



ABBY
WOOD

Loose Id

Didja
Know...?

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Abby Wood



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Chapter One

He blended into the Saturday afternoon crowd at Marty's Grocery Store, a small-town mom-and-pop place on Main Street in the town of Duluth where he hoped to find someone he recognized, or at least who'd call out his name. Hell, he didn't even know his name, but in the meantime, he decided to call himself Frank.

He ran his hand through his scruffy beard. The absence of all his personal history downright scared the shit out of him.

The moment he dropped down out of the atmosphere into the park from wherever he came from, he checked his body over for injuries. Something must account for his shoddy memory, but he'd found nary a scratch on his body. He'd come away more confused than satisfied at finding himself physically fine. The raw, exposed feeling in his chest left him fumbling around in search of something or someone.

A young mother pushed a shopping cart down the aisle and babbled nonsense at her toddler who rode along for the ride. He stepped out of the oncoming path and studied the woman as she passed. Her polite smile and excuse-me manners appeared genuine and routine. That alone proved he appeared sane, at least on the outside.

If he came across as crazy, a concerned mother would have snatched her child up into her arms and taken off running for the nearest exit yelling for the police. Hell, after he'd shown up at the police station earlier and raised a scene, the men in blue would've loved to slam his ass into a mental institution.

He continued his stroll down the bread aisle to the back of the store in search of a beverage. His reflection in the glass on one of the large built-in freezers irritated him, and he frowned. How did a person not recognize his own reflection?

The face of a stranger stared back at him with rumpled shoulder-length dark hair. The whiskers along his jaw verged on becoming a full beard. He ran his hand over his chin again. He needed a shave. Or maybe he always sported a beard.

Anytime he caught his reflection, a sense of loss hit him square in the solar plexus. It went beyond not remembering and settled in desperation. Nevertheless, it wasn't for himself. He needed to find someone more than he needed to help himself.

He opened the cooler and grabbed the closest soda bottle on the shelf. It didn't matter what kind, because he didn't plan to open it. The desire to consume any type of food or beverage apparently disappeared along with his identity.

"How's it goin'?" The Pepsi deliveryman opened the glass door beside him and filled ringed six-packs into the cooler.

"Good." *Liar.*

"Yeah, it's got to be good on a day like this. The sun's finally showing itself for a change. I got a deep feelin' in my bones that summer's just around the corner." The older man laughed at his own words and reached for another crate of soda.

Frank forced his lips into a smile, nodded, and turned to make his way back up to the front of the store. He needed a lot more than small talk with a stranger to figure out what happened to him. He wanted answers.

Mainly, where did he go at night, and what exactly took him? The first time he disappeared, he fought the magical pull with a warrior's stamina. The weightlessness, the sense of leaving one world for another alien one—it all created a scary place for him. In panic mode, he'd reached out for something to secure him in place, but in the end, he never succeeded at staying planted in this world.

The last couple of nights he refused to fight the pull, because the next morning he again showed up at the exact place in the park where he sat the previous night.

Whatever invisible force he fought used his own body against him and ridiculed him for even trying to stop the process.

He fingered the twenty-dollar bill in his front pants pocket that he didn't know how he'd come to own, and got behind two older ladies who chatted in line, waiting for the cashier to run their purchases through the scanner. He stared at the women and found himself leaning forward to hear their conversation.

One woman, her hair twisted in a high bun, clamped her hand over her open mouth in shock over something the other women whispered. He moved his gaze around, so not to be caught eavesdropping. "Sh...I swear, Josie, if you tell anyone, I will announce to everyone who will listen about how you don't really make the pineapple upside-down cake you donate to the booster club every year." The shorter woman pursed her lips.

"You know I won't," said the bun lady.

The other lady leaned in closer and shook her head. Frank rocked to the ends of his toes to hear what came next.

"I can't believe it worked. Chantel told me if I do it every night for three consecutive days, on the fourth day, the potion should start doing its magic." The woman's lips curled. "Of course, she stressed how I needed to match the doses according to the quarter-moon schedule." She sniffed. "She gave me a paper with everything wrote down."

"But did it work?" The bun lady frowned.

A smile lit up the other woman's face. "Jerry came home from work, and he acted like a new man. Not grumpy or surly at all."

"Did he suspect anything?" Bun Lady's eyes widened.

"No. He hasn't a clue."

The women's laughter burst out over the beeping of the cash register and the noise from the other customers. The ladies moved down the counter to pick up their

groceries. He stepped up to the cashier, placed his drink beside the register, and cast another look at the women.

“Maybe I should go visit with Chantel. You know, about—”

He stared at the women. The back of his throat tickled. He wanted to ask them questions, but he didn't even know them. For some reason, the woman they talked about who was so much help sounded like she'd be the kind of person who could help him.

“Yes! Do go and talk with her about it. Whatever she gives you, follow the instructions. That kind of magic can turn disastrous if you miss a step. You heard what happened to Margaret, didn't you?” the shorter woman whispered.

He missed finding out what happened to the other woman, because the two ladies moved out of hearing distance with their brown paper bags stuffed with groceries in their arms.

“One dollar and twenty-five cents, sir.”

He turned toward the cashier who held out his hand for the money. Frank dropped his attention from the two ladies and rummaged in his pocket to extract the bill.

“You new in town?” The pimply-faced cashier cocked his head.

I don't know. “Yeah.”

“I thought so. I haven't seen you around here before.” He grinned. “You'll love Duluth. Unless you don't enjoy everyone knowing your business, that is.” The young man handed him his change and the soda he'd purchased but didn't plan on drinking.

He tilted his head and moved away from the counter. After a couple of steps, he turned back around. “Excuse me.” He hoped the cashier was right and everyone knew each other. “Could you tell me where Chantel lives?”

The conversations around him seized, and he glanced down the line of muted customers behind him in line. A mix of disbelief and mirth flashed on the people's faces. *What did I say?*

"Chantel? Well, sure I can. Head out to Eaton Street until you come to Grace Road. Follow that road to the very end. Her place is the last driveway on the right. Just a short walk; you'd make it in fifteen minutes or less." The young man ducked his head to hide the amusement over his question.

Frank nodded. "Thank you." He turned back around and hurried out the door. The tingling sensation in his throat grew. Maybe this woman, Chantel, who helped the two ladies in the store, might help him if he asked.

* * *

"Let's play Didja. Please..."

Chantel shook her head to remove the stray strands of curls out of her face. "No, I have to get this yarrow planted or half the women in Duluth will be mad at me."

Kneeling beside the raised flowerbed in front of her house, she dug another hole in the soil. Her hand spade sliced through the cultivated dirt and turned a tedious job into an easy one she always enjoyed. To have her hands in the dirt and to nurture her plants brought contentment to her life.

For the past six weeks, she'd babied the tender plants inside her greenhouse from the seeds she'd collected from last season's plants. Now that the perfect weather presented itself for outside planting and the sprouts had grown strong enough, she'd plant them outside and wait for them to bloom.

"Those women take advantage of you, Chantel, and don't deserve your kindness."

She sighed and pointed the spade in her friend's direction. The action spewed dirt across the sidewalk. "That may be, but it keeps a roof over our heads, doesn't it?"

"I don't need a roof." Her friend, Eve, raised her chin.

"True, but I do." She grinned.

"Oh, very well. Plant your precious flowers and get the dirt all over yourself. It's no skin off my nose." Eve sat down on the front step and situated the folds of her dress over her legs. "Why you lower yourself with these menial tasks is disgraceful."

Chantel glanced over and smirked. You'd think Eve sat at a king's table for how much fuss she gave the same evening gown she's worn every single day since Chantel's childhood. The fact that her clothes remained the same must not have mattered to a ghost.

She picked up the yarrow and hit the side of the pot with her spade to loosen the soil from the container. Without disturbing the fragile roots, she placed the plant in one of the holes and gently patted the dirt down. It did no good arguing with Eve. She'd never understand how bills needed paid. The so-called menial tasks she did every day supported her without having to get a so-called real job in town.

"When do you think you'll go to town again?" Eve sat with her hands clasped in her lap, knees together, and her ankles crossed.

"I don't know, but you're staying at the house the next time." She picked up another plant and thumped the side of the container. "You blew it last time."

A sound that resembled a snort but had to have been a scoff because Eve swore she'd never make such a rude noise, came from the right of Chantel. "It wasn't my fault you talked to me in front of the others."

"It's not an easy thing to keep silent with you swooping down around everyone and blowing in their ears." Chantel's cheek twitched. "You create chaos wherever you go."

Eve clapped her hands and giggled. "Did you catch the expression on Old Man Turner's face? He thought Mr. Sumner was getting fresh with him."

Chantel burst out laughing, sat back on her heels, and gave in to the fun conversation. Eve never failed to get a rise out of her no matter the situation. She

got into more trouble with Eve's childlike pranks than she'd ever find on her own. Every one of them worth the consequences, though.

"We have to be more careful, Eve. It's one thing to go a little crazy on occasion, but another thing to make people suspect I'm losing touch with reality on a weekly basis." She dug the last hole. "They already whisper enough about me without me adding more bizarre behavior for their loose tongues."

"I'm sorry." Eve stopped her laughter and sniffed.

"I know you are." She patted the last plant into the ground and stood up. She brushed her knees free of dirt. Her head lifted at the dog barks coming from the backyard.

"Now what?" She headed toward the backyard, where she kept the stray dog penned up.

The usually calm black-and-white dog jumped up and down on the side of the rickety pen in a frenzy of excitement. "What are you so excited about? Hm?"

Chantel reached over the fence and rubbed the fur between Dawg's floppy ears. With no luck finding his owner the past three weeks, she'd grown to love the furry pooch. "You're a good doggy, aren't you?"

"He's more of a fleabag with legs in my opinion." Eve stood back a safe distance from the pen.

"You just haven't become friends with him yet. Once I'm sure his owners are not coming for him, and he's living in the house, you two will become fast friends. You'll see..." Her smile directed at the mutt.

"Yeah, right. The dog hates me," Eve said. "First chance he gets he's going to bite through half my leg. Just you wait and see."

"He only needs to get to know you. He'll learn. Right, Dawg?" She turned her head in Eve's direction. "He's probably never seen a ghost before."

"That is such a stupid name for a dog." Eve cast her eyes up.

"Can you think of a better name?" Chantel stepped back from the fence. The dog almost jumped to the top in an attempt to get out of its pen. *What in the world is wrong with you, dog? Keep acting like that and Eve will start whining even more.*

"I'd call him Stupid, Brainless, or—"

The rest of Eve's suggestions got lost in the incessant barking, and both women jumped back and gasped. The hyperactive little dog scrambled over the fence and ran across the yard faster than they'd ever seen him run.

"Dawg!" Chantel clapped her hands.

"Oh God, the beast is out. Save me! Save me!" Eve held the ends of her dress off the ground and twirled in a circle in pure dramatic zeal.

"Knock it off, Eve. The dog can't even see you, much less bite you." Chantel glared over her shoulder as she took off in a jog to follow the same path the dog ran. After all this time, she didn't want him to run away. She loved the little sweetheart, fleas and all.

"Dawg! Come back here..." She rounded the corner of the house and screeched to a stop. She shrieked, and her hands came up to cover her mouth. Her dog jumped all over a man who lay on the ground. *Oh no!*

The man covered his face with his arms to defend himself against Dawg, who bounced back and forth around his head in search of an open spot to squeeze his head in to lick his face. She giggled and dropped her hands. Obviously, the pup liked this man.

The man grumbled, attempted to catch the dog, but Dawg dodged his hands. Chantel burst out laughing. The sight of man versus beast amused her, and she wondered which one of them would win the title for the championship showdown.

"What is wrong with your damn dog?" The man heaved himself up off the grass and stepped back. That didn't deter Dawg. He attached himself to the shoestrings on the man's sneakers and attempted to tear them off.

"He's really not my dog." She laughed and walked over to pick Dawg up, but the dog's back end sidestepped every time she attempted to grab him. "He's a stray that I'm keeping if no one comes forward and claims him."

Her hands finally made contact with the speedy ball of fluff, and she pried his teeth away from the shoelaces. She clamped him to her chest. The dog yipped in protest at the tight hold. She crooned low into Dawg's ear and smiled up at the man in front of her. *Oh my God, he's gorgeous.*

"I bet his last owners dumped him off here, because he has no manners." The man brushed his sleeves off and looked down his nose at the obnoxious dog in her arms. "Little shit needs obedience school."

"How can you say that?" She frowned. "He likes you."

She pushed Dawg's head against her shoulder in an attempt to protect the dog's self-esteem. "I swear he must be the most misunderstood dog in Duluth."

"Likes me? I think he needs to be fed. I think he took a chunk out of my neck!" He roamed the curve of his neck with his hand, searching for signs of blood.

She shook her head and turned to walk Dawg back to the kennel. With her luck, she'd never be able to keep the pup contained in the pen now that he knew how to jump the fence.

"Hey! Wait. Where are you going?" The man caught up with her.

"To lock this vicious, hungry dog up in his kennel. We wouldn't want to have him attack you again and end up eating you for dinner, now would we?" She bit down on her lip to keep from laughing. *Although I'd love to have a taste of you.*

Dawg wormed his way up the front of Chantel's shirt and barked over her shoulder at their visitor who followed close at their heels. She'd never seen the dog act this way. Even around Eve, he snarled and snapped and never showed such pure unadulterated happiness. With this stranger, the dog wiggled his rump at super high speed. Didn't the man realize Dawg only wanted to play?

He must not be a dog lover. Anyone with a spot of sense knew an overexcited dog that licked and jumped wasn't planning to take a chunk out of the man's leg. He only wanted to play with this new attraction. She ran her hand down his furry back. His little doggy heart pounded a mile a minute.

"You wouldn't happen to be Chantel, would you?" The man kept stride with her and the dog.

So, he knew her name. She'd never seen him around. If someone in town guided him to her, who knew what they told him about her, the crazy woman who talked to herself and dabbled in magical herbs. She'd never stand a chance at getting to know him. *Pshaw!*

She set the dog down on the ground inside his pen, promptly turned around, and grabbed hold of the stranger's arm to steer him around to the front of the house. She didn't want to tease Dawg by standing around with his newfound playmate, and chance him getting out of his enclosure again.

Once the man left, she'd booby-trap the fence and hope that kept the dog contained. She planned to bring him in the house if no one showed up to claim him in a month, and turn him into her pet. Only one more week to go and she'd have her first pet.

"What are you doing?" The man yanked his arm out of her grasp and stared at her in confusion.

"Sh!" She held up her hand and cocked her head. The barking came to a stop, and she smiled up at the man. "Okay, I think Dawg will stay in his pen now."

"Good. Look, lady, I'm trying to find a woman named Chantel. Do you happen to know if she lives here or if I have the wrong place?" The man stood up straighter. "I don't have much time to play games, and it's important to me to find this woman."

"You've got the right place. I'm Chantel," she said.

The man's face relaxed, and he blew out his breath. The lines on his forehead disappeared, and his eyes widened enough she received a glimpse of startling green. *Oh. My. God.*

Her lips curved into a pleased smile, and she stepped closer to him. Those magnetic eyes peeked out from thick, dark lashes—lashes any women might kill for—brought out a surge of succulent rays of lust that traveled straight to her nipples and brought them to attention.

Her gaze wandered over the rest of him, and her tongue came out to run the length of her bottom lip. His dark-chocolate-colored hair lay long and rumpled. She imagined he ran his hands through it at the first sign of frustration.

His wrinkled clothes carried bits of grass clippings, thanks to Dawg's friendly attack. Despite the frazzled appearance, he presented a package she'd love to unwrap.

"You don't know how glad I am to meet you." He grabbed her hand and pumped it up and down.

At his touch, her stomach clenched and her ears rang. His lips moved, but her brain filtered the words. *What is he doing to me?*

"And that is why I came to you. I thought, maybe, if I explained what is happening to me, you'd fix it." He gazed at her with his eyebrows raised.

"Fix it?" She swept her bangs behind her ear. *What the heck is wrong with me? I act like a cat in heat! I can't even follow the conversation.*

The man reached out and used the pad of his thumb to scrub at her forehead. She glanced down at her hands covered in dried dirt. *Great. The best-looking man comes to my house to see me, and I have dirt from head to toe.*

"Yeah, I need to find my memories. I don't know what is happening to me. One moment, I'm here, and the next, I float off to"—he threw up his arms—"heaven or hell. I don't know, really. Somewhere I lose myself. I don't even know I am there. I'm zilch.

“And you want to hear the crazy thing? No one knows me here, and I don't know my own name or if I own a home around here. Nothing looks familiar. I don't even recognize myself. God, this is insane.” He clutched the top of his head with both hands and tugged his hair. “I heard the women at the store talking about you giving them something to help their husbands. Something inside me knew I should find you and ask for your help.”

He grabbed both of her hands and kneaded them. She pulled away and wrapped her arms around her middle. *Did he create that buzz? She wanted nothing more than to push him back down on the ground and imitate Dawg's acts of licking him all over.*

“I...I don't understand. What women?” She shook her head. *Snap out of it! Pay attention to what he is saying.*

“I don't know who they are. It doesn't matter.” He shrugged and paced a few steps. “I just need to fix whatever is wrong with me. I don't want to disappear tonight. You are some kind of witch aren't you?” he asked. “That's the impression I got from the women. You helped one of them. Maybe you can help me?”

Chantel studied the man. Out of breath, confused, and belligerent, he appeared on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Her heart went out to him.

“Here, come sit over on the porch and rest. I'll get you a glass of water.” She guided him over to the house.

“Let me go in the house and get you a glass of my special lemonade. I'm sure that will help you feel better. After you take a rest and get your breath back, we can talk.” She stepped up on the step where he sat, and he grabbed her hand.

“Please, no!” He let go of her, placed his elbows on his knees, and sank his head down on his hands. “I'm sorry. I no longer eat or drink.”

She stepped back down off the steps and sat beside him. Her hands clasped on her legs, she stared at her visitor who appeared to fall apart right in front of her. The desire to hold on to him and have hot, sweaty sex with him took her breath away and left her confused. *I must be confusing lust with compassion.*

This whole morning turned into one confusing dream. Her brain unable to grasp why she found herself so attracted to his stranger. A simple touch of his hand, and her body responded as if she'd received fifteen minutes of foreplay, and she wanted to jump right into sex with someone she believed didn't have all the marbles in his head.

How did today go spiraling out of control? Eve pestered her all morning to play Didja, and Dawg developed a freak spurt of energy that she'd never witnessed the whole time she's taken care of him. The most confusing was her sex drive shifting into full throttle at the sight of this green-eyed man. It didn't make a lick of sense why they'd all act so strange.

"What do you mean? How long have you gone without eating?" She kept her voice low. Half-afraid he'd hear the excitement coursing through her body if she spoke normally.

He lifted his head but gazed straight ahead. "I can't be positive, but I think about a week."

"A week! You must be starving. I can fix—"

"No, you can't. I told you I can't eat or drink. My throat closes up and I choke. I'm never thirsty or hungry anymore, but I know that is what I am supposed to do. I remember that." He shook his head. "Maybe I don't, and it is just something everyone knows."

"I'm confused. You really don't know who you are? Did you suffer a head injury? An accident?"

He shook his head and snorted. "I don't think so, but how am I suppose to know?"

Eve showed up in front of her with a knowing smile. She frowned at her friend. She tilted her head and darted her eyes to the side for her to go away, but Eve crossed her arms and ignored her. *Oh shit, what is she going to do now?*

The man beside her inhaled through his nose, and his whole upper body expanded. Her gaze swept the width of his shoulders, and she bit down on her lip.

I'm acting craziest of all of them. What is with this man that I find myself so attracted to him?

"Do you smell that?" He sniffed the air. "Roses. I smell goddamn roses. Now how in the hell do I remember a scent, but can't remember where I live? Can you tell me that?" He slapped his fist against his knee. "This is so frustrating."

"I don't know." She bit her lip and stared at Eve. She knew exactly where the smell came from. Eve always smelled of the love flower, but she didn't remember anyone ever picking up the scent, besides her. "I have lots of flowers in the yard."

He nodded. She nibbled on her lip. She hoped that he wouldn't ask her to explain exactly where the rose scent came from or notice that all of her roses planted in the flowerbed were not even close to blooming.

"I heard a couple women talking about you at the store. You sell concoctions or potions, right?" He turned toward her on the step. "Are you some kind of witch? Can you cast a spell and send me back where I belong?"

"I...I own an herbal medicine shop." She scooted away from him. "Look, I don't really understand anything that's happened today. Maybe you should go back home, take a nap—" *Go away, so I can get control of myself.*

"You don't get it! I don't have a home. Every night, I seem to vanish, no matter how much I fight against it. Zap! I'm gone!" He snapped his fingers. "The next morning, I'm back in the park on the edge of town."

He glanced away. His eyes squinted as he looked toward the yard. She turned her head to follow his gaze, her eyes widened in alarm.

Jumping off the step, she stood between him and Eve. She glanced over her shoulder to make sure he still remained behind her, and stepped farther out onto the grass, forcing Eve to back up farther, away from the man.

"What do you think you're doing?" she whispered. "He can smell you. Can he see you too?"

Eve stood in the yard, her hands clasped together under her chin. Chantel rubbed her temples. By the position of Eve's mouth and the way she held her ground, she knew this confrontation took all of Eve's strength.

"I need to talk with you. We've got to play Didja." Eve waved her hand in the air. "I should have explained..." She glanced away. "Oh dear! I should have—"

Chantel groaned. *Just great! Now Eve spoke too much and disappeared.*

Chantel walked back to Frank, who sat staring at his hands, lost in his troubles, and thanked the lucky stars he had his own problems to deal with that he didn't pay any attention to her odd behavior.

"Maybe you should come back tomorrow. Let me think about everything you've shared with me. I'm confused about what is going on, and maybe tomorrow things will make more sense and I can help you." She tugged at a strand of her hair.

He nodded his head. "Yeah, I'll leave. I'm embarrassed about unloading all of this on you. I just don't have anywhere else to go. I have no clue whom to talk this over with, without coming out looking like a total flake. I thought...never mind."

The lines on his forehead grew in numbers, his shoulders sagged even more, and his mouth clamped shut. She raised her brows to encourage him to speak his mind, but he closed his jaw and shook his head.

"Is there anything you need until tomorrow?" She laid her hand on his arm but didn't linger. It would be best not to push temptation, or she'd end up exploring more of his gorgeous body. The skin under her fingers vibrated, and she turned her hand over to check the skin. The sensation of a mild electrical current evaporated quickly, and she wondered what caused it and if he felt it too.

"No, I need nothing. I'm sorry I bothered you this way." He stood up. "If you don't mind, I'd like to come back tomorrow. I know that I come across insane, but I really don't think I am...normally."

"You're welcome to come back. I can't promise you any answers to your questions, though. I've never had a customer with this kind of confusion before."

She sobered. “Besides, people misunderstand me all the time; the least I can do is try to help you.”

Chapter Two

The sun rose high enough in the sky the rays beat down on Chantel's shoulders and covered her with a warm blanket on her way home from her trip into town where she delivered tinctures to her customers too addled with age to come to the house. For a change, she enjoyed the solitude of her early-morning walk.

Eve never returned after her confrontation in the yard yesterday over the man named Frank. The time alone gave her an opportunity to replay yesterday's events without worrying about what upset Eve.

Usually, Eve came back after disappearing and would forget what was so important earlier. She'd acted funny all morning with her big desire to play Chantel's childhood game. She shrugged. Eve would have to wait. Right now, she had bigger things on her mind with helping Frank.

The whole day left a pocket full of doubt in the pit of Chantel's stomach. Coupled with the hard-to-fathom ravings Frank spoke about, it left her feeling unsettled. She never claimed her life resembled a normal one, but right now, she'd prefer to forget about everything she learned yesterday.

The bizarre way her body gravitated toward Frank on its own accord and the vibrancy of his touch zapped her to the core. With that kind of man, a woman sure didn't need to rely on foreplay to scream in delight. His hand alone sent her reeling toward the edge of an orgasm and brought out her inner wickedness in five seconds flat. Two seconds if he used both hands, she bet.

The excited barking of a dog pulled her out of her musings, and she gazed up to find she had walked the whole distance home deep in thought. She hurried into the yard and around the house. Everyone acted loonier than a bunch of three-year-

olds on a sugar high lately, and it seemed that Dawg was planning to continue his craziness again today.

“Calm down! What is with you, boy?” She bent over the fence and tried to pick the animal up, but the dog kept jumping up on the fence, avoiding her hands.

“Sit! Down! Come on, Dawg. Be a good doggy and sit.” She tilted her head, her hands on her hips, and gazed down at the dynamic acrobatic dog. “I think you've gone completely crazy.”

“That makes two of us.”

Startled, she turned. “Shoot! You scared me half to death. I didn't hear you walk up with all this noise.” She pointed at the dog. “I don't know why he barks at you this way, but it seems there's something about you that sets him off.”

He shrugged his shoulder. “If only dogs talked in English.”

“Yeah, that'd help solve the world's problems.” She grinned.

Dawg moved down the fence line ten feet and jumped against the wire, barking his fool head off. She turned and studied the area. What set him off this time? She'd thought Eve might have sneaked up on them, but she was still missing.

“What do you see, boy?” She frowned down at the dog.

“That's weird; it's almost like he can see someone we can't.” Frank shook his head. “Maybe we are all a little jumpy today.”

Chantel nodded and stepped toward the house and motioned him to follow. “Let's get out of this area so we don't drive him bonkers.” She studied Frank. “Are you feeling better today?”

“The same. Did you figure out what is happening to me?” He stared back.

She shook her head and ran her hand up and down his arm. “I'm afraid not. I thought today we might write down all your symptoms, and maybe that will show us how to treat you. The same way a medical doctor will run test and rule out any possible causes.”

“Okay.” He glanced down at the way she squeezed and caressed his arm. “You sure enjoy touching people, don't you?”

She stopped at the door and dropped her hand. “Sorry about that.” She wrinkled her nose. *Dammit, it's happening again!*

She waved him to follow her in the house. “You can come in. My customers frequently come inside to wait for their supplies that I mix up for them. That way you can relax a little.” She opened the door and stepped inside. “Did you disappear again last night?”

“Yeah.” His face grew hard, and he kept his answer short.

He followed her in, wiped his feet on the rug, and scanned the room. “Holy shit! What exactly do you do?”

She laughed. “I'm a healer, a witch, a folk doctor, a dabbler of herbs. I've been called a lot of names, but most people call me Chantel to my face.” She grinned.

Floor-to-ceiling shelves covered each wall of the room, with colorful jars and tins of every size that she had filled with dried herbs sat packed and ready in precise, tidy rows. Different sized bundles of assorted herbs hung upside down by strings from the ceiling in various stages of drying. She enjoyed his reaction and studied the expressions that crossed over his face at the sight of all her supplies.

“This is unbelievable.” He strolled around the room, only stopping to pick up a jar here and there for closer inspection. “Why this? What piqued your interest in wanting to discover the secrets to all these plants?”

“I became interested in herbs and their medicinal purposes in childhood because of my grandmother. She was a very wise woman and one not afraid to go against society, bless her soul. She showed me a few ways to heal cuts, headaches, and stuffy noses using plants you find out in the wild. Simple things, really, but my curiosity grew, and I soaked up every book I found at the library.” She pulled a notebook out of a desk drawer and carried it over to the couch. She picked a spot far enough away from him, she hoped the distance kept her from wanting to run her hands all over his body.

The sensation of wanting to have Frank plunge into her and take her fast and furious crept up on her swiftly. The room grew hot, and she fought to sit still, her pussy throbbing with need.

“By the time I entered high school, I threw myself into horticulture and growing my own plants in my parents' backyard. The rest is history.” She waved her hand in the air and squirmed on the couch. *Shit. I'm going to embarrass myself any moment if we don't hurry and get down to business.*

“What did those women at the store want from you?” He turned and sat down on a chair opposite the couch. “Something secretive, because I doubt they conspired and whispered over a cure for arthritis.”

She raised her eyebrows and gave a helpless shrug. “Women?”

An unfamiliar hitch in her chest forced her voice up an octave. Why did the fact he inquired about other women cause a pang of jealousy?

“Yes, at the store. One packed her hair up in some tight bun thingy; the other one spoke in a high-pitched voice and pressed her lips together after she spoke.” He pursed his lips and lowered his eyelids. “Something like this...”

She snorted and put a hand to her belly. “Josie and Grace. Their husbands are first cousins.”

She gazed over at the window, shook her head, and tried to wipe the smile off her face. Relief swept through her. No way did those two compete for his attention. He pegged Grace with his imitation of her, clear down to the way the woman gazed down at others although she only stood a little over five feet tall. The woman grew bitterer every year. She often wondered if Grace ever possessed a pleasant personality in the past.

“Well...?”

She turned back to Frank. “What?”

“What did you treat them for?” He spoke slowly.

"I can't tell you. That's confidential." She tapped the notepad against her legs. "I don't discuss what my customers buy or use. You too can rest assured that whatever we discuss won't go past my lips."

He nodded. "I suppose that's best."

His gaze lowered to her mouth, and she licked her lips. *Concentrate.*

"Yes." She pulled the cap off the pen and wrote his name at the top of the page. "Now, should we start trying to figure this out?"

"Okay, the sooner I find out what is wrong with me, the faster I can stop leaving at night." He sat forward in the chair, rested his elbows on his knees, and his hands fiddled together. "That's more important to me than remembering who I am at this point. I hate that part."

"When did this all start—the memory loss?" She wrote the question down with a shaky hand.

"I think it's been five days, but I can't swear on it. Every time I come back in the morning from wherever I got sucked up to, it seems like I never left." His mouth tightened. "Wait—I do know. I'm never here in Duluth after darkness comes."

"You don't remember anything prior to waking up in the park five days ago?" She cocked her head.

"Nothing. I know people live in houses, morning comes after night, and food is something that keeps you alive. Normal people are supposed to have jobs. I know how the world is supposed to work, but everything about me personally is missing." His laugh rose, and he ran his hand through his hair. "I don't know my name, where I live, if I own a car, or even how old I am. It feels like a huge chunk of me is missing."

He stared right across the room into her eyes. "I even visited the police station to check about issuing a missing person's report on myself."

"Oh!" She set the notepad beside her. "How did they react?"

“They asked me if I needed help. You know...” He formed a circle with his finger beside his head. “I left the building because even I knew that sounded crazy. I can't imagine what they thought.”

“I understand.” She retrieved the paper and wrote his answers. She drew a heart around his name and hurried to scribble it out.

“Do you really? I don't understand how you can say that. Have you ever woken up somewhere that you didn't belong?” He stood up, agitated, and paced back and forth in front of the chair.

She stared at the way his legs unfolded. “Well...no, but I do under—”

“Oh Jesus, I should have known!” He threw up his hands. “You think I'm one of your crazy customers who come to you with a request for a love potion or a bottle of cat piss to encourage hair growth.”

“Now, hang on a minute!” She narrowed her eyes.

He pointed at the shelves. “No! Admit it. You think this problem of mine is a figment of my imagination or I really am fucking crazy!”

“All right dickwad, or should I call you I-don't-know-shit-but-you-can-call-me-Frank?” She stood up so fast the tablet fell to the floor. “I'm trying to help you! You can't come in here, ridicule me, and tell me my herbal medicine is...is some kind of hoax! How dare you make fun of my customers, which, by the way, some of them have legitimate reasons to seek my help.”

Her chest rose and fell. She stepped in front of him. He lifted his chin to challenge her words. It infuriated her, but her frustrations over the matter at hand ran deeper. A hunger to rub her body against his came over her so strong it set her temper on fire.

What gave him the impression she planned to take his insults sitting down? She'd show him how much his words insulted her, but first she wanted to open her legs and let him soothe the gluttony she fought for him.

“I...I think you should go. Can you remember where the door is?” Her upper lip twitched, and she pressed her hands against her stomach to keep from screaming that she was a liar and she'd enjoy nothing more than to drag his ass to the floor and screw his brains out. *I'm losing my mind.*

He stared down at her. The muscle along his jaw twitched, and his eyes narrowed. She stepped away to back up her words and help him realize she was dead serious, but his arms flashed out to grip her by the upper arms. *Oh God, yes!*

He pulled her up to his chest and kissed her. Powerful, demanding, relentless, his mouth took everything it wanted and left her more heated-up than before.

A frigid rush of air moved over the surface of her body, goose bumps broke out on her skin, and her nerve endings tingled in mild shock. Powerless to break away, she opened her mouth and sucked at his tongue. In no way was this like a normal kiss she'd experienced in the past, but one that intoxicated her enough her pussy juice dampened her panties.

Frank broke contact first. She stumbled back and landed on the couch. She gasped and stared at him. His body appeared to split into two identical Franks. Identical in every way, he appeared a mirror image of himself. She clamped her eyes shut and shook her head. When she opened her eyes again, the double vision was gone, and Frank stood across the room.

“What the hell just happened?” His chest heaved. “What are you? Is this some kind of voodoo magic?” His hand moved down and pulled at the front of his jeans. “Jesus, my dick is going to explode. What are you doing to me?”

He moved toward her, stopped, and stepped back away. “Shit, it's still happening. It's pulling me toward you.”

She stood up and stepped toward him. “I know. Something weird is going on.”

He moved farther back, bumped into the chair, but caught himself before he fell. “Stay back!” He stumbled to hide behind the chair. “Fuck, I've never... It's like your hands are stroking me, pumping me.”

"I'm trying to stop, but..." She pressed her hands over her breasts. "Something is touching me. You're touching me! God, it makes me hot."

His eyes scrunched up, and he held on to the back of the chair for support, his legs buckling. "I know. Shit! My dick, it's so fucking hard."

Chantel whipped off her T-shirt and shifted to unclip her bra. Her hands shook, and she fumbled with the clasp. She wanted to stomp her feet in frustration. She needed to get her clothes off.

Her body cried out for his touch, his heat, his cock. The juice ran out of her pussy, dampening her panties, and she hurried to strip her jeans and underwear off. She slipped her finger between her lower lips and rubbed her pulsating clit. Swollen and sensitive, it peeked out of the hood that usually kept it partially hidden.

"I got to get out of here." He undid his jeans enough to let his cock have extra room. "I'm not safe around you. Jesus... Look at me!"

She glanced over at him. His dick stood out stiff. He fisted the base and groaned. She sucked in her lower lip and whimpered. Her legs shook. She wanted to touch his cock, let him rub it all over her body, between her tits and over her mouth.

He gazed down at her bare breasts. "Leave! Do something. I don't trust myself to walk by you." He licked his lips. "Jesus, I want you."

She wiggled her ass in an attempt to create friction on her clit. "I'm not going anywhere."

Free of clothing, she ran one hand over her flat tummy, and in a smooth motion that resembled a feline on the prowl, she advanced on the man named Frank. With a growl, he met her halfway and swept her up in his arms.

His cock pressed against her stomach, and she wiggled against him. She wanted to rub her body all over him. Her breast, nipples, clit, pussy were swollen with a need so deep, she wanted to satisfy every part of her body.

Her tongue came out to taste his nipple. It hardened into a nib under her touch, and she gently grasped it between her teeth. Frank hissed, grabbed the hair at the back of her head and pulled her away, and claimed her mouth.

She tasted his arousal—part man, part heat—and sucked the tip of his tongue into her mouth. She groaned, needing more.

Frank ground his cock against her, and she wrapped her arms around him, her hands spread on each side of his ass. She pulled him tight against her, her fingers digging into the muscled flesh.

He broke the kiss. “I want my cock up your pussy. I want to slam it all the way and watch you scream.”

“Yes.” She panted, her mouth open, her head shaking. “Oh God, yes!”

He laid her on the floor. With his body situated between her legs, and with her hands on his ass, she encouraged him to give her what her body craved. He plunged his cock plunged inside her with one quick thrust. Her nails raked across the back of his shirt. The ardent intensity for everything he offered drove her wild.

Chantel clutched at his upper body in an attempt to take every luscious lunge he fed her. Her back pressed hard against the carpet. She spread her legs wide, not wanting to miss one delicious inch of him. He pleased her with long, succulent strokes of his cock. *Yes! God, yes!*

He reached down, hooked his arms behind her knees, and brought them up higher, wider. Situated above her, he stared transfixed down at her pussy. It aroused her to view the raw desire on his face.

The way he gazed almost mesmerized at the sight of her pussy taking all of his cock turned her on. The heavy breathing plus the sloppy squish sound of her wet pussy sucking his dick filled the room each time he pushed and pulled his cock from inside her.

He licked his lips and gazed at their two bodies joined together. Her ass lifted off the floor, she met each advance, and her clit grew hotter, seeking the ultimate

prize. He drove her over the edge. Her toes pointed toward the ceiling, and a guttural scream arose from the depth of her belly.

Frank gave a final lunge, and she writhed from the aftershocks of her orgasm. He groaned and shot his cum deep inside her cunt. They both struggled to recover from what happened between them. She stared up at the man who she knew nothing about, but one thing came clear. *I belong to him.*

* * *

Frank withdrew from her body, and stood up on shaky legs. Chantel sat up and grabbed the shirt she'd flung off earlier and slipped it back over her head. She searched for her panties but came up empty. Not caring, she slipped into her jeans and sat on the couch.

She tucked her legs under her and turned her attention to Frank. He returned to his position behind the chair. Propped against the back, he bent and rested his head in his hands. Who was this man, and why did her own body defy her mind? She lost all self-control around him. Yet coming together with him seemed so right.

"I'm sorry." He raised his head. "I'm not the kind of person who would take advantage of a woman like...like that." He groaned. "At least, I don't think I am."

The angst etched around his eyes, and the way he spoke through tightened lips showed Chantel how deeply troubled he was over what just happened between them. She shook her head. It wasn't his fault. Neither one of them needed to apologize for what they did a moment ago. Something out of their power took control. Where that desire came from, she had no idea.

"I don't understand what is going on." She ran her hands down the tops of her thighs. "From the second you touched me out in the yard yesterday, I felt"—she paused and shrugged her shoulders—"this incredible urge to have sex with you. That's never happened to me before."

"Me either, although, I thought what I experienced yesterday was normal. You know, finding you an attractive woman. I controlled myself, though. This came out

of left field and hit me with more power than my body or mind could control.” He came around the chair and sank down on the cushion.

“Are you doing this? Is there something in this room? An herb, a potion, something that you used to persuade me into having a fuck of a lifetime here on the floor?” His eyes narrowed.

“Me? What about you?” She dropped her feet to the floor. “You came to find me. God! What kind of person do you think I am?”

“I know. Dammit, I didn't mean to blame you.” He ran his hand along the whiskers on his jaw. “I feel like a fuckup. I didn't even take time to pay attention to you.” He groaned and smacked his forehead at the absurd statement. “I'm sorry. I can't even say if that is normal for me or not. I hope to God I've never treated a woman that bad.”

“Quit saying that. I played a part too.” She sniffed. “Excuse me for a minute.”

She hurried out of the room and slipped into her bedroom. She picked out a pair of panties, clean jeans, a shirt, and opened the door to the connecting bathroom. A few minutes of privacy, and maybe she'd calm down.

After stripping out of her clothes, she moved over to the sink to clean up the mess between her legs. Her hands shook. What kind of trouble did she get herself into today? Thank God I take an herbal supplement to regulate my period. It'll protect me from getting pregnant.

After all these years of keeping to herself and living alone with Eve, she never thought the second time she'd ever have sex it would be with a stranger on her living-room floor. The only other sexual experience she'd had happened behind the bleachers at a football game in high school, and the boy ignored her the next day in biology class. Having a reputation for being the whacked-out witch who talked to thin air at inappropriate times turned her into a recluse of her own power. She wasn't willing to ignore Eve for any man.

Besides, even if she did try and have a relationship, what man was going to understand that she claimed a ghost for a best friend without thinking she'd lost all

brain cells? Even her own parents treated her different. Sure, they loved her, but she caught the way they glanced at each other if she slipped up and talked to Eve while in their company.

To add to her already eccentric life, she just fucked a man she doesn't know. Who didn't even know himself, and in no way did she think it meant anything to him to get a free lay. He'd be out of her life in no time.

Bile bubbled up her esophagus and threatened to choke her at the thought of losing him. She didn't kid herself. They didn't know each other, and at this point lust overruled any emotional investment she'd formed for him. She swallowed down the unease. She'd have to protect herself and not let her body cave to the higher authority of whatever possessed and overtook her sensibilities around Frank. Whatever she fought, she'd have to outsmart it.

She inhaled a big breath and let it out in a whoosh, opened the door, and walked back to the living room. The swollen, tender feeling between her legs disappeared, and a warm, contented response replaced it the closer she came to Frank.

"I think it's happening again." She stood at the edge of the room. "Do you feel it?"

"Yeah, the moment you entered the room." He stood up. "I'll leave now. This shouldn't happen again."

"Let's go outside. Yesterday, I controlled it, so maybe it is easier outside. We can give it a try if you want." She moved toward the door. "I do want to talk to you, and I spoke the truth when I said I wanted to help you."

He slammed the door with more force than necessary on his way out. She flinched. The desperation etched around his eyes, and the way he gave up on finding the answers to his problems reminded her of all the times she'd grown frustrated over defending her senility. For that reason, she wanted to help him solve his problems.

Add on top of that, this crazy attraction going on between them. She imagined he traveled through his own personal hell right now. She wanted to help him. He needed to figure out why he disappeared every night, and she wanted answers on what kind of hypnotic pull sent her right into his arms. It almost seemed as if an evil presence had come down and decided to torment them both.

“This is better, but I'm going to leave. I hope you...” He paused. “I'm sorry. I don't know why or what is happening, but I didn't come here to drag you into this mess. It's the last thing I'd want to do to someone. To you.”

“Don't go.” She reached out but changed her mind about touching him and pulled her hand back. “I do understand what you're going through and how it feels to have no one believe you. You begin to accept you are a little crazy. Please...sit and talk with me?”

He frowned. “You'll let me know if I get out of line?”

She nodded. “Promise, and if my inner nymphomaniac comes out to play...run! Run fast down the road.” She laughed. “Let's figure out how to help you. That's where we need to start.”

“Why would you do that? You don't even know me.” He pointed to her picnic table by one of her greenhouses. “What you've seen of me, you must hate.”

She pivoted and followed him. “After you tell me your story, maybe I'll share mine with you. Of course, you won't believe it, but that's okay; no one does.” She wrinkled her nose. “Talk about two crazies finding each other in a crowded room.”

He raised his eyebrows and took a seat on the opposite side of the table. “I don't know what you mean.”

“It's not important.”

Frank flicked an ant off the middle of the wooden table. “I've told you most of what I know. Anything about me, whoever I am, is gone from my memory. I think I can even deal with that.

"I want the disappearing at the end of a day to stop. I've tried everything, from wrapping my legs around a park bench to hugging a tree. Nothing works." He snorted. "Nothing like making a damn fool out of myself."

"Is someone pulling you away, or do you wander off on your own because you want to go? Or is it like what we have between us, and you have no power to stop it?" She propped her head up on her hands. "Do you think if you're stronger, you might be able to fight whatever takes you?"

The skin around his eyes softened, the corners of his mouth grew wider, and for the first time, she witnessed how absolutely breathtaking Frank became if she ignored the scruffiness on the outside.

"Oh! I didn't mean that you are not strong. I'm sure you are the strongest of any man...that I know." She blew the bangs out of her vision. "I'm just thinking, what if I can help hold you here? You know, that way you won't disappear."

He lost the amused grin. "I don't know. My body gives up, and I become paralyzed. My mind screams and fights the pull. If I knew where I lived, I swear I'd try to chain myself to something so heavy that nothing would be able to drag me away."

He ran his hand over his face. "That is if I even owned a chain. God, this sucks."

"I have a chain." She almost wished to take the suggestion back the moment it left her mouth. *What if I harm him in the process of helping him?*

He leaned forward. "You'd seriously help?"

"Sure." She caught her lower lip between her teeth. "You don't think it will hurt, do you? I mean, I don't know what happens, and if somehow I harmed you..."

"No! It's perfect. Where should we do this?" He stood up.

I can't do it here. If Eve showed up, I'd never hear the end of this.

"Let's do it at the park. You say it always happens there, right?" She walked around the table and stood beside Frank. "Plus, out here in the open, I can control that obsessive attraction to you. Can you?"

"I can handle it; although, if you offered, I'd have you here on the picnic table." He groaned. "Sorry. I don't think I talk this way in my other life. It doesn't sound normal."

"You are just being honest." She smiled. "I imagine you are a bit more classy and smooth when you are feeling more like yourself." She laughed. "We'll get through this. Already it is more relaxing around you, and if I can help you solve your problem, it will probably fix our...little problem."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but the problem with you isn't one that is hard to take or one I'd want to fix." He lifted the corner of his mouth. "In fact, if my life straightened around, I'd love to take you to dinner."

She shook her head. "No. You wouldn't, but let's not talk about that now."

She gazed back at the house. "Do you want to hang out in my yard for a while? I'm going to go inside and try and calm down." She patted her stomach. "I think I'm wound up from earlier and need a little space."

"No, go ahead. I'll head back to the park. I've spent most of my time there. It's secluded, and I can think without worrying if I'm bothering someone." His hands moved from his pockets to his hair. "It's the only place I knew to go without people wondering about me." He scoffed. "With my luck I have a house around the corner from the park and don't even recognize it."

Excited over their plans for tonight, he paced back and forth in front of her. She stayed where she stood and stared at him.

"Are you okay?" She ran her hands up and down her bare arms.

He shook his head. "I don't know. I have all these thoughts and feelings. Somehow, with the way I've lost my memory, and met you, I still think..."

"What?" She waited, but he didn't answer her. "What are you thinking?"

“I’ve lost something. A part of me. I can’t make sense of it.”

“We’ll figure it out. Try to rest at the park. Get over the craving we have for each other. You’ll need all the strength to fight whatever this is that is tormenting you.” She stood in the yard and watched him walk down the road.

Oh God! What if this comes back to bite us in the butts?

Chapter Three

Eve showed up in the kitchen, out of the blue, and with a normal, everyday smile on her face. Chantel continued to dry the plate she'd used to eat the leftover pot roast and salad. She didn't want to admit it, but she missed her friend's company. Especially when her life took a disturbing turn, and today was a whopper.

"What have you been doing?" Eve strolled around the table and peeked over her shoulder.

"Eating. That is usually what I do at dinner time." She fought the urge to smile. She was glad to see her friend back to normal and not wielding a weapon.

"Splendid!"

She placed the plate in the cupboard, turned, and gazed over at Eve, who stood in the archway to the living room. "Why is that splendid?"

"I thought we'd play a game of Didja." Eve clasped her hands together in front of her chest.

She frowned. "You should have come earlier. I don't have time to play now." She glanced down at her wristwatch. "I have plans, so you'll have to entertain yourself for a while."

"Plans?" Eve hurried over and blocked her path. "To do what, and with whom?"

She laughed and walked around her friend. "To go to town, and it's none of your business who I am meeting. I might be having a scandalous affair with Joe at the gas station, and if his wife found out..." She clicked her tongue.

"Joe! That is disgusting. The man never washes the black out from under his fingernails, and he wears those awful coveralls with holes all over them every single

day. The patch with his name even says Jared, not Joe.” Eve shook her head. “Yuck!”

She almost escaped to her bedroom, but Eve's expertise at traveling at high speeds and through walls got her to the room first. She snorted. Nothing compared to the sight of a ghost bouncing up and down on the bed.

“Can I come?” Eve jumped high enough her head disappeared beyond the ceiling. “You'll never even know I'm there. I'll be so quiet, and I swear I won't talk to you.”

Chantel opened her closet and removed a sweatshirt. Unable to ignore the sideshow act, she grinned.

“You freak me out every time you do that. How you manage to bounce on an object, yet your head can float through the ceiling, is too creepy for me to understand.” She slipped the sweatshirt over her head. “No, you have to stay here.”

Eve lifted her legs and plopped down on her butt atop the bed. “Are you seeing that man that came yesterday? Have you asked him if he has a best friend, so you can—”

“Eve!” Chantel's eyes widened. “I can't believe you said that. I should never have told you about my fantasy.”

“There's nothing wrong with wanting two men in your life.” Eve crossed her arms. “Two men touching you, pleasing you, and devoting all their attention toward you.” She wiggled her eyebrows.

Chantel sighed. “That would be the ultimate, huh?” She picked up the hairbrush. “No use dreaming about something that won't happen.”

“You didn't say if it is *that* man from yesterday that you're meeting...”

“Which man would that be?” She pulled the brush through her hair and grinned. “I know a lot of dreadful men in Duluth.”

The sputter of a raspberry blown her way told her Eve didn't believe that. "I'm twenty-eight years old. I don't have to tell anyone where I am going or with whom I choose to go there with. I didn't ask you where you left off to yesterday, did I?"

Eve didn't answer. Chantel walked out of the room, grabbed her car keys off the hook in the hallway, and continued to the front door. Sometimes dealing with Eve was like dealing with a spoiled pooch that barked and begged to go everywhere once you headed for the front door.

"Excuse me." Eve swooshed to the front door, raised her eyebrows, and gave a dramatic sigh. "What time will you be home?"

"Since when can you figure out how to tell time?" She crossed her arms and waited for Eve to step away from the front door. She learned long ago not to try to walk through her. It wigged her out and gave her terrible goose bumps.

"You can't talk to me that way. I've known you since your childhood when you didn't have one person you called a friend. Wasn't it I who befriended you? Hm? And now look at you—ignoring me, not caring if I am here worried sick and wondering if you are okay or out with some delicious man of your dreams!" Eve threw up her hands and stepped aside.

"That's not what friends are for, Chantel. You've made me very sad." Eve produced a hankie out of the top of her dress and proceeded to dab at the corners of her eyes.

Chantel laughed. "I did have friends before you came around, remember? You scared all of them off. I do care about you, Eve, but your theatric skills suck."

She opened the door. "I'll be back later. Go ahead and hang around the house, but do not follow me. I'm going to meet Frank in town."

"Frank!" Eve rose a foot off the floor and hovered near the ceiling. "Is that his name? Tell me more."

"Simmer down," Chantel hissed. She closed the door in case anyone wandered by, overheard, and thought she talked to herself. "What is with you? I wasn't going

to bring it up, because you took off and stayed away, but you seem a little too interested in this guy.”

“Are you jealous?” She laughed and clapped her hands. “Tell me everything. Don't leave out even one juicy detail.” Eve floated down to stand on the floor again.

“I'm not saying a thing until I know more about him. I barely know him. Plus, he's got some problems he needs to sort out.” Chantel crossed her arms. “Besides, there's something about him...”

“Yes! That's why you must help him. Spend more time with him.” Eve leaned in closer. “Besides, the time isn't right yet. He was supposed to—” Eve squealed and stamped her foot. “I really need to play Didja. Can't you wait a few minutes?”

Chantel shook her head. “Never mind. Sometimes, Eve, I can't even follow one of your conversations. You'll have to wait. I'll play later. You've got all the time in the world, and Frank doesn't.”

“What do you mean?” Eve stepped closer.

Chantel rolled her eyes. “You're a ghost. You can wait.”

Eve disappeared in front of her. She groaned. Now she'd gone and done it. She hurt Eve's feelings and called her a ghost.

“Eve! I'm sorry!” She gazed up at the ceiling. “Come back later after I get home. I promise to talk to you. I'll even play Didja. Jus-just try to understand. We are different!”

* * *

Chantel rarely drove her old Buick sedan anymore. She took pleasure from the short walk to town to run most of her errands. Only in the wintertime did she find owning an automobile worthwhile, and still, she never drove in the snow.

Tonight, she drove because she'd never make it all the way into town carrying a chain without raising suspicion. People already thought she was a freak. She didn't need to add more fuel to their imagination.

In no time at all, she pulled over at the north end of the park, where the play area gave way to hiking trails. Familiar with the slice of nature on the edge of the small community, she exited the car, opened the trunk, and removed the chain she found in the shed that the previous owners left behind.

She pocketed the two bicycle locks and stuffed the chain inside the hand pouch on the front of her sweatshirt. The cotton material stretched to her knees, and she frowned. *Smart move, Einstein. No one will ever notice that!*

She removed the chain and tossed it back in the trunk. With only a half hour left of daylight, she needed to hurry. Turning her head in all directions to make sure no one else witnessed this insane act, she lifted her sweatshirt and fed the end of the chain between her waist and her jeans, down into her pants.

The first iron link hit the top of her shoe, and she stopped. She found the other end of the chain and worked it down the other pant leg. Only two feet of chain looped out of the top at her waist. She gathered the extra links under her sweatshirt and kept her arms on the heavy bundle. *There we go. That isn't too noticeable.*

She shut the trunk lid and stepped toward the path that led to the camp area with a definite horror-house groan coming out of her pants. She squeezed her eyes shut and stopped. If she met anyone on the path, they'd know in a second she carried a six-foot chain in her pants.

Shaking her head, she trudged on, lifting one leg at a time. Out of breath and with legs that trembled from the extra weight she packed, she spotted Frank, and her already pounding heart beat faster. He lounged at the base of a fir tree, staring up at the sky, lost in his thoughts.

She paused to drag more air into her lungs and swipe her sleeve across her damp forehead. She headed over to the man who needed her help. The low-pitched creaking of metal against metal alerted him to her arrival. She grinned and dropped her hold on the chain under her sweatshirt. Big mistake!

The weight of the chain dragged her jeans down over her hips, and they puddled at her knees. She shrieked and pulled her sweatshirt down to hide her panties.

“Don't just sit there! Get the chain out of my pants. I don't want someone walking by to catch me in my panties!” She squeezed her bare knees together and hunkered down to make her sweatshirt cover the most of her exposed skin.

Frank's brows reached the middle of his forehead. He gave his head a shake. With a grin the size of a full-grown rosemary plant, he strolled over to her side. She scoffed.

“Take a picture. It'll last longer,” she muttered.

“I would, my little witch, but I can't remember if I own a camera or where it's stashed.” He leaned over and pulled the rope of iron links out of her pants slower than necessary.

She tried to keep a straight face, but lost it and laughed. The atrocious way he slid the chain slowly between her legs titillated and delighted her playful side. The flirtatious, carefree manner Frank exhibited endeared him to her, and she decided she rather enjoyed being around him this way.

With a death grip on her sweatshirt with one hand, she reached for the waist of her jeans. She caught a glimpse of the white material on her hip. She hurried and yanked up her pants, zipped, and buttoned. *Oh, poop! Why did I have to put on the white granny panties?*

She handed him the two bicycle locks, and together they walked over to the picnic table near the tree. They glanced back and forth at each other. She grinned. He appeared more adorable than earlier, almost playful, and she wished their perilous plan didn't have to happen tonight.

Frank stopped and cocked his head at her. He lifted one eyebrow.

Her hand automatically came up to clutch his forearm. “What's wrong?”

“I don't feel it.” He smiled.

Her brows lowered. "Don't feel what?"

"I don't have that overwhelming urge to have sex with you." He shrugged.

She placed her hands on her hips and huffed. "Well—"

"Damn! Let me rephrase that." He stepped closer to her. "I still find you attractive, and yes, I'd love find somewhere and spend hours playing with your body while you lose control and scream out my name, but I can control it. It almost seems natural...this attraction to you. How about you?"

She caught her lower lip between her teeth, scooted closer to him, and smiled. "You're right. I have butterflies, but I don't have to touch you if I don't want to."

"Let's test it out." He placed the locks in the hand that held the chain, reached out with his free hand, and brushed her hair behind her ear.

"Wha-what are you going to do?" Her hand came up and rubbed the skin at the base of her neck.

"I'm going to kiss you." He lowered his head.

She squeezed her eyes shut and lifted her puckered lips. Nothing happened. She opened one eye and peeked. His eyes crinkled at the corners, and his mouth curved in a smile. *He's laughing at me!*

Chantel opened both eyes and glared at him. "What's so funny?"

"You! I've seen how you kiss, but for a second there, I got the impression this is the first time you've kissed a man. You're lips are all squished together tight." He laughed.

She lowered her eyes. His assessment hit too close to home, and she wanted to dig a hole and bury herself in it. She blinked rapidly to dispel the tears pooling behind her eyelids and lifted her chin.

"Hey, what's wrong?" He dropped the locks at his feet and gathered her face between his hands. "What did I say? I'm only teasing you. I know for a fact your kisses drive me wild."

She gave her head a quick shake. "It's nothing."

A tear slipped out, and he swiped it with his thumb without letting go of her head. "Listen to me, okay? We're in this together, right? What happened to make such a sad expression come over your face?"

"You won't believe me." She searched his face. "This whole thing is so screwed up, and with everything that's happened, it's even hard for me to understand the way I've acted."

He leaned back down and placed a gentle kiss upon her lips. One so tender and filled with respect that she wanted to bottle the emotions and keep them on her shelf for always. She wanted to sit down and talk about all her thoughts on how she'd dreamed of a man for so long who'd care for her and understand her bizarre life.

"Tell me, Chantel," he whispered.

"I...I've never." She swallowed. "What happened earlier...between us. I've never acted that way in my life."

He nodded and dropped his hands. "I know. Me either." He lifted the corner of his mouth. "At least, I don't think I have."

"You don't understand. I've never let myself lose complete control or had the opportunity to experiment with sex." She inhaled. This was it. He'd either laugh at her or call her a liar.

"That's only the second time I've ever had sex." She wrinkled her nose. "I can't explain it right now, but I've never even gone on a date or fell in love with a man...ever."

He stepped back and rubbed the back of his neck. His gaze didn't leave hers. Unable to view the truth on his face, she turned around and shoved her hands in the pouch of her sweatshirt. Her chin dropped to her chest.

"Shit." Frank turned around. "I'm such an asshole."

She shook her head. "You shouldn't feel that way. That's not why I told you. We both acted out. I know I didn't want you to stop."

“Did I hurt you?” He moved closer.

Her smile trembled. “No. It was wonderful.”

His shoulders lowered, and he stepped forward and took her in his arms. She snuggled against his chest.

“One step at a time.” He ran his hand over her hair. “Let's stop me from leaving and fix my memory, and I swear I'll make this up to you.”

She sniffed. “The sun is getting lower. We better hurry.”

He didn't let go of her, but drew back his head. She lifted her face. His lips landed on hers, and this time she opened her mouth. The fluttering in her lower belly grew, but unlike earlier, this one excited her in a brand new way. She wanted to explore these new sensations and take her time to discover everything Frank offered. He gave her hope for a more meaningful relationship than one that only involved great sex.

“God, you make everything better. I want to beat this piece of shit that takes me away from here.” He let go of her but picked up her hand. He bent over and picked up the locks and chain. “Promise me, the moment we get this mess fixed and I figure out who I am, you'll let me see you again?”

She nodded. “I'd enjoy that.”

They walked together toward the picnic table. He shook his head. “I don't think the table will work. It's not concreted into the ground. What if I disappear with it attached to my leg?”

“Nope, that won't work. Let's think of something else.” She tapped her pointer finger against her lips. “How about that tree over there?”

He shook his head. “The chain isn't long enough to go around the tree and me.”

Her gaze circled the park in search of somewhere more sturdy and strong to chain him to where he'd stay put. “I've got it. Come with me.”

She hurried across the grass. She didn't have to glance over her shoulder to know he followed. With the chain looped over his arm, he rattled and clanked with each step he took.

She led him over to the playground area, stepped onto the sand, and turned around. "What do you think?"

"About what?" he asked.

"Duh. The duck!" She pointed beside her.

A child's ride-on playground toy that resembled a rubber ducky on steroids sat atop one giant spring that came out of the ground. She blew the bangs out of her eyes, knelt down, and scooped the sand away from the base of the child's ride.

"Look down here. It's buried in cement. There is no way you can get sucked up in the air if you chain yourself to it." She stood up and brushed her hands together.

"A duck?" He lifted his eyebrow, and she swore his chest expanded.

She stepped closer, grabbed his shirt, and pulled him over. "Yes, a duck. You really need to get over this male manliness thing. I'm sure lots of men have ridden it."

"Yeah, fathers with their children." He froze. "Oh God, what if I have children?"

"Sh...don't think about that. Look! It's getting darker. We must hurry." She patted the seat. "Climb on, big boy. Don't be afraid. I'll be right here to kiss your booboo if you fall off."

He sneered but placed his leg over the ride and sat down. "I don't think th—"

With all his weight on the equipment, the spring bent too far, and he flew off backward. He landed on his back in the sand, gasping for breath. He looked pathetically adorable.

"Oh, let me help you up. Haven't you ever ridden one of these rides in your childhood?" She giggled.

He coughed and struggled to gather his breath back. "No, I... Don't you remember me telling you I have no memory?"

She laughed. "I got some real estate for sale in Greenland. I'll sell it to you cheap."

"Huh?" He picked up the chain he dropped and rubbed his hand over his ribs.

"Nevermind. Come on. Let's try this again." She moved her fingers in a made-up sign language. "Get on the toy." Her hand movements sped up. "Brace your feet on the ground." She wiggled her pointer finger in the palm of her hand.

"Okay, knock it off. I remember sign language, and I doubt if I know if you are doing it correctly, because I can hear just fine!" He handed her the chain. "Swing this around me and the toy. Make sure you go through the spring, so I can't come off."

She weaved the chain around him exactly the way he instructed. He handed over the locks. She hooked the links in the loop and stopped.

"What's wrong now?" He glanced up at the sky.

"I don't remember the combinations." She caught her lower lip between her teeth. "I stopped using these about five years ago. A thief stole my bike outside the public library in town, and I never bought another one."

"Shit! Chantel, it doesn't matter! Either it's going to work, and I'll be here to figure out how to get myself lose, or I'll disappear. If I do, you can take your chain home and figure out your locks later." He inhaled so much air that she worried about him popping a vein.

"Step back. We don't have time to goof around. The sun is completely behind the trees, and I want you to stay back at a safe distance." He reached down and snapped the locks closed.

She stepped back off the sand and sat in the grass. "Are you sure you want to do this? I mean...this doesn't seem right. What happens if the chain cuts you in

half, and I am left here trying to get rid of a pair of legs with no upper body? I doubt if I can lift even half of you.”

For a moment, she witnessed the wavering hesitation in his eyes. He wasn't sure about what they planned, and that scared her more than she wanted to admit. *I can't do this. I won't be responsible for someone's death.*

“It doesn't matter. This ends tonight.” He gazed up at the sky. His eyes narrowed, and he wrapped his arms in a choke hold around the ducky's neck. “I won't go down without a fight!”

Chapter Four

Chantel glanced down at her wristwatch again. Only ten minutes passed since the last time she checked, and Frank still hugged the buff duck in preparation of the evening drama. She hummed a tune and ran her hand over the white clover heads splattered in the grass. The blooms caught in the act of closing for the night ahead. Not knowing exactly what would unfold tonight, she gauged her reaction by the waves of trepidation coming off Frank.

She plucked one of the flowers out of the ground and cocked her head, studying the fragile bloom. A slow smile came over her face, and she hurried to pick more. It should have dawned on her before now to use what the earth gifted them with to help Frank fight this battle.

She shoved handfuls of the precious wild herbs in the pouch of her sweatshirt.

Satisfied that she'd collected enough of the blooms to do the job, she hurried over to the edge of the sandy area of the playground. One after another, she tossed each clover head to the ground and formed a complete circle around the play area. *That should do it.*

"What are you doing?" Frank didn't let go of the duck, but his head turned to follow her path. "I want you to stay back. Don't get too close. I don't know if this thing is just coming for me, or if it'll try and take you too if you are around me."

"I just remembered that some cultures believe good luck comes from the flower heads of clover, and not from the typical four leaves that we Americans think." She smiled. "There are others who believe it will protect you from evil spirits and keep you safe."

She threw the last clover down and retraced her steps to make sure she closed off the circle. She nodded her head in satisfaction.

“There! All sealed up. You should be fully protected.” She gazed up at the sky. “It's almost dark. I no longer see the sun through the trees.”

“Why don't you go ahead and leave. I don't want you out here by yourself in the park after dark if I'm not around. It's not safe,” he said.

“You don't know that; you always leave at dark. Besides, I know everyone in town. They're a little nosy but harmless.” She laughed. “I'm going to stay with you. If you need any help, I'll be here to lend a hand. You need a friend, and well, I want to stay, so there's no use trying to talk me out of it.”

He gazed at her. She brushed the hair out of her face and smiled. He appeared sad and lost. So different from the way he appeared earlier.

“It'll be okay. I won't leave.” She sat down on the edge of the sand. “This is what friends do for each other.”

He nodded. “Whatever happens tonight, I'll find a way back to you. We've got unfinished business to take care of between you and me.”

His words brought a smile to her lips. A promise of a future date, an exploration of the tangible connection they found with each other filled her with hope. Maybe after they worked through all these mysteries surrounding them, he'd be the one she trusted with her most protected secret. Just maybe he'd understand her relationship with Eve.

She propped her chin up on her knees and studied him. In the gradual darkening, she lost the ability to read his expressions. Her compassion for the grown man who sat on a duck clutched at her heart. The puzzlement over their instant attraction and bizarre zeal to become intimate perplexed her, and even knowing how odd it all seemed, she accepted it without any worries.

He perched ready to do battle with either a figment of his imagination or a force out of this world. All alone, not knowing if his family searched for him or if he held a job somewhere, he probably believed she was his only link to this world. She

swallowed the lump that formed in her throat. There were so many questions unanswered.

He could have a wife out there somewhere crying herself to sleep because she thought her husband had left her without a good-bye. Or a child who waited for his dad to come home to read him a bedtime story but he never showed up. Her stomach seized, and she wrapped her arms around her middle. She needed to push away those thoughts and concentrate on helping him find the answers. Once done, she'd be free to pursue what happened between them. *And the consequences of our actions.*

The top of the moon rose above the staggered eastern tree line, and with the extra light that shined down on the open area of the playground, she gazed upon the person who sat silent except for the steady stare he cast in her direction. She wished she had some magical concoction that would solve his problems. An herb that would allow her to see the truth behind the man. She exhaled. No matter what others believed, her plants didn't work that way.

He appeared unnatural. His body seemed too relaxed and accepting of what should come at any time. His eyes were intense, dark, with a hint of hysteria, and she realized even in darkness, his stare burned bright enough they penetrated her very soul.

Something wasn't right. She shouldn't be able to view his eyes in such detail in the dark.

She jumped up and ran to him, calling his name, but an invisible force field shielded him from her touch. Banging her fist against the discernible wall, she cried out with the need to save him. The shield was much stronger than anything she'd physically be able to fight against alone.

Those strong, broad shoulders of his slowly hunched, and his upper body lay over the duck in defeat. He appeared unconcerned with what happened around him, and it scared her enough she increased her attack. His legs were no longer stiff but

lay flung out to the sides; his arms hung down at his sides, no longer wrapped around the duck in a death hold.

“Frank! Listen to me.” She beat the air. “Hold on!”

His eyes reflected the torment he experienced. Vacant one moment and terror-filled the next. The gaze from those piercing green eyes silently screamed for her to go away.

“Frank!” She stepped back. “Oh God, I’m sorry...”

Her hand covered her mouth. *No no no no...this can't be happening.*

Beginning at his feet and progressing up, his legs, his torso, and finally his whole body disappeared completely from sight. She bent over at the waist, clutched her stomach, and emitted a loud wail of pain. It felt as if someone had ripped a part of her soul out of her body and had left her to bleed and die a slow death.

Even her sweatshirt didn't keep out the frigid cold that swept over her and encased her in a dark, gloomy hold. Frank's body had disintegrated right in front of her, and no matter how hard she'd tried, she'd failed to keep him here. Her muscles clenched as she strained to grasp at any last piece of Frank. Her loss swirled in the pit of her belly and rose up to capture her whole body. Her legs gave out, and she fell to the ground, unable to shake the evil attack.

She huddled in a ball on the ground. Shivering and unable to gather the strength to flee, she succumbed to the grief. Her stare aimed at the lone bouncy duck without a rider. The chains Frank used to secure himself to this world now lay draped over the seat and left behind. Witnessing the disappearance didn't solve any of the questions Frank wanted answered, except one. He wasn't going crazy.

* * *

Steve Foster pushed through the swinging doors of St. John's Hospital. His long strides carried him straight past the lobby to the first elevator available, where he pushed the button for the third floor. His business meeting at the office had run

longer than he wished, and he only wanted to get up to the room and see his brother.

By now, most of the nurses knew him by sight, and he lucked out that the current on-duty nurse waved him through to room 217 with a smile, even though visiting hours were long over. He paused outside the spotless hospital room door, inhaled, and pushed the door open quietly. It only took a moment for someone's life to change.

The room was dark without the evening sunlight to shine between the slats of the blinds on the window. Not needing the light, he pulled up the one chair in the room and set it beside the bed. He sat down and reached through the guardrail for the hand that lay atop the crisp white sheet with an intravenous tube running into the back of it.

"Hey, Bro. Sorry I'm running late tonight. Work has been a real bitch without you there." He squeezed the hand but received no response. "You're going to have a hell of a workload after you wake up and get back on your feet."

The silence ate a hole in his gut. A reminder of how alone he was without Hank beside him.

"I can't wait until you wake up." He chuckled, but no sound came out. "You must be having some killer dreams, Bro. The woman I saw you with in my dream—he clicked his tongue—she's kick-ass beautiful."

The door swooshed open, and a distinguished man in a long white overcoat stepped into the room. Steve held on to his brother's hand and gazed at the doctor expectantly. *Please let there be some encouraging news...*

"Anything new?" He found himself holding his breath, afraid of the answer.

The doctor shook his head. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid it is up to your brother if he will come out of it or not. We've slowly edged him off the drugs that helped induce the coma. The bleeding on his brain has stopped, which is good news and what we hoped would happen. In fact, we plan to take the draining tube out tomorrow, but...it's a waiting game for the rest. We've done all we can do."

He nodded. "Thank you. Can I stay with him a little longer? I...I need to have this time with him."

"Sure, I'll let the nurses know." The doctor nodded and backed out of the room.

Steve leaned his chin against the cool metal of the rail and gazed over at his brother's face. With Hank's eyes closed, he appeared only to sleep. If he wiggled Hank's shoulder, nothing happened, though. No amount of coercing brought his brother around. Not even a silent request to come back to him.

He'd tried everything—pleading, crying, yelling—but those eyelids stayed shut. Hank's heart beat at a regular pace, but not a finger twitched. He lay immobile. Steve had spent hours every night watching for some little sign that his brother's soul remained here in the hospital, but so far, nothing.

The only sign he'd received that his twin remained inside the body on the bed was the wild fantasies that came out of nowhere about a woman. A very hot woman who'd had even hotter sex with his twin. At least that connection between him and Hank remained.

"I'm not giving up. I'll come back each night for however long it takes you to come back to me. I want you to come back, Bro. I need you to come back. Without you, I'm nothing. I'm part of you. You are part of me. We are one." He let the tears fall and squeezed his twin's hand. "I love you. Fight for both of us."

* * *

"Eve!" Chantel slammed the door and wildly turned her head in all directions, searching the house. "Eve! Please come. I need you!"

She ran into the living room, and finding Eve not there, continued down the hall to her room. Her friend wasn't in the bedroom, either. *Where are you?*

She sank down on the edge of the bed. All the times she wished Eve left her alone and gave her enough room to form friendships to lead a normal life, and the one time she needed her, she disappeared.

She crawled up farther on the bed and laid her head on the pillow. Tired beyond belief, she didn't fight the exhaustion and closed her eyes.

The overwhelming grief for a man she barely knew crippled her, and without Eve, she experienced how alone a person really was without a friend. She wanted to curl up inside herself and block out all the depressing thoughts and the way she ached for someone to hold her tight and comfort her heart.

She'd gone through this before with Eve when she left. In her head, she grasped what had happened, but in her heart, her grieving was real, touchable, and it crippled her body.

One hour turned into two, and the night dragged on into morning at a slow, painful pace. She spent the time crying, begging, and hoping either Eve or Frank would show up. She longed for someone who'd sit with her and tell her the world didn't stop and she'd survive.

Exhausted, she slipped into a dream-filled sleep in the early-morning hours. Elated at the way Frank strolled into the bedroom, she tried to wake up, but her legs wouldn't move.

"Frank!" She held her arms out, reaching for him, but he stood at the end of the bed and gazed back at the door. "Frank?"

An identical image of him joined him at the foot of the bed. Together they turned toward her and smiled. She shook her head. This didn't make sense. Why wasn't he one whole person?

"What's going on? Why do I see you cloning yourself?" Her gaze flashed from one man to the other, not sure which one was the real Frank.

Without a word, the two wandered to different sides of the bed and crawled up on the mattress on each side of her. She ran her hands over them. *Oh God, their bodies are so solid, warm, and real.* He'd come back. It didn't matter that she didn't understand how he became two people; she wanted him, and he'd returned.

"Chantel, lie back. Let me touch you." Frank's two bodies echoed the request.

All four hands moved over her breasts. Rubbing and plucking her nipples, their attention brought them to a peak. She arched her back. This wasn't real, but why did it feel so right?

"Let us love you, baby."

She turned to the right, and Frank captured her mouth. His tongue came out to tease her. She mewed and attempted to bring him farther into her mouth, but the other Frank lifted her leg and spread her thighs. She pulled away from Frank's mouth, lifted her head off the pillow, and wanted to stop his clone.

"Let him lick your pretty little clit." Frank nibbled on her earlobe. "Watch him, baby. See how much it pleases him to taste your pussy?"

She lay back on the pillow and closed her eyes. The havoc they played on her body was too delicious to dissect. She lifted her hips and pushed herself up against the tongue that circled her clit. Warmth filled her lower stomach and spread out to her limbs.

"Frank." She pulled the hair at the sides of his head and detached him from her nipple. "Frank." She moaned. "I want." She reached for his cock. "To suck you." She moaned. "Fuck my mouth."

Frank scooted up on his knees, and she turned her head. He fisted the base of his cock and ran the tip of the head over her lips. Her tongue darted out to taste the drip of precum glistening from the small hole.

"More, Frank." She strained to take every inch inside her mouth. "Mm..."

He pushed his length into her mouth. His balls lay against the side of her face. She relaxed her throat muscles and accepted every bit. She moaned, and her hips humped the other Frank's mouth.

"Oh Jesus, baby, that feels so good." Both Franks spoke together. "I'm going to shove my cock in your warm, tight pussy."

She swallowed, and Frank's hips jerked at the added pressure on his cock. The other Frank lifted her legs up onto his shoulders, and his hot, hard cock probed her

entrance. She tightened her knees around his neck and lifted her ass off the bed, encouraging him to plunge into her and make her come.

He lunged in one stroke, his balls slapped her anus, and she cried out in pleasure. Frank pulled out of her mouth and stroked the length of his cock over her breasts. The combined visual of his hand around his cock and the other Frank's dick filling her pussy brought her over the edge. She screamed out her orgasm.

Both men groaned. Frank shot his cum all over her chest, claiming her. The other Frank gave one last shove and held himself tight against her pussy. Each squirt of his cum up inside her channel heated her pussy even more.

She closed her eyes, and each of the men lay down beside her. Arms from two directions lay over her waist. Their heads snuggled next to hers. A euphoria of completeness filled her heart.

“You'll never be alone, baby.” Frank on the left kissed her on the temple.

The other Frank massaged her breast in a lazy afterglow caress. “We love you, Chantel.”

Her lips curved up in a smile. She reached out to touch them, but her hands came into contact with a cold blanket.

* * *

Steve's head jerked off the railing of the hospital bed. His heartbeat raced, and he stared down at his twin with his mouth hanging open. Where the hell did that come from?

He ran both hands over his face. Experiencing a sexual encounter through his brother wasn't something new, but Hank was in the hospital, not out on a date. He swallowed. The way the woman in the dream accepted both of them knocked him off balance. Who the hell was she?

“I didn't dream that. I wasn't asleep, Bro. That dream must have come from you.” He concentrated on Hank, looking for any little sign that he was waking up. Was it hope that he'd wake from the coma or just Hank's overactive imagination?

He reached down and repositioned his stiff cock in his jeans. “What the hell is going on between us? Who is this perfect woman we dream about?”

The wait to find out if his twin would ever wake up killed him. Somehow, he wanted to believe that somewhere in Hank's head, his brain still worked, and he could hear him. If the dream came from Hank, that must be a good sign. It might not have been a real experience, but it meant his brother still connected with him.

Steve closed his eyes and inhaled. He could still smell the woman's scent. Something you'd find outside, a flower or a warm breeze on a spring day, filled his nostrils. God, she was something.

Handfuls of curls surrounded her face, and she'd gazed at Hank and him with unguarded eyes that begged them to love her. He groaned and shifted in the chair. The way this woman pleased them both was something he and Hank dreamed about finding someday.

“Come on, Bro, wake up.” He squeezed Hank's hand. “I want you back, and you have to help me with a little problem. Somehow, I want to find the woman from our dreams.” He sniffed. “I think she's the one.”

* * *

She sat up in a rush, blinked multiple times, and willed her heart to slow to a more normal pace. She gazed down at the jeans and sweatshirt still on her from last night and patted her chest, searching for evidence that the two Franks brought her blessed relief.

Finding nothing to indicate the dream was real, she quickly pushed it to the back of her mind and remembered the despair of what happened with Frank at the park. *Eve!*

She scrambled off the bed and hurried down the hall to the kitchen. Her feet screeched to a stop at the entrance. What little strength inside her fled at the sight of her longtime friend. Eve sat on a chair by the table, her back to her. She walked around the table, sat down opposite Eve, and let her shoulders droop. No longer alone, she exhaled.

Unusually quiet, her friend gazed at her with such pity and sympathy, Chantel glanced away to hide from the truth of the matter written all over her face. She damned the inability to question Eve about everything. Chantel suspected that she knew the reason why Frank left, but she needed to validate her idea. Only one person knew the answers.

She hesitated, afraid Eve's answers might send her friend away too if she did say it aloud.

"You knew." She turned to Eve.

Her friend nodded. "I'm not allowed to talk about it, or I'd have told you. I tried to tell you what I did, if you remember, but you didn't have time to listen. You didn't have time to play the game with me."

"Why can't he see you? Don't all ghosts recognize each other?" She placed her elbows on the table and held the sides of her head.

Eve shook her head. "He is not one of us. Don't ask me questions that I'm not allowed to answer. Just help him, Chantel. I brought th—"

"I don't understand any of this. Last night..." She closed her eyes and inhaled. "Last night reminded me of how I discovered you all those years ago. Remember how I reacted to you leaving? The cold and grief that consumed me? This time the reaction to Frank leaving seemed ten times worse. I don't understand."

Eve stood up and paced the kitchen. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't ever say that. It's not your fault. You are the best thing I have in my life. You know that, dammit. It's just a hard thing to go through. I never expected to run into this kind of thing again." She tilted her head back and stared at the ceiling. "My God, what is wrong with me? Why can't I meet someone normal?"

She inhaled and faced Eve again. "The thing is...I don't think I can stay away from him. Something about him—"

"Yes!" Eve zoomed across the room and placed her hands on the table beside her. "There is something about him. Help him and then let him go."

“Why? If he is one of you—”

“He's not! Listen to me! He can't stay. He isn't anything like me. He's not a ghost!” Eve's head snapped up, her gaze drawn to the corner of the room.

“What is it?” She stood up, wanting to rush to her friend, but the moment the words left her mouth, she knew what happened. “Shit...I'm sorry Eve. I shouldn't have pressured you. Don't say anymore. Please, don't say another word. I don't want you to leave me right now.”

“I must go. I've said too much.” Eve drifted across the room. “Send him back...”

Chantel gazed at the corner of the kitchen where Eve disappeared into the wall. She frowned. Why would she send him away? She wanted Frank to find answers, but it'd be nice if he could stick around for a while. Get to know her better.

She failed with Frank and sent Eve away with all her questions. It didn't matter if her friends turned out to float in and out of her life; she knew better. The rules were unbending, and she should never have put the questions out to Eve. Hell of a friend she made.

Her eyes burned from lack of sleep and all the tears she shed overnight. She didn't understand Eve's cryptic messages. She scoffed. *Nah, that couldn't be it. Shoot! Can ghosts even get jealous? Maybe the time I have spent with Frank bothers her. It's always been her and me against the world.*

This stuff with Frank didn't involve Eve. She'd never give her up, no matter who came and went in her life.

Shaking her head, she moved over to the kitchen counter and pulled out the smallest canister. She filled the coffeepot with water, dumped it into the back of the machine, poured a few spoonfuls of grounds in the filter, and pushed the On button. Even with her stomach tied up in knots, she hoped following her normal routine might give her courage to face the day.

Later, she'd remind Eve not to say so much, no matter what questions popped out of her mouth. Over all these years, she really didn't know how the whole ghost thing worked. The higher power she answered to didn't allow her to answer certain

questions about the past nor the future. If she said too much, she always disappeared.

“What am I? A freaking ghost magnet?” she mumbled.

She blew the hair out of her face and tugged her dirty jeans up higher on her hips. After she drank the cup of coffee, she'd take a shower and change out of yesterday's clothes. Thankfully, she only expected Mr. Blumberg this afternoon to come by the house and pick up his arthritic tincture. There wasn't a need to rush.

With coffee in hand, she strolled into the living room. One hand held her cup; the other hand tested the drying stage of the herbs hanging off the ceiling. A small sense of security came over her in her favorite room of the house. She usually enjoyed the morning routine of drinking her cup of energy with the morning sun shining through the big picture window and heating up the smells of all the plants drying.

She kicked off the shoes she slept in all night, sat down on the couch with her legs curled underneath her, and wiggled her toes. With no idea on how to go about helping Frank, the memory of his pain at leaving this world settled on her shoulders. The thought that he came to her for a reason wouldn't leave her mind. What did she have that could save him? More importantly, would he come back to her the same way Eve always did?

During the night, she held on to hope that Eve had the answers, but that possibility dwindled. Eve vehemently denied that Frank belonged in the spirit world with her, yet she'd witnessed him leaving. He disappeared the same way Eve used to back in her childhood, where it left her despondent and unable to cope with reality. None of this made any sense.

The coldness that apprehended her body with Eve's leaving her years ago was the same with Frank's exit last night. Years ago, she didn't understand that Eve's leaving always brought her back. Experimenting together, they learned not to touch each other, and if she wanted Eve to stay, they refrained from talking about Eve's past or how she came about living with her.

That's how they'd come up with the game Didja, a simple way to keep Eve here with her and get answers to some of her questions.

No hugs, high fives, or even a pat on the arm played into either of their lives. She sipped her drink in hope the warmth would take away the chill inside her chest. The sooner the unease from last night left, the faster she'd be able to sort through this mess.

One thing that stood out very different between Eve and Frank was that his presence in her life allowed him to touch. In that way, he didn't compare to Eve. But why? Ghosts couldn't have sex with the living, could they? No, the way she reacted to Frank didn't come close to running parallel to her relationship with Eve. Frank was a red-hot, breathing male. She burned with insane intensity to become one with the man who she shared her body with.

Dawg startled her out of her musings with his ceaseless barking. Her hand trembled, and she sloshed coffee on her jeans. She rubbed the wet spots on her pants, and at the same time she turned to gaze out the window. Frank walked toward the house at a determined speed. *Yes! He's able to come back.*

She stood up and hurried to search for some place to set her cup. She placed it between the hibiscus jar and the yarrow tin. Her uncombed hair an obvious mess, she ran her hands through the snarls and tried to tame the wildness that came after a night of uneasy sleep.

In a show of surrender, she gave up on her hair and ran her tongue across the front of her teeth. She groaned. Snapping off a leaf of a spearmint plant hanging off the ceiling, she chewed briskly. The wash of flavor coating her mouth gave her inspiration. *My plants! Why didn't I think of that first?*

The tension squeezing down on her forehead eased. Everything would be okay now. She'd found the solution to help Frank.

Satisfied that her breath didn't smell of a mix of coffee and Dawg, she spit the leftover leaf in her half-empty coffee cup and replaced it on the shelf to hide.

She hurried over to answer the pounding on the door. Not wanting to view her untidy self, she dipped below the mirror in the hallway and clasped the handle. She inhaled, held her breath, and opened the door. The air she held in her lungs whooshed out.

“Oh God, you look terrible.” She opened the door wide. “Come in and sit down. Did you just get back? I'm so sorry about last night. I tried my hardest to keep you here, but whatever that thing is that takes you away used some kind of force to stop me. I tried to push past it, but it was too strong. Do you remember anything?”

She didn't give him time to answer. “It was horrible. The way your eyes connected with mine, I could feel you begging me for help, and I couldn't get past that thing...whatever it was that took you away from me. God, I'm sorry. I promised to help you, and I failed.” She inhaled. “Don't worry, though; I am going to figure out something else, and this time I won't let you down.”

He stepped into the house and followed her to the living room. “Is this safe?”

He motioned between their bodies, lifted his eyebrows, and waited for the powerful thrust of desire to smack them both upside the head. Chantel placed her hand on his chest. The push to gather him in her arms and soothe his fear away dominated any other urge, and she chalked it up to last night's traumatic events. Nope, no unusual desire to strip down naked and do the deed on the floor with him showed up.

She shook her head. “I'm okay, just worried about you. Last night...” She shuddered. “I know what you are talking about now, and I promise to help you any way I can. I've been thinking that there is a reason why you came to me for help. Then, when you knocked at the door, it hit me. I know how to save you. My herbs and plants will keep you here with me and protect you from whatever grabs you. God, I can't wait to end this.”

He frowned. “I don't—”

“Hear me out, okay? I can't believe I didn't think of this right off the bat.” She grinned. “There's a way I can use my plants to counteract the spell of this...this

thing that captures you and drags you away.” She stopped and cocked her head. “A lot of respect has been given to their uses for protection, cures, healing, you name it, and it's been proven that herbs can do the job.”

The lines on his forehead were more pronounced than yesterday, and he set his mouth into a hard, straight line. She stepped closer but stopped at reaching out to touch him. She didn't want to tempt fate.

“Are you hurt?” She ran her gaze up and down his body, moving from side to side. “I know you are shook up over disappearing, but you're not alone now. You can stop worrying, because I just promised to help you. I think together we can use what I have on hand and figure out how to make this”—she twirled her hand in the air—“dark cloud leave you alone.”

The muscles along his jaw twitched, and he shook his head.

“Tell me what you're thinking. I don't understand your hesitation. Yesterday, you wanted my help. Don't give up! We can do this. It just might take some time until we figure out the right combination of plants to use.” Her fingers rubbed the spot at the base of her neck.

“No, I don't want you involved anymore. This is worse than leaving every night. I absolutely don't want you involved.” He stepped around her and gazed at one of the shelves along the wall. “It terrifies me how much I want you. This morning actually brought me pain because I wasn't with you. The closer I got to your house, the more comfortable I grew. Even without a memory, Chantel, I know this isn't normal. We're not normal. This thing we have between us...fuck!”

He turned his back to her, and she hung her head. Somehow, his rejection, his unwillingness to accept everything she wanted to give to him crushed her hope, and it stung. She didn't even know why it mattered so much, but it did.

Despite Eve's words of warning and her own experience last night at the park, she refused to let him go. The agony in his gaze shot right to her soul and pleaded for her help, no matter what words came out of his mouth. She didn't believe him.

Something beyond their control brought them together, and she'd be damned if she let him walk away now.

She stepped up behind him. Biting down on her bottom lip, she reached out to him.

“Stop!”

Both of them jumped and turned to the left. Chantel darted her gaze between Eve, who stood in front of the window, to Frank. His mouth hung open, and he stared in Eve's direction. *He can see her!*

“What the hell?” He rubbed his forehead. “What the hell is going on here, Chantel?”

Chapter Five

Chantel ignored Eve and faced Frank. She blocked his view to break his stare toward Eve. Never in her whole life had anyone actually seen her best friend.

“You can see her, can't you?” She placed her hand on his arm. “Tell me you can see Eve.”

He blinked and shook his head vehemently. “No.”

“Yes, you do. I know you do. You turned when she yelled at me. Please, this is important. Tell me that you saw her.” Her grip on his arm tightened. The vibrations of making contact shook her to the core.

“I...” He stepped away from her, breaking any union between their bodies. “I don't see anyone. I heard someone, and I thought for a second...no.”

She kept her gaze on Frank. “Eve, say something!”

Frank cocked his head and flinched. She tightened her mouth. *I know you saw her, dammit!*

She swung around. Eve stood in the same spot, arms crossed, and her chin in the air.

“Talk! Dammit, this is huge, Eve. Please, as my best friend, just say my name. Sing the alphabet! I don't care. Just say something!” Tears fell down her cheeks, and she swiped them away.

“Chantel, stop. It's only you and me here in this room. Maybe you should sit down. Last night probably did something to you too. Here I thought I must be the crazy one out of the two of us.” He attempted to chuckle, but it came out weak and

forced. "You've got to chill, or whatever this thing is that has taken control over us wins. We can't lose ourselves in the process."

She sat on the edge of the couch and glared at Eve, who remained in the room. She sniffed and ran both hands down her face to wipe the tears away. Her chest heaved in great sobs she couldn't contain. Eve didn't understand her desire to have friends of this world, where she might receive a real hug, go out to dinner, and even fall in love.

All those things connected people to their community, to their loved ones, and brought them to life. She gave it all up because she believed in her friendship with a ghost. Sure, she loved Eve, but if she shared that life with one other person, she'd get the best of both worlds. Frank gave her a taste of everything she didn't know she lacked until now.

"Can I get you something? A drink? I think I smell coffee, right?" Frank knelt down in front of her.

She nodded and pointed to the shelf. "I've got coffee, thanks."

He stood up and retrieved her mug for her, placed it in her hands. "Is there someone I should call? Do you have any family that can come over and stay with you?"

She shook her head. "No. I'll be all right."

She raised the cup to her lips, the coffee lukewarm. She promptly spewed it out. Frank rocked back on his heels, his eyes squeezed shut, and some mysterious green stuff stuck to the side of his nose.

"Oh shit, keep your eyes shut!" She reached out, plucked the chewed up spearmint glob she'd spit in the cup earlier off his face, and placed it back in her cup.

She used the ends of her sweatshirt sleeves to wipe his face clean. He opened his eyes. She tilted her head and put on a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

“Hi.” She fluttered her eyelashes. *If he can forget one thing, let it be this moment.*

He cocked his head. “Uh...hi.”

She raised her eyebrows higher and forced her mouth to curve up some more. “So, how about we get started—”

He cleared his throat. “What just happened?”

“Happened?” She leaned over and placed the coffee cup on the end table. *Now he has a memory.* “I’m not sure what you are talking about.” *Please forget what just happened.*

Eve entered her line of vision, and she frowned. “Back to what we talked about before, I um...spit on you. You swear you can’t find anyone else in the room with us? A dark shape, a wisp of material, anything?”

He shook his head.

She studied him and then gave up. “Oh, very well.”

Eve shook her head and frowned. “He’s telling the truth.”

Chantel glanced over at Eve and turned back to Frank. “I don’t have time right now. Afterward, I’ll talk with you. I promise.”

“Huh?” Frank touched her forehead. “Are you sure you’re okay? I should leave, but I don’t want to leave you like this.” He ran his knuckle down the side of her cheek and kept going along her neck. His hand wound its way over her heart and above her breast, and he jerked his arm away and inhaled a big breath.

She glanced over at Eve, but Eve crossed her arms and didn’t leave.

“Okay, I think that instead of trying to tie you to a duck again, we should stay here. Maybe the force that takes you out of this world is located at the park.” She waited for him to speak, but he remained silent, his gaze at breasts level.

She squirmed on the couch. It didn’t take much to have the thought of having sex with him enter her mind. She rotated her shoulders to try to ease the way her

nipples hardened, and she wanted to rip off her top and have him suck on them. *Stop it! I have to find a way to help him first.*

“What do you think about staying inside my house all night?” She lifted his chin and brought his focus up to her face.

“What?” He plopped back on his butt and leaned against the wingback chair across from her. “God, I want you.” He adjusted his dick and groaned.

“Do you want to have a sleepover?” She tossed her hair over her shoulder. “You know what? Sometimes, I don't think you really listen to me, or maybe that last trip to the great blue sky rattled your brain even more. Is that it?” She shook her head. Her hands ran the lengths of her thighs. She must not gaze down at his swollen cock.

“The sky isn't blue. It's black when I leave.” He rubbed his chin.

“Aha! You do remember.” She sat back on the couch, tucked her legs under her, and smiled. “I knew we'd start figuring his out.”

If she kept babbling, maybe she'd stop the way her pussy screamed for attention and the way her nipples ached for Frank's mouth. The plan she formulated had to happen tonight, because she wasn't sure how many more times she'd survive losing him if she failed in producing a way to beat the evil.

“Chantel,” Eve whispered in her ear.

“Go away, Eve. I'm working.” She continued to smile at Frank.

Frank worked his way up into the chair. “Who is this Eve person you keep talking to?”

Chantel pursed her lips to the side. She pretended to give it great thought but stalled to think up a good excuse for what must appear incredibly deranged. The time wasn't right for a deep discussion on the fine arts of ghost making. She'd do it after they solved this mess.

“I promise to tell you after I solve all your problems, okay?” She nodded to encourage him to agree.

“All right, but about my problem—”

“I know. We have to work fast. That's why I've came up with having you spend the night.” She clapped her hands. “So, what do you want to do during the time we have to wait for evening to come? Hm?”

For some reason, Frank sat back in the chair and appeared a bit shell-shocked by her plan. His chin dropped, and he ran his hands over his lower belly. She kept the upbeat expression on her face in the hope he'd go along with her suggestion, but he only stared back at her. *He'll come around. It really is the best idea I've thought up in such a short amount of time.*

“I don't think that's a very good idea. Remember what happened to us the last time in this room?” He moved his hand up and rubbed his chest. “Plus, I don't feel well.” His head snapped up. “I mean, I feel good, but...shit.”

“You want to screw me again, don't you?” She bit down on her lip. A big part of her screamed for him to say yes and end her suffering. Once she tasted what he offered, she built a craving that wanted appeased.

“Yeah, I do.” He groaned. “Not the same way, though. My body feels weak. Yet I have enough energy to think having sex with you is a pretty damn good idea right about now.”

She rubbed the tops of her thighs. The idea appealed to her, and she debated whether to go to him and end both of their miseries. “I know. Me too. If we keep ourselves busy, maybe that will help. We shouldn't exhaust your strength. Ugh! I want to wear you out, but I shouldn't because you need to be strong. This is so hard. I've never—”

The clock chimed, and she sat up straighter. “Oh, sugar! I need to jump in the shower.” Her laugh came out a nervous titter. “Hey, I bet you'd enjoy a shower too.”

He cleared his throat. “I'm not taking one with you. Jesus...you're not making it any easier with these stupid suggestions. I can hardly control myself fully clothed. Chantel, you need to help me out here. I can't keep away from you when you have these crazy ideas.”

She stood up and scoffed. "Fine." She refused to look at him, but her ass sashayed across the room to tempt the devil himself. "You can jump in the tub after I'm done." At the bathroom door, she wrinkled her nose and raised her voice to yell, "Better yet, I have Mr. Blumberg stopping by later. You can entertain yourself in the shower during his appointment. Sometimes, my customers don't appreciate other people knowing they stop by."

* * *

Frank's gaze followed Chantel out of the room. How could he not when her ass tempted him to jump out of the chair and strip her jeans off? The wild minx had stuck her claws in him, and he'd be damned if he could shake her loose. He didn't want her involved. If something happened to her, he'd never forgive himself.

Even after the sputter of the water in the bathroom down the hall came on, his head remained pointed in the direction she left. He rubbed both hands down the sides of his face. In his short memory of the past week, he never met someone who acted quite the way she did.

She talked faster than his brain processed the words that flew out of her mouth. All of her babbling nonsense today proved that the stress of last night damaged her in some way. One minute she talked about seeing someone in her living room, calling out someone's name, and the next, she tried to convince him nothing was wrong.

He slouched in the chair and closed his eyes. Her disarray of curls that nearly floated around her face and halfway down her back gave her a wild girl-next-door appearance that sucked the breath right out of him. A carefree tilt of her chin, and he'd think nothing every bothered her much...but he knew differently.

The memory of how frightened she appeared the moment he left the earth, sitting on that stupid duck, haunted him this morning. He wanted to tell her that she must stay away from him, but she never gave him the chance. *She never shuts up.*

All these nights of losing himself in the abyss, he didn't remember a thing. Time stopped, his mind went blank, and he didn't exist. He opened his eyes and gazed up at the herbs hanging over his head. Last night should have been the same. *Why did the vision of her crying play repeatedly in his head the entire night?*

Not only did he remember viewing her pain during the night; something else beyond the darkness called for him. It wasn't a person but a piece of him. What happened to him? Why did he have this crazy notion that without that part of him, he'd never survive? *It's my memory. If I could just remember.*

One thing was certain. The moment she returned from her shower, he'd tell her plainly, he was walking out the door and not coming back until he fixed his problems. If she tried to talk him out of it, he'd put her in her place and demand she stay away from him. It was up to him to protect her, and he'd never let any harm come into her life.

He stood up and wandered in front of the couch to gaze out the window. The image of Chantel nude in the shower pushed most of his worries aside, and he needed a distraction. His body reacted, and the muscles throughout his torso tightened. He rubbed his stomach and moved his hand down to give a few strokes to his cock, and he realized that made matters worse. She did the sexiest thing in the way of brushing her hair out of her face, especially during the times she laughed.

How did he remember sex or how all men should hold down jobs to support themselves and their families? Yet he didn't recall if he ever made love to a beautiful woman prior to this week. Hell, he didn't even know if he left a girlfriend or a wife back at wherever he came from. In the back of his mind, he feared the worst. For how much he lost himself inside Chantel, somewhere in the deep recesses of his soul, something was missing.

The unique bonding he found with Chantel wasn't the only one he had known. He felt pulled in two directions. Neither direction ruled over the other but tugged incessantly on him. It worried him that someone just as important stood on the other side of where he came from, waiting for him.

He plunked down on the couch. His fingers picked at a long thread that came loose on the arm of the couch. He snapped it off and set it over on the end table. His hand brushed the mug Chantel drank out of earlier, and he picked it up. He tipped the cup to check out what it was she drank that would make her spit it all over his face, and wrinkled his nose.

“What the hell?” He set it back down. His nose scrunched up, and he shook his head. *Probably one of the weeds in this place.*

What did someone do with a beautiful, opinionated, but adorable woman who drove him crazy with lust? Half the time, he didn't understand her, and the other half, he wanted to spread her legs to sink his cock deep inside of her pussy. She mystified him with her innocence but tormented him with that wonderful ass. Overall, he didn't want to go on living without her in his life.

The connection he found with her could be the missing piece of the puzzle, the complicated piece that he didn't know where it fit. He hadn't even told her about the way he walked around with such an incomplete discomfort. The pressure he put upon her with his memory problem and the disappearing was already too much to unload on someone.

“Go back to him.”

He lifted his head. The steady drone of the shower still ran, and he knew Chantel hadn't come out of the bathroom. He turned to find who spoke. With no one in the room and positive he didn't hear the door open, he ran his hand through his hair.

“You must go back. He has the answers for you.”

“Who's there?” He stood up and peeked down the hall.

He wandered into the kitchen and found it vacant. He frowned. Someone *had* spoken to him. A woman's voice, plain as day, as if she stood in the same room.

“Show yourself.” He walked back to the living room. “I know someone is here. Who are you? Eve? Great, now he sounded loonier than Chantel did earlier.

He studied the room. A woman turned away from him in a long dark evening gown that bellowed below her waist and brushed the floor. Her blonde hair hung down her back in old-fashioned ringlets, not a hair out of place. He blinked and stepped toward her.

“Are you Eve?” He stopped his advance at the glare he received.

In a split second, she evaporated, and he scooted over to stand where she stood before she left. He turned in a circle and searched for the woman. No way could he blow off the image of the woman this time. The heady scent of roses over the other floral scents in the room wafted around him.

“Whoa! That might have been the best shower I’ve enjoyed in a long time.” Chantel came out with a giant towel wrapped around her head and piled on top.

“Your friend...that thing, she’s here. Right here.” He pointed to the spot.

Chantel closed her eyes, counted to five aloud, and opened her eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“What the hell is going on? Did I wake up in a different world? That’s it, isn’t it? I somehow must have walked through a portal, or the stars aligned with the moon and transported me in time. Who’s the goddamn president?” He hurried over to Chantel.

“Obama.” She pulled the towel off her head and shook her head.

“The same,” he whispered. “Shit! This is getting crazier.”

His hand came up and slid down a damp strand of her hair. He leaned forward and inhaled. He closed his eyes and pulled her closer. His lips brushed the curve of her neck. He inhaled the fresh-out-of-the-shower scent on her body. She tilted back and allowed him access to the length of her throat.

Chantel provided a safe grounding for him, and he clung to her to keep from going ape shit over this life he found himself living, where memories were lost, sex was incredible, and people came and went in a blink of the eye. He trailed his lips over her silken skin, hypnotized with the creamy smoothness. The temptation to

consume the nectar of this woman grew too much, and he opened his mouth and tested the taste with his tongue.

Chantel purred. Her hands came up and grasped the sides of his shirt. He stepped closer, his leg situated between hers, and pressed against her pussy. He wrapped an arm around her waist and tilted her enough to have more access to her neck. The fresh smell of a showered woman plus the heady natural aroma of Chantel reminded him of the outdoors in her yard, all wildflowers and fresh air, drove him forward.

He cradled her head in his hand. Her hair lay wild and curled bunched up in his grasp. The way her body molded to his mirrored a shadow, and they became one. The proof that she belonged to him.

Yet something was missing. Nothing Chantel lacked or what he felt together with her. No, it was something else. A part of him. Of course, blaming it on his faulty memory would be easy, but deep down he knew the part of him missing was his heart. The very core that kept him alive.

Nibbling his way up her neck, he rounded her chin, placing kisses along the way, and found her mouth open and ready. He accepted the invitation and groaned at the touch of her lips. His tongue explored the sweet, inviting warm of her mouth. The detached feeling from earlier was now a dim memory as his body fed off Chantel and absorbed everything good and real.

Chantel pulled at his shirt, and he hugged her closer. His hand wandered down to her hip and skimmed the gentle slope. The tug on his shirt came harder, more urgent, and he lifted his mouth. Her tongue darted out to lick her bottom lip, and he leaned back in for more.

Chantel turned her face away from his advances. "Frank, someone is knocking at the door."

"Huh?" He attached himself to that delicious spot below her ear on the side of her neck.

"I have to get the door. Mr. Blumberg is here." She pushed away from him. "Hurry, go take a shower." She lowered her eyes and giggled. "You might want to do something with that." She reached down and gave his dick a squeeze. "Save me some for later, okay?"

* * *

Chantel paused with her hand on the doorknob, closed her eyes, and inhaled to slow the rapid beat of her heart. Frank surprised her with the way he jumped right into a smooch session. For a split second, she wondered if the mystical force drove him toward her or if he wanted to have sex with her all on his own power. This whole relationship, if she could call it that, confused the heck out of her.

She opened her eyes, gave her head a shake, and opened the door. "Hello, Mr. Blumberg."

"What?" The old man shuffled his way past her and headed toward the living room.

Past the age of ninety, Mr. Blumberg acted cantankerous and impatient with the kids these days. That included her, whom he viewed too sassy and fresh for her own good. Bless the old guy, if only he'd wear his hearing aids.

She stood behind him and let him peruse the shelves alone. He scoffed, snorted, and grunted throughout his shopping trip. She knew exactly what he searched for, although she played the same waiting game every week with him until he finally picked up what he came for.

This time, though, she wanted to hurry him along, and stayed back out of his way in hopes he picked up the special bottle of medicine he always bought and left. Frank might come out any moment, and she didn't need anyone asking questions about her houseguest. *I'm already a witch. I don't need to have the town-slut label tattooed on my forehead too.*

"How are you doing, Mr. Blumberg?" She bit down on her tongue to keep from smiling at how absurd she sounded yelling at the man. No doubt Frank could even hear her under the running water of the shower.

“Huh?” He turned around.

She smiled. “How are you today?”

“The same. How do you expect me to feel? I'm ancient!” he scoffed and grabbed a bottle off the shelf. “What are you charging me for this here elixir today?”

“Six dollars and fifty cents!” The bottle of dandelion extract that he added to his tea once a day to keep the water retention out of his joints had cost him the same amount for the last five years. Although she charged other customers ten dollars, it was too confusing to argue with a deaf man.

He handed over seven dollars, and she stepped over to grab two quarters out of her change jar on the end table. “Remember to only take it in the morning. You don't want to stress your gout!”

“Of course I don't dress my cow! I don't even own a cow!” He shook his head and marched to the door at the speed of a snail. “I don't even know why I come here; you don't even listen.”

Chantel bit her lip to keep from laughing. In his prime, Mr. Blumberg had sat in the judge's chair for the town of Duluth. He no longer listened with a critical ear when people talked, but he'd kept his ferocious bark.

“Damn crazy witch with all her weird ways...” he mumbled outside the house.

She stood in the opened doorway and gazed after Mr. Blumberg. His son, the retired schoolteacher, sat in his car in the driveway and waited for his father. She waved to Mr. Blumberg Junior and shut the door.

“Everybody gone?” Frank stuck his head out of the bathroom and peered down the hall at her.

She nodded. “It's safe. Come on out.”

“Do you have any man clothes around here? My dirty clothes are about ready to stand up on their own...and they stink.” He pulled his head back into the bathroom but stuck it back out into the hall quickly. “Maybe you have a washer and dryer? I'll be on my way the moment they are done, I swear.”

“Um, ixnay on the man clothes, but I'll get you something that you can use.” She headed down the hall. “Throw your clothes out here, and I'll toss them in the washer for you.”

The door shut and reopened, and he kicked the pile of clothes out with his bare foot. She grinned and leaned to peek through the crack in the door, but he held it too closed off for her to view his glorious naked body.

She bent over and picked up his garments. He flicked one more sock out the door with his toes, and it hit her on the side of the face.

“Gah! Phew, these do need washed.” She held them at arm's length.

“Sorry,” he mumbled behind the closed door.

After she threw the detergent in the washer, she picked out an extra blanket out of the linen closet and walked back to the bathroom. She knocked on the door. He poked his head out, and she handed over the blanket. The door instantly slammed shut.

She laughed and waited in the hallway. “Have you suddenly gone shy?”

“I'm not tempting fate,” he said from the other side of the door. “Even though it doesn't appear that I have no self-control, I know I do...somewhere inside.”

Frank came out of the room with the blanket knotted at his waist, his top half-bare and so frustratingly inviting. She found the way the hair spread out across his chest and trailed down the middle of his stomach fascinating. The temptation to run her fingers along the line leading down under the blanket too much for her to resist, she raised her hand, but he stepped to the side out of reach.

He cleared his throat and rubbed his chest. “Thanks for the shower.”

“No problem. I have an extra comb I've never used in the drawer under the sink if you want to use it.” She pulled at a strand of her hair. “Let me squeeze by you, and I'll get it for you. I need to brush my hair too. It's already getting too dry and will be a pain to untangle if I wait any longer.”

He turned, and she squeezed into the bathroom behind him. Tingles of pleasure shot through her at the way she rubbed her chest across the width of his back. She brought her hand up and traced the tattoo on the back of his left shoulder with her finger.

“What does this mean?” She moved past him and retrieved the brush and comb.

He took the comb and worked at sweeping his hair back off his forehead and down the back of his head. “What does what mean?”

“The tattoo on your back.” Her nose wrinkled up at the pain of pulling the brush through the snarls in her hair. “Ugh, I should have brushed my hair after my shower. I hate getting the knots out.”

Frank stared openmouthed at her reflection in the mirror, his arms hung down at his sides. She stuck her tongue out, but he didn't smile. *Okay, so his good mood vanished in the shower.*

“Do you have a mirror?” He set the comb down on the counter, turned his back to the sink, and peered over his shoulder. “One of those handheld mirrors I could use to check out the tattoo?”

“Yeah, sure, there's one in the bottom drawer.” She pointed.

He opened the drawer, retrieved the mirror, and resumed his position with his butt propped against the counter. He angled the mirror and squinted. “Dammit, I can't read it. What does it say?”

He turned his back toward her. “Well?”

“Hang on. It's kind of faded.” She pinched and moved his skin. “Born...live.” She angled him toward the overhead light. “Die as one.” She returned to brushing the ends of her hair. “Why? Does it mean something?”

He shook his head. “Explain the tattoo to me. What's on it?”

She set the brush down again and examined his shoulder. “There are two swords, no...two fishing poles crossed in an X. Behind the X is a cloud with wings on

each end. Oh, hang on, there is more writing at the bottom of the cloud. It has the letters *F* and *S*....” She swallowed. A bitter ball of doom sank to the pit of her stomach. “You’ve got someone in your life. Someone important enough you put their initials on your back.”

He walked out of the bathroom. “This doesn’t make sense. I don’t remember even getting the tattoo, much less know what it means.”

“Come on, let’s go sit down. I’ll fix you something to eat.” She pushed him into the living room. Her stomach revolted at the thought of eating. Frank was involved with someone else. The truth practically hit her in the face.

“I don’t eat, remember.” He sat in the chair.

She sighed. “I’m sorry.”

Chantel sat down on the couch and waited to find out what he wanted to do with this new discovery. He mourned for someone he didn’t remember and didn’t know how to find. A sympathetic heaviness settled over her chest. What if he left a wife, or heaven forbid, a child somewhere, and never got back to them?

“I’m so sorry. I wish...” She swallowed.

“No, don’t be sorry. We don’t know what is going on. The tattoo could mean anything. Let’s not jump to conclusions.” He ran his hand along the back of his neck. “Look, I’m going to leave the moment I get my clothes back. Last night proved to me that I need to keep you safe. I should never have asked you for help without knowing if you’d end up hurt, and you are suffering. I’m the one who is sorry.”

“But I’m okay. I didn’t get hurt.” She shook her head in denial. She stood up and hurried over to one of the shelves in the room that held a myriad of books.

She trailed her finger over the spines, plucked out the one she wanted, and sat down on the floor beside Frank. She licked her finger and thumbed through the pages. If he allowed her to show him, made him believe in what she did for a living, he’d learn she really believed that together they’d solve this problem of his.

“Here! Read this.” She held the book up for him.

He bent his head to view the page and snorted. "I don't understand how I can read, but I don't know my own fucking name."

"Hurry! Read what it says." She needed to act fast and talk him out of leaving.

"Basil placed in all four directions—west, east, north, and south—will protect the occupant from evil entering the home." He cocked his eyebrow and raised his head to meet her gaze. "This is just an old wives' tale, Chantel. You witnessed how powerful this thing is, and your body took a beating just being with me when I disappeared. There is no controlling it."

"Here, read this one." She licked her finger, flipped the pages back, and pointed. He might have another life somewhere, but she'd give it her best shot at finding the answers he needed first. The tattoo was old and might not even refer to a woman in his present life. *Please let it be an old girlfriend.*

He exhaled loudly. "Marigold flowers strung in a rope of garland and placed around the neck will keep evil at bay." He slammed the book shut and thrust it back to her. "I say bullshit! You can't honestly believe this crap, can you? You might as well dress me up in some fairy outfit, sprinkle pixie dust on me, and tie me up with purple ribbon. It isn't going to work. Remember the weeds you set around the playground? They didn't work."

Chantel bent her head over the book and ignored his ranting. "Besides the one's you read, there is anise, caraway seeds, marjoram, elderberries, feverfew, lemon balm, and so many more it would take me hours to list everything." She paused to take a deep breath. "Listen to this! There are even certain times of the month that makes these herbs more powerful to the user."

Frank snorted. "I don't have time to wait around."

She set the book aside, rose onto her knees in front of him, and grasped his hands. "I have every one of those herbs here, in this room, out in the greenhouse, and scattered around my yard. Please, Frank, give it a try. What's it going to hurt?"

He set his mouth in that stubborn position she'd seen come over his face more often today. "It's going to hurt you. That's what's stopping me. I don't care what

happens to me. I thought nothing was worse than not knowing my identity, but the other night, seeing... No! I won't put you through it again."

"What did you see?" She brought his hands up to her chest and held them tight. "What happened last night? I thought you go blank and don't remember anything."

He wiggled his hands loose from her hold and cupped them on each side of her face. His thumbs strummed her cheeks. The show of tenderness brought tears to her eyes. She blinked and sent them cascading down to land on his hands.

"Please, Frank, let me help you. Let me try and help you find and get your life back." She licked her lips. "I know together, we can do anything."

He pulled her up and sat her on his lap. He cradled her against his bare chest. His chin rested on the top of her head. "What am I supposed to do with you?"

"Hold me and be my friend," she murmured.

His arms tightened around her, and he kissed the top of her head. Her hands wandered over his chest hair, skimmed his nipple, and his cock pulsed beneath her butt. She let her head fall back, and he captured her lips. *Yes.*

Frank's hand massaged her breasts and she arched up into his hand. Wanting the fabric between them gone, she pushed herself up and removed her shirt and bra. He guided her off his lap, and she stood in front of him, waiting for his next move. She hoped he wasn't pushing her aside.

Unable to take the way her body screamed for the simple touch of his hand, she crossed her arms over her breasts to answer their need for attention. Her pussy twitched. She'd never experienced her body growing more excited without helping it along with her hand or a naughty book.

"Take your clothes off." He lifted his ass off the chair, yanked the blanket from around his waist, and tossed it to the floor.

Chantel gazed down at the hardness he sported. She removed each article of clothing. In a wicked attempt to make him hotter, she pushed her breasts together and leaned over.

“Nice, baby.” He sat back. His hand wrapped around his cock, and he stroked himself in a slow up-and-down caress. “Show me your pretty little body.”

Encouraged, she moved her hips in a circle that resembled a belly dancer's move, and turned around. She widened her stance, with her back toward him, bent over at the waist, and gave him a view of her pussy. Wet, swollen, and ready, she hoped he'd want to pound his cock all the way in.

“Oh Jesus. Your cunt is begging for me. So juicy and pretty.” His breathing came faster. “Spread your ass for me. Let me see that puckered hole.”

She reached behind her and pulled her cheeks apart. Wanting to see his reaction, she tossed her hair and gazed over her shoulder.

“God, I'd love to show you the pleasure of anal sex.” His hand stopped moving, but his knuckles bore white marks from the tight grip he kept at the base of his cock.

She shook her head and moaned. The thought of giving something to him that no one had ever had turned her on.

“One day, babe, one day, I'll show you what it feels like to come with my cock up your back hole.” He let go of his cock. “Come here. I need to fuck you.”

She moved over and climbed back onto his lap. This time, she straddled his legs and met him head-on. She held on to his face. The warmth radiated off his body and sent delicious thrills to her lower stomach. She sucked on his lower lip, dipped her tongue into his mouth, and fed off him with a strength that surprised her and rocked her to the core.

Frank's fingers found her clit, and with a touch so gentle and soothing, he circled his finger around the very part of her that kick-started her hips to move back and forth in a litany of pleasure against his hand. *Oh yes!*

She rode his fingers. Her cream spread from clit to anus and brought every nerve ending to life. Frank groaned in her mouth, and she answered with her own mew. Knowing he experienced the same craving that she did only excited her more, and she shuddered.

She broke away from the kiss and gazed down between their bodies. He fisted his cock and ran the head up and down her pussy, teasing, tempting her with what he alone offered. Her pussy convulsed at the tempting sight, wanting to experience the fullness of him inside her.

The glorious difference of something so hard and thick against her tender skin wanting to bring her pleasure created a flood of juice to leak from her cunt and trickle along her slit. His dick glistened with her moisture, and she licked her lips. She'd love to lick each inch of his cock.

Hard as steel and covered in the softest skin, he yielded a powerful tool that her body recognized and cried out to consume. She wanted to experience the way the walls of her cunt squeezed and stroked the length of him.

"Do you want this?" He rubbed himself against her opening, slipping in and tantalizing her pussy.

"Yes." She leaned toward him. "I want it all."

He positioned his cock, placed his hands on her hips, and pulled her all the way down upon his length. His hands pressed her down, not allowing her to move. She swallowed and swore his rod shot straight up to her throat.

Her hips fought his hands with her need to grind her pussy against him. She wanted to move against the smooth, rock-hard invasion and build up the tension, knowing he'd bring her to orgasm.

His hands moved around and cupped her ass cheeks. Her legs relaxed, and he began to move her up and down, up and down. She set her hands on his forearms and let him control the way he moved.

"Oh Frank." She tossed her hair and stared straight into his eyes. "Oh. Oh. Yes." His cock filled her, stretched her, and stroked every little spot inside of her.

She gasped and dipped her chin. It felt like... Oh God. He wasn't even touching her breasts, but a wonderful sensation of having something squeezing her breasts from behind came over her. She could almost swear the skin around her nipples compressed on its own.

The hair at the back of her neck rose, and a warm tickle of air blew across her shoulder. She wanted to glance behind her to see what caused these feelings, but her pleasure consumed her too much to worry about where the extra feelings came from. Afraid that somehow she'd make the feelings go away if she looked for a reason behind the tantalizing experience, she concentrated on her and Frank's pleasure.

Her juices covered them both. The suction of her pussy on his cock excited her even more with the proof of what his body did to her body. The way Frank's breath came faster, heavier, and his jaw fell open as he gazed down at her pussy eating him fully sent her body into motion. She slid her hand down the front of him, through the hair spread out at the base of his dick, and up to touch her clit.

"Baby, touch yourself," he moaned. "Work it for me."

A gentle pressure around her wrist moved her arm, but Frank's hands were on her ass. Pressure as if someone leaned against her back came over her, and she pressed back, liking the sensation.

Her middle finger drew tight circles around her nub, and her hips took on a life of their own. She rode him faster and set a new motion up to their madness. His hands explored her ass, tickled her other hole, teasing her.

The new sensation on her anus shocked and delighted her. She moaned and tossed her hair down her back. Her finger, slick with her own fluid, skimmed over her clit, back and forth. She'd never thought that anal play would give her so many new feelings. Her whole lower half grew warmer, and she wondered if Frank could feel the heat coming off her pussy and wrapping itself around his cock like a glove.

"Oh God!" She grabbed a fistful of his hair at the base of his neck with her free hand. "Harder."

She used her legs to gain momentum to bounce down on him, not holding anything back. His balls smacked her ass and encased her whole pelvic region in delicious warmth. Her pussy clutched and milked him.

She removed her hand from her clit and pulled his head to her nipple. He latched on and sucked. A plethora of pleasure seized her body. "Now. I'm. Oh. Oh." She sank down completely. Her pussy pulsated around him and squeezed every drop of cum he shot out of him. Satisfaction filled her stomach, and her chest tightened at the emotions overcoming her. His legs stiffened and then jumped underneath her in response. His breath came out in one great gust. He laid his cheek against her breast. *You are mine.*

I am yours.

She raised her head and glanced around the room. She must be going crazy. She could have sworn someone held her while she fucked Frank, and just now whispered a reply.

"Did you say something?" She lifted his face off her chest.

He blinked. "No, I can hardly breathe, much less speak." He chuckled.

Her arms hung loosely around his shoulders. Exhausted and fulfilled at the same time, she came to a decision about what they shared together. No matter what happened, she knew no one could take away what he'd given her, and for that, she'd never give him up willingly.

"That was so fucking great." Frank let his head fall back.

She inhaled and smiled. "Exactly. You made me feel pleasure on every spot of my body." She gave a soft laugh. "I even thought for a while that someone else was in the room with me and fondling me from behind."

He cocked his eyebrow. "Did that turn you on? Does thinking about having two men get you hot?"

She bit her lip and gave a small nod.

“Hm, I like that idea.” He drew a circle around her nipple. “I'd love to see you screaming out with pleasure. That makes me rock hard thinking about it.”

“I've always wanted to experience two men with me.” She swallowed. “I can't believe I'm telling you this.” She ducked her head. “How embarrassing.”

He lifted her chin. “No, don't be embarrassed. I like that. You're honest, and that's the way it should be between us.”

Chapter Six

"You're making a big mistake. It's time to send Frank back." Eve paced beside the bed in Chantel's room. "Some things are better left alone, and this is one of them. I can't explain any more, but it's time to tell him to leave."

"How can I do that? It's obvious that he's tormented. It has nothing to do with defying your opinion." She removed a plastic bin from her closet filled with shoes. "You'd do the same thing if it were allowed, wouldn't you?"

Eve stopped in midstep. "You're creating a difficult situation. I can't even talk to you about this so you understand the significance of what you are doing." Eve heaved a sigh of failure.

Eve had no idea of the thoughts circling around inside her head. Not counting their current problems, the idea that Frank wasn't hers to keep, to love, to enjoy, wiggled in the back of her mind, and plain mulishness on her part kept it at bay long enough to find a way to help Frank.

"Can we play Didja?" Eve sighed. "Please? Just one game. I think it will help you. I do."

She laughed. "You act crazy for that game lately. What's up with that? She wagged her head. "Does it appear that I have time to play our game?"

She dumped all the shoes on the floor of the closet and carried the bin out of the room. "I promise, the moment I'm done helping Frank, our lives will go back to being the same, and I'll have all the time in the world to play Didja with you."

The tinctures and tins she planned to use tonight lay on the couch, and she jumped into setting everything up in order of their magical strengths. She still needed to go out in the greenhouse and pick the marjoram. She was reluctant to

take Eve out with her since she'd sent Frank out back to collect double-leafed clover buds.

Once Frank returned from gathering the plants, she'd get to work stringing the garland. She wanted to use every possible herb available. The more barriers they set up, the stronger power they'd create to fight the evil.

"Didja know shoe stain works in men's hair to hide the embarrassing gray streaks?" Eve floated around the rosemary stalks in the corner of the room.

She sighed and blew the bangs out of her face. "Fine, Eve. A short game, but afterward, you have to leave for the night. I need this time alone." Chantel nodded. "Yes, I did know that. I read it in a book." She paused with a jar of extract in her hand. A grin grew on her face. "Didja ever fall in love?"

A giggle floated over the room, and Chantel turned around in surprise. "I don't believe I've ever asked you that one. So, Didja?"

Eve swooped down to kneel beside her on the floor. "Yes, my dear. Didja know I've found myself smitten quite a few times in my life, but only one man claims my heart."

"Oh, Eve, I never knew." She hung her head. Guilt for not knowing such an important detail about her friend tugged at her heartstrings. "I should have asked you this years ago."

"Years ago, it wasn't important to you. Now it is." Eve shook her head. "Didja know you can be stuck in a dream?"

She shook her head. "No, not possible. You'd wake up. Someone or something would wake you up."

Eve stomped her foot and crossed her arms. Chantel laughed. Her friend always tried to pull a fast one over on her during this game, but that one didn't do it.

"Didja really mean it when you said you wanted to have a relationship with two men?" Eve moved forward.

“God, Eve. You should forget I even mentioned that.” Chantel sighed. The dream she had with Frank splitting apart and her experience of feeling more hands on her while having sex with him were too fresh on her mind. “It’ll never happen and it’s a fantasy, nothing more. People in real life don’t settle for that kind of relationship.”

Eve studied her friend, her brows pulled down in concentration.

“One more and I’m done playing. I have to get all of this done. I don’t have a lot of time.” She stood up and grinned. “Didja enjoy kissing the man you loved?”

“Yes, and in the end, I got hurt.” Eve gazed intently at Chantel. “Don’t stop. Keep asking.”

“Nope, you’re on your own. Tomorrow you can come back, and I’ll play a long game with you.” She picked up the bin. “I hope you’re not mad that I asked you to leave tonight. I just think it best, with you being...who you are and all.”

“Chantel...be careful,” Eve said, and promptly vanished.

From the first time that Eve came into her life, any question directly related to her being a ghost, or her previous life, resulted in her friend evaporating into thin air. That went for any information Chantel tried to pass along to her too.

Together, they learned how to talk about Eve’s past and her present form playing a silly game called Didja, where they configured a question-and-answer session in the guise of a game. Somehow, the spirit world where Eve came from sanctioned the game to continue and allowed her friend to remain in her presence.

The knowledge that Eve had loved someone surprised her. She always figured Eve led a more solitary existence similar to her own and never experienced the titillating joys of a love affair. She’d give anything to sit down and play a long game with Eve and find out more, but it’d have to wait. Frank’s problem came first.

Chantel ambled out of the house to gather the needed supplies out of the greenhouse. She scanned the field next to her property for Frank, but she found no sign of him. No wonder she never thought to ask Eve about a past love in any of

their prior games. Now she wanted to know more, because of how she found herself drawn toward Frank.

In her fantasies, she always dreamed about two men who'd sweep into her life, accept her eccentric dealings with Eve, and love her completely. She bit down on her lip to keep from laughing. She never expected in real life that one man would come from another world, plane, or wherever Frank came from, to make her fall in love.

She set about cutting the greens and piled them in the bin. All this busy work helped her keep from doing something foolish and announcing to Frank that, somewhere along the line, she developed more than a need to help another human being. Her feelings stretched beyond the deranged attraction between them. She loved him.

So far, he was the one person in her life who didn't run away the moment she talked to thin air or run away after one of Eve's tricks. She hummed under her breath. Frank reacted indifferently to everything except her. He shrugged off the paranormal happenings at her house and ended up screwing her senseless. She'd love if it continued this way and he'd always accept the way she lived.

The answer to all the mysteries surrounding him needed to end first.

Satisfied with the amount of marjoram she accumulated, she left the greenhouse and stepped out into the bright afternoon sunshine. Despite the sun's rays on her shoulders, the air outside the greenhouse cooled her off from the stuffy, muggy, higher temperature inside the plastic-enclosed structure.

Her gaze instinctually targeted beyond the house in search of Frank. He strolled back in her direction, and she smiled. Dawg bounced alongside him, happy to have his playmate to himself. She should have named the dog Houdini for how he managed to escape his kennel whenever Frank came around.

She crossed the yard, delighted the bag Frank carried at his side appeared plump and he'd been successful in his search. They needed a big amount to cover all the areas they planned to protect tonight. All that was left to do now was to prepare

the final stage for the showdown, and if they lucked out, they'd shut off the access to whatever preyed on Frank.

Chantel shook her head, laughing. "Dawg, what are you doing out of your pen, silly dog? Have you been a bad boy, bothering Frank and running wild through the fields?" She knelt on the grass and scooped the dog up in a hug. "I bet you enjoyed that little bit of freedom, didn't you?"

"He seemed to have no trouble finding me. He came barreling straight through the tall grass, his tail just a wagging. I swore he even smiled with that ugly mug of his." He laughed. "After I sat and gave him a good rubdown, he calmed down a lot and stuck right beside me. I figured it didn't hurt to have him out with me, if he didn't run away." Frank smiled down at the dog. "He's actually a rather good dog."

"He is, isn't he? I'm almost glad his owners didn't show up after I placed all the found-dog flyers around town. I have to admit, he's grown on me." She lowered the dog to the ground and smiled at the way he scooted over to sit at Frank's feet. "In fact, I've been putting off bringing him into the house because I didn't want to get too attached to a stray dog. He's already claimed my heart. If someone showed up now, wanting him back, I'd miss him. I'm going to bring him inside to live. You want to be a member of my crazy family, Dawg?"

The dog barked and wagged his tail. She laughed and gazed up at Frank. "I guess that's my answer."

* * *

Frank leaned back in the kitchen chair, his hands clasped behind his head, his legs sprawled out in front of him. She finished the last bite of her sandwich and pushed the plate to the middle of the table. If a person didn't know what thoughts circled inside his head, she'd swear, at this precise moment, Frank appeared not to have a care in the world. In fact, he appeared rather at home with himself.

They'd worked steadily all afternoon stringing various herbs together, laughing, and to her delight, he stole quite a few minutes' worth of pleasuring her. Both of them aware of their limits around each other and their playful interaction

ended up a dueling match to find out how much teasing they handled without it going into hot, sweaty sex. Her lower belly warmed. She enjoyed the afternoon foreplay.

She relished the easygoing camaraderie they discovered possible between them. Sex definitely wasn't the only thing they shared together. Frank turned into the whole package of the perfect man. If she could only figure out the secret on how to keep him with her forever.

She strolled in front of Frank's chair to pick up another handful of roseroot, and Frank snagged her arm. She fell back onto his lap with a squeal. His arms came around her waist to keep her secure, and he laid his cheek on her chest. She placed her arms around his shoulders. One hand came up to run through his hair and to hold him close to her breasts.

Smooth and thick, his hair shined from his second shower earlier. She ran her fingers down the back of his head to the collar of his shirt where the hair stopped. With all her heart, she hoped tonight turned out the way Frank wanted. She'd deal with her part in his life, but she wished the best for him.

Whether or not he found out the truth and regained his memory, she'd never forget the last couple of days. If she knew a way to bring him back to his former self and keep the man she knew, along with his feelings toward her, she'd do it in a heartbeat. Yet fate was what ruled this game, and she'd have to accept the outcome. He might not come back to her.

"A part of me wants to stay in this position with you in my arms forever, to forget about my past." Frank's arms tightened around her waist.

"We both know it isn't possible. You wouldn't be happy not knowing what you are missing." She inhaled. "Thank you for saying that, though. I wish we'd met in different circumstances. I really think I'd allow myself to fall in love with you. You're a special man, Frank."

He lifted his head. "Chantel, I—"

She laid her finger over his lips and smiled. "Don't say anything. Those are my feelings, and I own them. I don't ask for anything back, and I know how this is probably going to work out. I'll be okay, I promise. I just wanted you to know that before things get going tonight."

"I'm scared of living through tonight tormented over how you suffer through the whole process. What if other bad things happen to you, besides the huge curtain of grief that covers you? What if you are physically hurt? You have to promise me to stay back out of the way. Do not fight this thing if it comes for me, okay?" He brought his hands up to cup her face. "Promise me, Chantel, or I'm walking out the door right now."

She nodded her head. She blinked to keep the tears at bay, the aspiration to keep what they formed together foremost on her mind. She removed the necklace around her neck and clasped it around his.

A simple five-dollar fake silver chain with a daisy hanging off it that already lost the white paint on most of the petals meant nothing to her, but it belonged to her. If he never came back, maybe he'd remember how she befriended him and...

"If this works, I might not disappear. I'm hoping my memory comes back and I stay. After that, we'll deal with the truth of my life together." Frank trailed his finger where her necklace once lay.

"But if you have a wife, a family, what we share for each other now will go away. It must stop. I shouldn't have... It will have to stop," she whispered. "It's not fair to say we'll stay together, to either one of us. We don't even know if our attraction to each other is real or brought on by whatever this thing is that has changed you."

"It is real." He kissed her hard on the lips. "I know it in here." He thumped his chest.

She softened in his arms and let him show her how much she meant to him. Her heart already claimed him for her own, but it wasn't fair to say it aloud. Frank needed to leave so he'd find his way back.

* * *

The living-room furniture was newly rearranged with all the pieces shoved to the sides of the room, except for the one stuffed chair sitting in the middle where Frank would be ready for nighttime to arrive. Circles of assorted flowers, leaves, and buds placed around the chair on the floor resembled a dartboard, with Frank the intended bull's-eye.

The high level of floral scent inundated the room, and Frank sneezed. She giggled. He appeared out of his element. Too alpha, too tough, too rugged to appreciate the spectacular flower arrangements she prepared.

“Okay, here comes the part you're going to love!” Chantel placed the first of many garlands over his head. “If this was any other situation, I'd take a picture of you and blackmail you with it every time you pissed me off.”

He growled. “Funny. I think you went to a lot of work for nothing. I don't understand how all this plant stuff can do any good, except to make me smell girly.”

“Do I smell good?” She paused and brought her neck down in front of his face.

“Mm...” He nibbled along her neck.

She laughed and stood back up. “You're crazy!” She gazed down at him, her smile fading. “If this works, and you find out that you don't have a family waiting for you to return—.”

“Chantel—” He sighed.

“Okay, we best hurry. The room is getting darker now.” She handed him a bouquet of baby's breath, dragon's tail, and yarrow. “Hold on to this.”

“What do I do with it?” He held the handful of flowers away from his face.

“Throw it over your shoulder to all the single women.” She snorted. He stared at her, clueless.

“Just hold on to them. Each one of the plants, along with their blooms, has major power in fighting off harmful spirits.” She stood in front of him. “Trust me.”

"I do." His hands fell in his lap, the flowers clutched in one hand. "Remember to stay in your circle in the archway. Whatever you do, don't enter the living room." He narrowed his eyes. "Promise?"

"I promise." She crossed her fingers out of his view. A childish act, but one she did out of habit. She'd fight with everything she possessed to keep him safe. No way did she plan to sit back and watch him float away without doing her damndest to keep him here.

"Okay, get in your position, so I can relax and not worry about you getting in the way." He nodded toward the hallway. "God, I hope this crazy idea of yours works."

Minutes ticked by, and Chantel sat inside her ring of basil garland on the floor. She spared the other plants and made sure Frank stocked up with more than enough. With her legs crisscrossed, she placed her elbows on her knees and planted her chin in her folded hands. Frank stared off out the window, she assumed, lost in his own thoughts and fears.

The room grew darker, quieter, and reminded her of the time right before a rainstorm hit where the atmosphere grew angry, sulked, and grew in power. The coming evil threatened to crackle, snap, and light up the room similar to thunder and lightning. She hoped the added protection she used this time kept Frank safe.

"It's almost time." Frank turned his head. "Promise me!"

"I promise. Frank..." She swallowed. "If this doesn't work, make sure you come back to me."

He didn't answer. She scrambled up on her knees but remained in her circle of protection. Frank's body slumped in the chair. Only his gaze remained sturdy and strong. He stared right at her, his soul ready to fight the evil thing that took him out of this world.

"Hang on, Frank! Fight! Don't let it win." Unable to remain on her knees, she stood up within the circle of protection, her arms wrapped around her middle. "Go away! Leave him alone! He doesn't want to go!"

More aware of what to expect, she studied the room to search for something that stood out as a clue to this mysterious happening. The drapes stood still, not a quiver in the light material. The night's darkness overshadowed the room without casting any lights on the walls. The only sound coming through the deathly silence was the quick burst of pants coming from her chest. Frank sat in silence, unmoving, incapable of fighting for his own life.

"Frank!" Chantel placed her foot outside the circle of protection, but his eyes widened and darted up and down. The panic he conveyed through the expression in his eyes overwhelmed her, and she stepped back into the safekeeping ring of clover and basil.

"Go away! Get the fuck away from him!" Bile rose in her throat, and she clutched her neck. "Please...no..."

Frank's body grew uncongealed and appeared to float apart and evaporate right in front of her. Every protective shield she clung to in hopes she protected him failed. It left her wounded, raw, and all alone.

Her legs collapsed, and she fell to the floor, her knees drawn up tight to her chest. Totally devastated, she fought to gather enough oxygen into her lungs to keep from passing out. How many times did she have to go through losing him? Her mind knew that he didn't die, but this thing that took him left her grieving for a lost lover, a life mate, a piece of her soul.

The room grew completely dark, and Chantel lay in the same spot within the circle. Her body defeated, she gave up the fight and succumbed to the emptiness inside. With no energy to get up or go to bed, she left her eyes closed and dwelt on where everything went wrong. What did they miss? Why didn't her beloved herbs work against this evilness? Where the hell did it come from?

Every day, she sold tinctures, tea, and concoctions to remedy colds, arthritis and rashes. She even helped others with love spells, comfort, and achieving good luck. Whatever her customers wanted, she tested and supplied. She believed in the formulated potions, and they'd always provided great results.

Her customers came back repeatedly. She'd helped others get what their hearts desired. Why didn't it work for Frank?

The whole time she gave up on the acceptance of people, every day that someone scorned her for supposedly talking to herself, she retreated back home to the two things which never failed to support her. Her plants and Eve.

“Chantel?”

She opened her eyes and squinted against the gloom of the room. “Eve? You came back.”

“Yes, my friend. Let's get you to bed.” Eve swept in closer without touching her, but gave her moral support to get off the floor. “Come on. Get up. I'll sit with you and wait for you to go to sleep.”

She sat up. “Nothing worked. Not my flowers or any of the protective circles I laid out. I lost him. I failed him again, and I don't know what to do.”

“I know, dear friend.” Eve gazed away. “In the morning, I will help you fix everything, but do not ask me anything tonight. Let me sit with you and bring you comfort. I will be your friend tonight, and you'll never be alone. You will need all the strength you have to survive this, my dear. You must rest.”

Chapter Seven

“Hank, wake up!” Steve shook his shoulder and waited, staring into his brother's face.

Not even an eyelid twitched. He sighed and leaned back in the chair. He thought if he woke Hank up when he saw the woman in his mind, it might pull his brother out of the coma. He was out of new ideas.

“I know you're still alive in there, Bro.” He swallowed. “You've got to fight. Fight for both of us. Fight for the woman I see in our dreams.”

He glanced around the room. Fuck, what a depressing sight.

“I'll come back every night. I don't care if I have to drag your ass out of here, but you will go home.” He nodded. “Heal, dream, and then get your fucking ass back to me.”

The intercom from out in the hall broke his depression and pissed him off. He stood up. He pleaded, coerced, and thought up everything that would make him fight to come back and now Hank pissed him off.

“God damn you, Bro.” He narrowed his eyes and stared over the bed. “You can't fucking leave me. I won't survive without you.” His hands curled into fists. “I don't know if you're playing some game by showing me the perfect woman every fucking night to keep me entertained, but stop it.”

Tears ran into his mouth, and he swiped his arm across his face. “I'm so damn angry at you. I was supposed to be with you in the car. If I hadn't had my court date moved up, I'd be with you.” He doubled over the bed and pressed his head against the railing. “Fuck!”

He lifted his head, reached out, and placed his hand on his brother's chest. "Wake up, dammit. Just fucking wake up."

He counted to fifty in his head and hoped that he'd done something to get his words past the coma that consumed Hank's body. His brother was alive—he knew that—but he wanted all of him.

"Please, Hank. Come back to me."

He sniffed and sank back down. He stared at the white blanket hanging off the hospital bed. Why? What did they ever do to deserve this?

Hours ticked painfully slow. He stood up and stretched. A woman's laugh sounded behind him, and he jerked around. He recognized that laugh.

Rushing out of the room, he searched the hallway. Frowning, he stepped back in the room, shut the door, and stood beside the bed.

"Is she with you?" He stared at his brother. *God, I'm going crazy.*

Lack of sleep must be screwing with his mental stability. He closed his eyes and folded his arms. He had better try to sleep before he left for the office.

"Stay with me."

He rubbed his face and groaned. The woman always begged him to stay, but he didn't understand how to go about that. She was a dream.

"I love you both."

He followed the voice, knowing at the end, he'd find her. She waited for him and Hank. She never disappointed him.

The vision of their woman on the floor, her ass pointed up in the air teasing him, appeared so real. Hank stood in front of her, and she sucked his cock. He reached out for Hank, but he shook his head and motioned for Steve to take a piece of ass.

He shook his head. This was a dream. He knew that. Was it his or Hank's mind creating this woman who drove him crazy? He wanted her.

He reached down and rubbed his cock, already hard and ready to do the job. Grinning at Hank, he got down on his knees and ran his tongue up and down the woman's slit.

"Eat her, Bro. Chantel loves to have you eat her pussy, don't you, baby?"

Chantel moaned.

He repositioned himself and shoved his cock into her hole. Jesus, she was tight. He slid out and thrust into her harder. Over and over, he took his pleasure and listened to her moan...

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Steve's eyes flew open. He searched for the sound and found the heart monitor blaring. Dammit! He jumped up and rushed out of the room, the dream forgotten.

"Nurse!" He glanced back at his brother, who had not moved at all. "I need a nurse!"

* * *

After being so stressed last night, she slept terribly. The whole time she laid in bed with Eve sitting beside her in a chair, she wrestled with her pillows and fought with her blanket. Restless, broken, she yearned for Frank's arms around her and cried at their absence.

No matter how many times she told herself Frank would return to her, just like Eve always came back, her heart didn't believe a word of it, and she agonized over the loss.

She headed to the shower without stopping to find out if Eve remained in the house. She'd double-checked throughout the night, making sure Eve didn't leave, not trusting that she too might not leave her. Left with nothing but longing for a pair of real arms, even having Eve's presence around her saddened her... They'd never been able to touch each other.

The warm water woke her up. She rubbed the soaped-up washcloth over her breasts and moaned. Even after the hell of a night she experienced, and all the

dreams of the two Franks having sex with her in every imaginable position, she still wanted more.

If she had more time, she'd give more thought to why she's experienced so many dreams of two men screwing her, loving her, and worshipping her. She rinsed the soap off and shut off the water. Later, she'd try to understand. Right now, she wanted to hurry in case Frank showed up.

Determined to make herself presentable and ready to go back to work at solving Frank's problem the second he came back, she automatically ran through her morning routine. He'd return to her, and she'd appear confident and strong. Her next suggestion on what they needed to try wasn't going to please him.

She prepared herself for some tough negotiations, though. For both their sakes, she'd force him to agree to her idea. They had nothing to lose.

Once she finished with her morning routine, she formulated every nitty-gritty detail of her planned attack. She strolled into the kitchen, not surprised to find Eve lingering about in the corner beside the coffee maker.

"Good morning." She pulled out the canister and filled the coffee filter.

"He'll be here shortly." Eve crossed her arms.

She nodded. "Yes, and this time, I'm going with him and no one is talking me out of it, so don't even try."

"I know." Eve met her gaze and uncrossed her arms. She reached out but stopped short of touching her. "That's why I'm here. I'm going to tell you both what you must do. What I have to say is very important, and you must listen to me this time. I've done something, and I must make it right."

"But you can't. It's not allowed. You'll vanish, and we will never find out what it is that will work. You know this, Eve. We've tried it enough times in our past and failed miserably." She removed a mug from the dish strainer. "Besides, I'm not sure Frank can hear or even see you. I thought he did, but now I'm not too sure. I think maybe he senses you but refuses to believe."

"I can make him aware of me." Eve followed her to the living room. "He'll have no choice but to listen to what I have to say."

She set her cup down to cool off and dove into cleaning up the mess left from last night. She scooped plant parts off the carpet and threw them in the bin to dispose of later. Her usual desire to save any part of the plants still useable died inside her.

They'd let her down, and she only wanted to throw them away and get them out of her sight. Their usual mystical healing powers fascinated her any other day of the year, but today she forced back the sting of tears that threatened to overspill.

Eve stood off to the side, her hands clutched to her chest. "If you follow my instructions, everything will work out for you."

"What are you talking about? All this talking that you want to do is against your rules. You'll disappear, and I don't want you to go. I need you now more than ever." She shoved the bin under the shelf. "When we played Didja years ago, you told me if you show yourself to anyone who cannot naturally see you, you'd have to leave and never come back. Don't mess with the rules, Eve, not even for me."

Eve turned toward the window. "He comes now."

As if on cue, Dawg barked excitedly at her feet. Chantel nudged the chair out of the middle of the room and back to the original spot. Frank didn't need any reminders of their failed attempt last night.

Tiny yellow bits of flowers off a yarrow plant littered the cushion of the chair. She brushed them into the palm of her hand, but her pinky finger caught on something in the crack of the chair cushion. She wedged her hand in between and came back with her cheap daisy necklace she'd given Frank yesterday.

She held the piece of jewelry up and covered her mouth. Not even a part of her had remained with him last night. How did she expect to convince him to hold on to her and let her leave this world together if a simple keepsake for good luck couldn't travel to wherever he disappeared?

A couple short blunt knocks from the front of the house, followed by the door banging against the wall, interrupted Chantel's shock. She hurried to hide the evidence that'd prove her plan could fail. She'd have to work hard at convincing Frank to try her new idea, and she worried that he wasn't going to approve.

* * *

Chantel met Frank at the edge of the living room. He gathered her in his arms and rained kisses all over her face. His hands roamed her back, up and inside her shirt to touch her bare skin. He appeared scared to death and debilitated.

"God, babe, are you okay?" He brought his hands up to run them over her face. "I tried so hard to come back to you. I can't take this, Chantel. I'm kicking myself all ways to Sunday over walking up to your house and asking for your help. Jesus, if I'd known I'd fall in love with you and bring you this much pain, I'd have stayed away."

The way his hands trembled against her skin sent her stomach into a myriad of small cramps, and she pressed his hands against her chest to reassure him that she was fine. She nodded and guided him over to the couch.

"Did your memory come back?"

He shook his head. "No, but neither is the time spent away a void time, but a long night where images of you torment me. There's something else out there. I feel it pulling at me, wanting me. God, Chantel, this *thing* is so damn strong. I swear whatever it is begged me to come to him.

"It seems someone wants me to suffer the greatest pain of my life. Somehow, whoever is controlling me discovered the best way to do that would be to show me how much you grieve for me after I'm gone. I feel your pain deep in here." He patted his chest. "God, Chantel, it kills me to watch you in so much pain. I wish they'd hurt me directly instead."

She gathered the front of his shirt in the fist of her hands. "I know, I know. That is why I want to—"

Dawg barked and jumped up on Frank's leg. She stepped back and laughed. The little guy sure liked his new buddy.

"Hey there, Dawg." He ruffled the fur on Dawg's head. "How are you? Huh? You're a good boy."

Dawg returned all four paws to the floor, walked over to the right, jumped up, and danced on two legs. She snorted. "What in the world?"

"Almost looks like he's dancing." Frank chuckled.

"He's greeting the other person that comes with Frank."

Chantel whipped around. "What are you talking about?" Heaviness landed on her shoulders. "You see someone else? Is it the man in my dreams? The one I imagined the other day when I was with Frank? Ask him!"

"Another man?" Frank reached out and grabbed her arms. "What's going on?"

"I have the answers you seek." Eve stood off to the side of Frank and Chantel in front of the big picture window. "You will have to trust me and do exactly what I tell you to do. For both your sakes."

Frank's gaze darted from Eve back to her.

Chantel studied him. Yes, he definitely saw Eve now.

"Frank, this is my best friend, Eve. Somehow, she is allowing you to view her, but she is not of this world." She stuck her chin up, ready to accept his denial. "She's a ghost."

She turned back to Eve. "Please, don't do this. I opened my mouth without thinking. You can't answer. I can't lose you too."

Eve's lips softened and she smiled. "I knew this day would come for a very long time. I kept you to myself for far too long, but I've made it up to you. I've brought you what you've always wanted, Chantel." She nodded her head. "Yes, my dear friend, I have needed you just as much over the years. But it's time for you to live for you and not be saddled with a ghost for a friend."

"Stop it!" Chantel closed her eyes. She didn't want to hear this.

“Chantel, open your eyes and admit the truth. Look at me! You know there is a way around this. I can tell you what he needs to find peace and for you to go on with your life. I've set it all into motion, but you have to do your part now.” Eve turned toward Frank. “Make her understand!”

“I don't know what is going on here, Chantel. Who is this woman? What is she?” Frank stepped toward Eve, but Chantel held on to his hand to keep him from touching Eve.

“She's an apparition, a ghost, that I have known almost my whole life. No matter what you believe or what others think, she is very real to me. She's everything to me. She's been my friend and more of a mother than my own flesh and blood. You're the first person who has been able to see her.” She sniffed. “There's a rule that she is unable to talk about where she comes from or what has happened in the past to make her live here with me now.

“If she tries to tell me what is forbidden...she disappears. I never know for how long, but through a game we play, I have found out that if she tells me too many secrets from the other side, from her world, she will disappear from my life forever.” She inhaled. “In that way, she is very similar to you, I believe.”

She turned back to Eve. “I'm begging you, don't do this. I don't want to lose you. Not this way, Eve. You promised never to leave me alone. I've figured out a way to help him. You'll just have to trust me. This is my decision, not yours to make.”

“You're not alone anymore, my friend.” Eve glanced toward Frank and to the corner of the room. She stepped back across from them and waited. “You have him and someone else waiting for you, wanting you. They love you.”

“Chantel, if this is true, we must find out how to stop me leaving. I might even get my memory back. Do you realize what this means?” Frank's eyebrows raised, and the hope she viewed in his eyes forced her to make a decision she wasn't ready to accept. “I can find out who it is on the other side who claims a part of me. The same way I want you...”

Chantel frowned. "What? You didn't say anything about someone else in your life. You swore you don't remember having anyone in your life."

"I don't know who it is, but the connection I feel is the same. My body doesn't feel whole without this person." He ran his hands through his hair and tugged. "I'm sorry. I didn't want to worry you, but I didn't lie to you, Chantel. I want you. I want to come back to you and have a life with you. Without you, I feel like I'll curl up and die. I know it sounds awful, but trust me... I want you in my life."

She stared into his eyes. The intensity of his words and the way he verbally reached out and accepted everything happening in the room with Eve outing herself to him shocked her, but underneath the truth, the hurt, and the confusion, she believed him. She had to believe him or she'd lose him forever.

"Please, Chantel. Let your friend tell me how to fix myself so that I can love you like you deserve." Frank lifted her hand and held it between both of his strong, stable ones. "Babe, I love you."

She shook her head. *Oh God, what could I be thinking?*

Her fingers dug into his arm. "No, you have to understand that by helping you, Eve will leave forever, and we have no idea where she will go. From what I understand, she is in a place that is neither heaven nor hell but a waiting area—a limbo, for lack of a better word." Tears rolled down her cheeks. "Frank, she has been my constant companion my whole life. I can't send her off not knowing if where she ends up might turn out worse. I don't know if they'll punish her for breaking the rules. Don't ask that of me."

"It is time, Chantel." Eve smoothed her dress over her legs. "Let us all play Didja, shall we?"

"No!" She stepped between Frank and Eve. "I won't participate. This isn't right. I just need more time. I can fix this. I really can." She waved her hand from Frank to Eve. "We can fix this. We don't need you doing anything."

"Didja know that you and Frank have a lifetime of happiness ahead of you?" Eve smiled tenderly and nodded her head. "You'll receive your every fantasy."

“Stop it!” Chantel stomped her foot. “I love you, Eve. Don't make me choose.”

Eve sat down in the same chair Frank had used but disappeared from last night, her head lifted at a regal angle, her facial muscles relaxed into a decision of acceptance of whatever would happen. “I love you too, dearest. Didja know that you have to let Frank go for him to find his way back to you? He needs to leave on his own accord, and you must encourage him not to come back. That is the way it has been planned.”

“No! Why should I lose both of you?” She stumbled back and sat down beside Frank, who already dropped down to the edge of the couch. She grabbed hold of his hand. A simple act, but she wanted to anchor him to her. She only wished she could reach out, grab Eve, and keep her here too.

“Why do you think I'd walk away from Chantel? Isn't there another way to do this without losing her?” Frank gazed at Eve. “Somehow, now that I've found her, I know I'd end up miserable without her in my life. I won't leave her alone. I rather go on existing without my past. I can start anew.”

Eve shook her head and remained silent.

“She's unable to tell you without the cover of the game. You must address your questions with the word Didja at the beginning.” She squeezed his hand. “It is the only way she can stay to answer. Please, don't tempt her to answer without the game. She'll leave me.”

“Didja happen to find out where I come from?” He scooted to the edge of the couch.

Eve nodded. “You are from the same world that Chantel is from, but you must leave the place you find yourself in now so you can return whole. This body you are in is only half of the puzzle. Someone else needs you more than Chantel.”

Chantel jumped up. “Stop, Eve! You've said too much. That is more than he asked, and you are not remembering the word.”

Eve's form grew dimmer. Her dress took on an iridescent glow.

Chantel turned back to Frank. "We're pushing her too far. Don't play the game. Please! Can't you see she's leaving me?"

Frank ignored Chantel. "Eve. Didja wonder if this is the right thing for Chantel?"

"Yes, this is the only way. Trust what I tell you. I've planned everything." She nodded and smiled tenderly at Chantel. "Didja know that there are choices in our lives, and if we make the wrong one, it infects everyone we know. You must choose the right path. I know that I've made the right decision." Eve glanced down at her legs. Her feet were already gone. "Didja know that I am so proud of the person you are, for how far you have come from that knock-kneed little girl to a woman who is ready to live her own life?"

Chantel swiped her eyes with her arm. Eve took the game out of her control to stop it. She inhaled, but a sob thrust its way out of her mouth. "Didja know that I love you?"

Eve nodded. "Didja know that the weeks to come are going to be the hardest you've ever lived through, but I know the outcome will be worth it for you. I want to do this for you, my friend."

"Didja know I will be strong?" Her chin trembled, and she bit down on her lip to keep from sobbing. "You alone have made me who I am. It was always you."

Eve turned to Frank. "Didja know you must go tonight? Accept it and don't come back. If you feel yourself trying to come back for Chantel, fight it. Someone will be waiting for you, and you'll not be disappointed. You'll find the missing piece that you need to live and the answers on how to come back to Chantel."

Chantel stepped forward, wanting to stop Eve's departure.

"Last one, my friend. Didja know I will always be with you, even though you are no longer going to have me close by?"

She nodded, too choked up to speak. Her hand on her throat, she stared intently at the suddenly empty chair.

“Listen for me, Chan—”

“Eve!” She jumped up to rush to the chair, but her knees collapsed, and she knelt on the floor with her arms wrapped around her waist. She rocked back and forth, pushed back into a childhood memory of the time she thought she lost Eve for good, but this time she knew Eve wasn't coming back.

Her best friend killed herself so she'd find happiness.

Frank picked her up off the floor and carried her to the couch, where he cradled her in his arms. “Sh...I'm here. We'll get through this.”

“Eve...”

“She loved you.” Frank kissed the top of her head. “She did what she wanted to do. She gave you the biggest gift one person can give another.”

“It hurts. Oh Frank, I didn't want her to go. I didn't mind her being a ghost. I really didn't. I know sometimes I lost my temper, and I said things I shouldn't have. I didn't mean them.” Her chest rose and fell and she choked on her words. “She's the only person I really, really have in my life. No matter what, I depended on her, and now she's gone.”

“She knew that, babe.” He smoothed her hair out of her face. “Anyone who knows you realizes your heart is constructed out of gold. She loved you and wanted you to go on and find happiness in your life.”

Chantel lay cradled in his arms for the longest time. Her breathing returned to normal, and the gut-wrenching pains subsided to an empty hole inside her that ached. A part of her wanted to stay within his arms and ignore the fact that it didn't matter if Frank held her or not; he'd disappear once again the moment the sun set.

She sat up and scooted off his lap. She kept a grip on his hand, not wanting to separate from him. The need to have contact with another person was so strong, she never wanted to let go. If Eve's predictions came true, he'd soon leave her, and she wanted to hold on to him for the remaining time they had together.

The lines across Frank's forehead carved deep and reached from one side to the other. She ran her fingers over his skin. The wrinkles smoothed beneath her touch, and she managed a small smile. Nothing about her life seemed easy, and the speed bumps in her immediate path wouldn't go away with the sweep of her hand.

"I'm so tired." She leaned against his shoulder.

He scooted her over and kicked his feet up on the couch. "Here, snuggle down next to me. You can tell me about this man in your dreams."

She placed her head on his chest, wrapped her arm over his stomach, and sighed. "I don't understand it. He's so real, but he looks just like you. I think I'm mixing up my fantasies of having two men to having you." She tilted her head up and frowned. "Do you think it's a sign that you are all that I need?"

"Maybe." He grinned. "I can keep you busy on your back."

She snuggled against him. "I like that idea."

"Me too." He caressed her side down to her hip. "Let's not think about anything. We'll enjoy each other's company and play lazy all day."

"Sounds good—"

A pounding on the door brought Chantel out of Frank's arms. She stood beside the couch. She caught her bottom lip between her teeth. With everything going on, she couldn't remember if any of her clients scheduled appointments for today.

"Go ahead and answer the door. I'll go out the back door and visit with Dawg." He stood up and brushed a kiss across her lips. "Here." He rubbed his thumbs under her eyes to swipe at the mascara that no doubt shadowed her eyes. He pinched her cheeks, grinned, and gave her a quick kiss before walking toward the back door.

She crept toward the front door, stalling to run her hands through her hair, and inhaled a few cleansing breaths to boost her mood. She wasn't up to company and hoped whoever stood on the other side left without coming in the house.

She swung the door open and plastered a fake smile on her face. "Hello, Grace. What brings you out to my house today?" She stepped back to allow her to enter.

"That stuff you gave me stopped working. I need something else, fast!" Grace marched into the living room and stopped. "What is going on here? What kind of business do you run if you can't even keep a clean and tidy house?"

The woman's nose wiggled and she puckered her lips. Chantel stepped around her and picked up a few of the leaves still littering the floor. It gave her the opportunity to hide the smirk on her face from the bitchy old lady. She wasn't in any kind of mood to take her criticisms today. Not without Eve here to back her up.

"Would you like another bottle of tangarium, Grace?" She threw the leaves in the bin.

"No, I want something that will work for longer than a week this time. Maybe even more powerful. This last bottle took too long to work." Grace shook her head. "My husband's attention is leaving me weak and shaky. I don't know how much longer I can last under those conditions. It's plain disgusting what he puts me through once a week."

Chantel couldn't imagine a marriage where having sex turned into a burden and a chore. She refused to give the woman anything to make her husband impotent, and instead appeased her with a relaxer to supply her husband in the hopes he'd cope with an old prude for a wife.

She picked up two bottles of tangarium and a vial of lavender extract. "Double the dose in his tea, and sprinkle one drop of lavender on his pillowcase a few hours after dinner."

"This won't kill him, will it?" Grace slid her glasses down her nose and tilted her head back to examine the vial. "I only want him to go to sleep faster." She shook the bottle. "There better not be any poisonous plants in here or some spell that does harm."

Chantel shook her head and bit her lip to keep the rude comment from escaping her mouth. "No, it will only relax him." *And handle your nagging.*

The older woman paid her the total due and left the house. Chantel stood in the living room, gazing over the many shelves of stock she believed held medicinal

purposes and magical cures for everything under the sun. Would everything she held dear abandon her and leave her all alone? Science, Eve, Frank—they all left.

Her clients came week after week to purchase solutions to their wishes. Not once did someone say thank you or claim they no longer needed her services. They asked for more and more help, never satisfied with what life gave them. She lived invisible to their angry words, their whispers, and suspicious stares.

How much did she ever ask for herself? She only wanted someone to love and remain in her life. She didn't ask for much, did she?

Her decision about Frank finalized, she knew what she'd do next. One person in her life never let her down, and she'd follow Eve's advice. She walked to the back door with the weight of loss clinging to her back. If Eve managed to set her free, she'd contrive to do the same with Frank.

Chapter Eight

"I heard the car leave. Is it okay if I bring Dawg inside again?" Frank stepped into the kitchen.

Chantel shook off the misgivings and hid her depressed mood. Turning, she smiled at Frank, who held her dog in his arms. The pup's tail was wagging something fierce.

"Of course! Let him down. He's fine in here." She knelt down. "Come here, baby."

Instead of rushing over to her, the dog stayed beside Frank and heeled. She cocked her head. How did he get such a rambunctious dog to settle down so easily?

"I think he likes you better than me. You have a way with animals." She laughed. "Although, the day you showed up and Dawg threatened to kill you, I witnessed that raw fear-for-your-life terror in your eyes."

"He startled me. Besides, maybe I put on an act to have a certain beautiful woman save me from the vicious animal." He winked. "It worked too, didn't it?" He leaned down and patted his new loyal friend. "Although, I'd give him a real name if you plan on keeping him."

She laughed. "I think Dawg is a great name, and much better than calling him *dog*. That's so impersonal." She giggled. "I wanted to hold off on giving him a name in case his owners showed up, but I think it's safe to say I'm keeping him and his funny name."

The dog turned his head from Frank and Chantel. He ran to the door and barked. Chantel glanced out the window. "There's no one there, Dawg."

The muscles in her shoulders loosened somewhat, and she took comfort in discussing an everyday problem. This is the way things should be between them.

“Let's walk into town. I'll even buy you an ice-cream cone at the little place on Main Street if you hold my hand and sneak some kisses my way. We can even take the attack dog with us.” He hooked his thumbs in his front pockets and grinned.

She frowned. “But shouldn't we—”

“Nope, we should go out and enjoy the day. I'd love nothing more than to hold your hand and talk to you the rest of the afternoon. Let's not waste the perfect weather; let's get outside and have some fun.” He glanced down at the pooch. “Do you have a leash or a piece of rope?”

Chantel pointed to the closet and excused herself to freshen up. She hurried to the bathroom and shut the door. She turned on the faucet and splashed cold water over her face. Her eyes, dry from all her crying earlier, stung, and she kept them closed.

Her hand moved blindly in a search for the towel she kept on the counter. She patted her face dry and opened her eyes. She curled the corner of her lip at her reflection. The bags under her eyes, plus hair she never finished brushing after it dried this morning, shamed her into applying a little dab of mascara and spritzing her hair down. Frank had seen her at her worse, but still, she wanted him to enjoy taking her out of the house.

Not understanding Frank's desire to escape from what problems lay ahead of them, but reluctant to lose this one last chance with him to experience something normal, she hurried and got ready. Her heart sped up at the thought of spending time together acting normal and doing something completely mundane. Three days of chaos, trauma, sex, and she never dreamed of becoming so close to another human being. *Well...except Eve.*

On any other day, she'd call herself crazy and impulsive, but there was that connection between Frank and her that went beyond an attraction. Maybe mourning for someone speeded the relationship forward, or the old saying that

everyone had a soul mate somewhere in the world rang true. She didn't want to believe their whole relationship balanced on the evilness that overtook their lives and bodies.

The connection he claimed with another person did not repulse her, but the idea he'd pick the other person over her scared her to death. She held out hope the person turned out to be a parent or old girlfriend, and when he went back, he'd sort through his life and realize what they shared together was the real deal. Eve said they'd work it out, and she held that truth close to her heart.

She opened the door, glanced one more time back at the mirror, and smiled. Sure, they should sit and discuss more pressing matters than going out for a walk, but if Frank wanted to have fun for a few hours, she'd gladly join him. Ultimately, the decision on what happened tonight must come from her, and she already knew what she needed to do. This date into town would work perfectly with the plan she worked out in her head.

She possessed the solution to all their problems, and if Eve's guidance rang true, she'd set them all free. For now, she'd shove everything out of her mind and not worry about it. She'd allow nothing to take this day with Frank away from her, especially the truth, that damn evilness that overshadowed everything.

Frank and Dawg stood outside on the lawn waiting for her to come out. She stepped off the porch and hurried over. Her hand slipped into his, the size and roughness of his fingers a reminder that he remained strong despite his worries. He'd survive.

At this moment, everything seemed too perfect.

Dawg ran forward, fell, and ran back to Frank's side only to try again to outrun the length of the leash. Chantel laughed at the dog. Frank's arm came around her shoulders, and she slipped her arm behind him, sliding her hand in his back pocket. She'd hold this memory inside her forever.

She entertained him with stories of the pranks Eve had pulled on the townsfolk they passed on their walk down Main Street. People glanced over at their

loud cackles of laughter, and she'd laugh harder the more stares they brought to them.

Chantel stepped up to the outside order window at Two Scoops and More and ordered a soft-serve caramel-dipped ice-cream cone. Frank pulled a ten-dollar bill out of his pocket and handed it to the teenage girl working the counter. She handed him back his change and a wad of napkins.

Chantel led him down the sidewalk. "Where did you get money?"

"Who knows? I found twenty bucks in my pocket. Maybe whoever's cruel joke this is decided to pay me for my troubles." He snorted, shrugged, and pointed down the road. "Hey, how about walking down to the park? We can sit by the creek."

They walked in comfortable silence, Chantel too busy slurping up the ice cream running over the sides of the cone to talk. Frank led her to a shady spot next to a group of birch trees near the creek that ran through the length of the park. She sat down in the grass and smiled over at ducks that scurried into the water to get away from the humans who invaded their space.

"I think we scared them." Frank sat down beside her and gazed off at the water flowing downstream.

"I think they'll be fine. I know everyone comes to the park to feed them bread crumbs, so they are used to having people around." She bit into the cone and caught a glimpse of Dawg sitting up and begging. "Oh, look at him!" She elbowed Frank and held the bottom of her sugar cone in front of the dog. "You think you want this, do you?"

She set the rest of the cone on the grass, and the dog eagerly stuck its tongue inside and licked at the ice cream that remained.

"I didn't realize that I was so hungry. Thank you for buying me the ice cream." She stuffed the used napkins in her pocket. "Dawg thanks you too. Look at him go. He probably believes he hit the jackpot with that treat."

“Chantel, tell me what you want in your life. What you want to happen in your future.” Frank pulled her over, and she laid her head on his legs and gazed up at his face.

“I want what everyone wants,” she said.

“What's that?” He wound a tendril of her hair around his finger.

She closed her eyes. “I want someone in my life that will reach out and hold my hand for no reason other than they want to touch me. I want to sit across the dinner table and smile at the person I love, because it's me and him against the world.”

“Go on...” He brushed back the top of her hair off her forehead.

“Eventually I want to have a couple of children.” She opened one eye and peeked at him. “If they end up having a ghost for a best friend, I'll invite their new friend to dinner and cast an evil eye upon the children who turn their back on him or her.”

Frank tilted his head back and laughed. “I can just imagine you doing that exact thing!”

Dawg jumped up in the middle of Chantel's tummy, and she laughed. She gave the dog a good rub. A day spent being lazy along a babbling stream with the person she loved was what she wanted in her life.

The frisky pup scampered off and barked at a bird that flew off a branch high up in the tree. She sat up and smoothed the back of her hair.

“What about you, Frank?” she whispered.

He turned away and gazed out at the water. “I don't know. I can tell you what I want at this moment, but the future...” He shrugged his shoulders. “Actually, I do know. I'll never leave you. That I can promise you.”

“Don't—” She shook her head.

“I want to bury myself inside you and stay that way for a lifetime.” His Adam's apple moved up and down. “I know it's hard to believe that what we have together

isn't the work of something else forcing us at one another, but my heart, it tells me differently. It's important that you know that, even during the times I'm fucking your brains out."

She nodded and turned back to observe the dog pulling against the leash Frank had looped around his foot. Opening up her feelings had placed him in an awkward position, and she wrinkled her nose. She'd definitely hurt Frank further today, and she guessed he'd direct his anger toward her choices. She wasn't leaving the decision up to him.

She understood what Eve told her earlier. After years of interpreting Eve's clues to the Didja game, she only needed to follow through with her instructions. Coming to the park gave her the perfect place to end this relationship. Away from her house where she became stronger with Frank, she'd make the intricate decision to walk away from him.

Frank needed to understand that what she planned to lay at his feet came from the truth of the matter. They couldn't go on experiencing these emotions day after day. It'd wear them both down to nothing.

If he doubted her words or followed her back home, they'd both lose the chance to find each other in the future. That's what kept her strong and gave her strength to follow this plan. She hoped Eve's predictions came true. It was her only hope.

She set her jaw and prayed for guidance. She only got one chance at this, and she must not fail. *But it kills me to end this now.*

"Go ahead, Frank. Try and tell me what you want. It's only fair. I told you my dreams." She smiled over at him. *Make him believe.*

His brows shot up. "I told you, I don't know. That's the honest truth. You want to hear what I want this second? I'll tell you. I want you. I want to stay here all night and hold you under the stars. We can talk about embarrassing past experiences and future plans, for all I care. If I'm lucky, I'd walk you home under those same twinkling stars, and you'd invite me inside."

"I'd make love to you all night long, and wake up with my arms wrapped around you." He sucked in a lungful of air and hung his head. "I want what I know is a normal relationship, a normal life."

Chantel stared at him to dry the tears that threatened to come out and fall down her cheeks. She inhaled and raised her chin. *Push him further! He has to understand.*

"We both know that isn't going to happen." She waited for the truth to sink in.

He nodded, a short, sudden movement, but she saw it.

"Do you remember what Eve said I needed to do?" she asked.

He cleared his throat. "Something about how you needed to let me go." He turned to her. "What are you telling me? I'm not leaving, no matter what that thing, that ghost said. She doesn't know what kind of connection we have going. Don't you believe in us, Chantel? I can't live without you."

She shook her head. "You've heard what I want out of life. This"—she fluttered her hand between them—"isn't what I want. I can't take losing someone again, only to have you return and do the same thing again after the sun goes down. I have a business to run and a house payment to make. People depend on me every day." She straightened her back. "I want babies of my own and a husband who will never leave me."

She stood up. "I need a future where I give all my dreams a chance at life." She inhaled a swift breath and let it out slowly. She saved the big guns for last, the one thing that would stop them from ever going further in their relationship. "You have someone on the other side that needs you as much as I do."

He unhooked the leash from his foot and stood beside her. She held out her hand for the leash. Even the dog gazed up at the two of them and realized something major transpired between them all.

"I hope you find your answers." She clenched her teeth together to stop from changing her mind and begging him to let her help. She had to be the strong one. She wouldn't beg him to come back.

“Chantel, it's not worth it. I can live without my past. I'll learn how to go on. I can start over—”

She shook her head. “And every night you'd be yanked out of my life and leave me mourning you. My body doesn't understand that you will come back. I'd never survive another night. It's horrible, and I don't want to go through that again, not after losing Eve today too. Go find your answers, Frank. Go back to the person who calls your soul.”

She stepped toward him, stretched up on her tiptoes, and placed her lips on his. She softened and pulled away from him before she screwed everything up. Kissing him turned into a huge mistake. She needed to run away, or she'd give up the fight, throw her arms around him, and never let him go.

“Good-bye, Frank.” She turned and tugged on Dawg's leash.

With her head held high, she tried to hurry up the slope toward the road, but the dog protested every step. The moment her feet hit the pavement, she bent over and picked up Dawg.

The little traitor didn't stand a chance at stopping her retreat, and she ignored the barking beside her ear from him crying out for his new best friend over her shoulder. *Dammit, stop, Dawg. You're making this a hundred times worse!*

Past the main road leading out of town, she let the tears fall without missing a step. She arrived home in record time, out of breath, and exhausted from all the teardrops she shed over Frank, Eve, and the fact she now faced life alone for the first time since the age of six.

* * *

Frank followed Chantel up to the main road and watched her walk away from him and out of his life. Light-headed and shaky, he wanted to run after her and beg her to stay. At least, plead with her to wait for him to figure out this mess.

Eve's words rang repeatedly in his head. *What the hell did she mean that I am of this world, but I should leave to find my answers?* His chest constricted and left

an ache that about did him in. He rubbed the spot over his heart. Although he only knew Chantel for less than a week, no one had better try to convince him fate didn't play a part in this screwed-up game.

A chance of luck might have dropped those two older ladies in line ahead of him at the grocery store, but Chantel opened her arms and welcomed him into her home without any hesitation. Somewhere in the back of his mind, the thought that trauma could draw two people together tried to wiggle its way past the hurt. He clenched his teeth. Bullshit! What he and Chantel had was real!

Even Dawg's barks of protest fell silent once he lost sight of Chantel. He stumbled back down the slope and sat in the grass. The hours until dark seemed endless, and he hung his head. He'd planned to tell Chantel he'd leave tonight on his own, but he expected to come back to her in the morning.

He'd go through transition alone to spare her the pain. Now he couldn't even do that. If he spared her from going through losing him every night, he'd settle on having the days with the woman he loved.

He needed her during the day. Not for support or to help him understand his abnormalities, but simply because he loved her. He expelled the frustrated breath welling up in his chest, and he lay back on the grass.

White, fluffy clouds floated over the blue backdrop of the sky. His life seemed alien to him, yet Chantel connected him to living. He squeezed his eyes shut. The person who haunted him at night during his transition to the dark abyss pulled at him the same way Chantel did. Without both of them, he'd shrivel up and die. He didn't know how he knew this; he just did.

Yet he couldn't be in both places at once.

Without Chantel by his side, there wasn't a thing left here for him. She knew that all along. He'd go back and find the person who waited for him on the other side and hope like hell it was worth it. No matter what, he'd come back for Chantel, with or without the other person.

The clouds rolled away, people's voices left the park, and the whistle from the train that passed through town every day at seven o'clock on the dot drew him out of his self-pitying thoughts. He stood up and wandered back farther into the trees, where he sat and waited. For the first time, he looked forward to the dark to escape the pain over losing Chantel.

Time crawled, and instead of holding on to a bench, a tree, or a duck, he stood out in the open ready to go. He was the only one who could solve the dilemma he found himself in, and maybe whoever waited for him on the other side of this black hell had the answers he needed to be able to come back for the woman he loved.

Unencumbered, he stood with his eyes shut. His body relaxed. A few minutes later, the temperature dropped, and cool air blew around his body. He opened his eyes. Without the visual of floating off the ground, this was his first clue that whatever took him had come.

Chantel's screams suddenly filled the oppressive air. His body fought to stop the process. He must go back. She needed him. He couldn't cause her more pain than he already had.

Paralyzed, he yelled in frustration, willing his body to move, to fight the hands that pulled him away. Unable to do a damn thing reduced him to a meaningless creature without any control over his own fate.

"Without you, I'm nothing. I'm part of you. You are part of me. We are one."

Frank strained to turn toward the voice. The low, husky whisper so near, yet he stared out into the blackest pit of darkness. He'd heard that voice before, but he didn't recognize whom it belonged to with his mind waging war against what to do.

Chantel needed him. He needed her. Yet this other voice called to his soul.

Not able to decide his fate, he remembered Eve's promise. She'd told them he must go away so that he could come back to Chantel. Inhaling, he put his future into the hands of a ghost and gave up the fight. *I'll be back, Chantel. I love you, baby.*

* * *

Chantel pushed out of the chair, slipped her sneakers on, and hooked the leash to Dawg's collar. After three days, she knew taking him out for a potty break wouldn't stop his incessant whining. She understood his depressed state over losing Frank. She, too, missed him more than she ever imagined.

After crying off and on the first twenty-four hours, she didn't have any more strength to warrant a good, steady whine of her own. She opened the door and squinted against the brightness of the noonday sun. She didn't trust the dog to stay. He'd tried to break away each time they came outside since Frank left them.

"Come on, pup. Let's go outside." She shut the door and led him down the steps into the grass.

His excited little rump twitched left and right, and his nose stuck high in the air, searching for a familiar scent. She sighed. *Me too, little guy. We'll have to stick together, and maybe the pain will go away eventually, for both of our sakes.*

After finding out that she didn't take him where he wanted to go, Dawg set about his business and pulled her back to the front of the house to start this routine again later with the hope of finding Frank next time. A fleeting thought to hop in the car and go the few miles to her parents' house or browse the stores entered her head. Anything to occupy her time.

She didn't have any spare money to blow, and window-shopping didn't hold any appeal. Her parents spent summers away in Hawaii. They wouldn't be open to discussing her current problem if they were at home anyway.

Mom and dad didn't handle what they thought of as her imaginary friend, Eve, so she figured they'd never understand about falling in love with someone who vanished in the night. She didn't have enough strength to deal with them anyway.

Chantel gazed over at the greenhouse. Her stomach rolled. She'd put off watering the plants lately, and it wouldn't surprise her to find she'd lost some blooms by letting them go so long without cutting.

Stepping over the leash, she walked toward the door. She clapped her hand against her thigh for Dawg to follow. She might as well get the job done. She still had to keep a roof over her head despite wanting to crawl back in bed and forget about the world.

The muggy heat inside the building added to her miserable outlook. Unclipping the leash, she let Dawg have free run. Winding her way around the rows, she grabbed the hose off the wheel and turned the faucet on.

The marigolds seemed to laugh at her with their bright yellow blooms and unwavering stems. Tears blurred her vision. None of her skills at knowing how to treat common complaints with her herbs had helped Frank. Swiping her cheek, she aimed the water right at the tallest flower. *It's not fair.*

Under the burst of water, the little flower was powerless to fight. Disgusted and angry, Chantel, shut the hose off and hooked it into the misting system, the idea of nurturing the very things that disappointed her too much to handle.

Dawg growled and yipped at the end of the row. Chantel cocked her head and stepped closer. The dog backed up, sniffing the ground; his hair stood up in a line down his back.

“Eve?” Chantel stepped over the dog. “Is that you?”

The hiss of the mister and the low growl coming from Dawg were the only sounds out of the ordinary. She picked up a hand spade and stomped back down the aisle. *She's not coming back, and neither is Frank.*

Kneeling beside the pots of spearmint, she attacked the soil with vengeance. A sob broke through her clenched jaw, and she stabbed the plant. “No.” She raised her hand and let the sharp blade pierce the dirt. “No.” Dropping the hand tool, she picked the pot up and hurled it across the greenhouse. “No!”

She gasped between sobs, her heart breaking into little pieces that left a hole inside her soul. Screaming in frustration, she sank down on her butt and cried. No one asked her if she wanted a ghost for a friend or to love a man she could never have.

Dawg came over, lay down on the ground, and set his head on her thigh. She reached down and smoothed his ruffled fur over his back.

"I've lost everyone, Dawg." She let the tears fall.

The greenhouse grew darker, and Chantel raised her head. She groaned. Water spilled out of the tops of the pots and trailed toward the center of the aisle. She must have sat there longer than she thought.

Standing up, she shut off the water, picked up the hand spade and put it back in the caddy. She carried the broken pot she'd thrown to the garbage can and picked up Dawg's leash.

"Come on, Dawg, let's take a nap and hurry the hours away. Tomorrow is a new day." She led him into the house, shut the door, and sighed.

The house was too silent with Eve out of her life. She made her way to the bedroom, fell atop the bed and patted the bedspread.

The dog jumped up beside her and whined. She pulled him over and petted his back to get him to lie down and soothe his troubled spirit. His fluffy tail gave a halfhearted wag, and she smiled.

"I'm glad you're here with me, Dawg. Neither of us will be alone in the world if we stick together." She closed her eyes.

Chapter Nine

“Mr. Foster?”

Steve opened his eyes. The cute redheaded nurse from night shift stood over him, and he sat up, instantly alert. He ran his hand over his whiskered jaw. Shit! He'd had another crazy dream.

The same woman who plagued his dream this entire time held Hank's dog, Deoji. Except this time, she walked the dog by herself in a park. He swallowed. Tears marked her cheeks, and her lips didn't smile.

He inhaled and rubbed the back of his neck. The little dog had run away at the accident site. Steve came up empty on all of his searches looking for Deoji. First, he dreamed about their dream girl, and now he was dreaming about that obnoxious little dog of Hank's. *Jesus, I hope nothing is wrong with Chantel.*

“I fell asleep, didn't I?” He stood up, stretched, and gazed over at his brother lying prone in the hospital bed.

She smiled. “You've been asleep for a few hours. I thought it best to let you sleep. You've run yourself ragged lately with all your late nights here at the hospital.”

“Yeah, well...he's my twin brother. He'd do the same for me.” He gazed over at Hank. He remained in the same position, flat on his back, eyes closed.

“We are not sure if this is good news or not, but Hank's blood pressure has increased the last two hours. The doctor wants him monitored closely. Sometimes, this is a sign that the patient is trying to come out of the coma.” She pushed the button on the heart machine and waited for the little slip of paper holding the results to stream out of the front.

Steve stepped up beside the bed and gathered Hank's hand. "Hey, Bro! Time to wake up. You have a lot of time to make up for at the office. You'll be staying late every Friday night for months to make up all the time I've covered your ass with the clients."

He glanced at the nurse, who held her first two fingers against the pulse line on Hank's wrist. "You should check out the babe who's been with you every night."

The nurse clicked her tongue, and Steve winked at her. "You are going to kick your own ass over the missed opportunity there, Bro."

"I think your brother is full of himself, Hank." She moved to the end of the bed and removed the clipboard that hung from the bed frame. "I've got three brothers of my own. I can see right through shameless flirting like a pro."

Steve grinned, but inside he wanted to crawl up beside Hank on the hospital bed and slip deep into the coma with him. Others didn't understand the unusual bond the two shared. They shared their pain, their thoughts, and their lives together.

Even as children, they knew they were different. Unable to attend different classrooms at school, they fought to find ways to stay together, or they'd experience a separation anxiety that perplexed their parents and doctor. The time Hank broke his leg, Steve had limped for six weeks for no known medical reason.

Lost without that connection with his brother, he'd gone through each day since the accident in a fog. He didn't have a clue what went through Hank's mind as he lay there in the bed day after day.

"His pulse is increasing. I'm going to page the doctor and let him know." She stepped over and squeezed Steve's arm. "This is good news. Keep talking to him."

He nodded, unable to say thank you around the lump that formed in his throat. His gaze followed the nurse out of the room. *Please let her be right. Let Hank wake up and be okay.*

* * *

Chantel's hair tickled his stomach, and she grinned up at him. He reached down to run his hand through the glorious mass of curls, but he couldn't touch her. Straining to sit up, he found himself paralyzed, unable to move. *Chantel!*

He lay there staring up into nothing, no light, no shadows, only a barren white slate. His heartbeat pounded in his chest, coursing through his body. Why couldn't he move? Where was he?

"Hank..."

He stopped struggling. Turning his head, he strained to see past the nothingness. *Steve?*

"Wake up, Bro."

Hank frowned. He was awake. Able to lift his head now, he gazed down beside him, but Chantel was gone. His hands still lay useless at his sides.

"He moved. I saw him move."

Hank focused on the voices. Slowly, Steve's face came into view. He moaned, unable to swallow. His throat was so dry. It took all his strength to squeeze the hand that held his.

"Thank God." Steve smiled through tears. "Good to have you back, Bro."

He rolled his head back and forth. "Chan..."

"What?" Steve leaned in closer.

The whiteness came back, but he could still hear his brother. His body fought to go back. He had to tell Steve to find Chantel, but he couldn't open his eyes.

"So tired."

"It's okay, Hank. You came back to me. Rest. I'm not going anywhere."

Hank's breathing came easier. He still held his brother's hand. *"Steve?"*

"Yeah?"

"She's the one. Find her."

* * *

Hank scratched the bristly beard that covered the lower half of his face. "She's got this wild hair that always appears uncombed and windblown." He shook his head. "In a good way, though, like she just rolled out of bed...after a night of—"

"Okay, okay, I got it. But I'm telling you, I know exactly what she looks like. I've seen her too. Hell, I'm obsessed with finding her, so you better get better fast and help me." Steve grinned. "If I knew how to find her and that it wasn't just one of your fantasies that leaked out during your coma, I'd have already staked my claim and convinced her of our ultimate plan. Wouldn't that have been a hell of a surprise for you to wake up to?"

"I'm telling you. She's the one who helped me wake up. I don't know how, but she's real." He swung his legs off the bed and grabbed a pair of jeans out of Steve's hand. "These better not be your pants. I need more room for my manliness."

Steve threw back his head and laughed. "I guess you didn't forget anything during your hiatus, huh?"

He laughed the same way his brother did seconds ago. Identical in every way, even their mother, God rest her soul, couldn't tell them apart until they opened their mouths to speak. She claimed Hank, who was the oldest by one minute, was bossier and more stubborn.

"You never did tell me about Deoji. Is he over at your house?" Hank pulled his sock on and reached for his shoe. "I bet he's going bonkers without me."

"Bro, I don't know how to tell you this, so I'll just come out and tell you. Deoji ran away at the crash site. I hung flyers up all over town, but nobody has called." Steve rubbed the back of his neck. "I don't want to get your hopes up, but I think once we find the woman from our dreams, we'll also find your dog." He scoffed. "Shit! Do you hear how crazy we sound?"

Hank bent down and picked up the other shoe. The room tilted and he stumbled forward. *Deoji, gone?*

"Whoa...sit back. I'll get your shoe." Steve frowned. "The doctor said you are going to have to take it easy until you gain your strength and get cleared at your

post-op appointment. Twenty-seven days in a coma is nothing to mess around with, Bro. Trust me. I feel your nausea, and it's nothing to fool around with."

"Did you check the humane society? How about the veterinarian's office? Did you call them? Maybe someone turned him in." He lay back on the bed and threw his arm across his forehead.

"Yeah, I did." Steve laid his hand on Hank's stomach.

"Fuck! He was the best dog I ever had." He rubbed his hands over his face.

He couldn't believe he lost his favorite little pal, Deoji. The last two years, his dog traveled everywhere with him. Even into the office on the days that he wasn't due in court. *Shit!*

"Hang in there, Bro." Steve stood beside the bed. "We're back together, and I'll help you get through all this. Don't give up hope. I'll need your help to find Chantel, and I have a feeling once we do, we'll find Deoji safe and sound." Steve patted his stomach. "Better?"

"Thanks." He did feel better. His brother's presence always helped to soothe him. Steve must have had a hell of a time without him during this whole coma business. "I can't remember a damn thing since the drive over to Chagway." He cleared his throat. "Who's the asshole that hit me? I'd really enjoy paying him a visit."

"You'd have to go to Glenwood Cemetery. The guy died at the scene with an alcohol level of .23. He'd have gone to jail for quite a long time had he survived the crash. I'd have seen to that. This was his fourth drunk-driving violation in two years. He didn't even have a valid driver's license." Steve wagged his head. "You're damn lucky it wasn't you who ended up at Glenwood...and me."

Hank frowned. "Karma."

"Yep." Steve nodded. "Fuck. It's been hell without you, Bro."

Hank swallowed over the lump in his throat. They hadn't sat and talked about the effect this had on Steve. He didn't need him to tell him, he knew. Even in a

coma, he longed for something. Whoever the woman was who stayed with him during the time that he was away from Steve, she connected with him in a way that went beyond words. *Where the hell is she, and how do I find her now?*

Steve leaned over. "Listen, Bro, we'll figure this out. We need to get you back on your feet, and then I'll help you find our woman."

"She's everything, Steve." Hank stared up into eyes exactly like his. "She's the one we've always dreamed about."

Steve nodded. "I know. I feel it too. I was there with you every step of the way."

"Seriously?" Hank lifted his brows.

"She loved having both of us." Steve grinned. "You were fucking her, and I touched her all over." His breath hissed out of his mouth. "God. She came alive under our touch."

The door opened, and Bonnie strolled in with a huge smile on her face and carrying a clipboard. He glanced back and forth from his brother to the nurse. *Poor woman. Another one in the long line of women who wouldn't do for the Foster men's plans.*

"I traded shifts with Carla." She stepped over to the bed. "I wanted to send my favorite patient off. I bet you're glad to go home. For a while there, you had us all worried."

"I wasn't worried." Steve winked at Hank and rocked back on his heels, his arms folded across his chest.

Bonnie rolled her eyes at Hank. "Don't let him tease you. He planted his butt here every night after work. He talked your ear off and threatened to kick your rear if you didn't wake up and come back to the living. He'd stay until we shoved him out the hospital doors and forced him to go home and go to bed."

"Do you work with another nurse...about your height, wild hair with gold sprinkled in the strands? I believe her name is Chantel." Hank sat back up. "She talks horribly fast, and if you're not careful, you'll miss half the things she says."

“No, I don't know anyone by the name of Chantel.” She handed over the paperwork. “Okay, these are for you to sign. They're the release papers the doctor went over with you earlier. Plus, I have a few papers describing your restrictions and medication the doctor wants you to take for the next two weeks.”

He took the pen and paper and scribbled his name without reading. “You have to know her. She spent a lot of time with me.” He handed the clipboard back. “She smells of wildflowers, and I think she talks to herself, especially when she's frustrated. At least I remember her mumbling.”

The nurse shook her head. “Sorry. Doesn't ring a bell for me. Maybe you dreamed it. You were in a coma for a long time. We're never sure what exactly goes through a patient's head during a deep coma, but many doctors believe that you hear what happens around you and you have dreams. Things can get jumbled up in your head, and it is hard to tell what is real or imagined.”

He blew out a breath. This didn't make any sense. He remembered her, yet no one else did. Hell, he even remembered the way his fingers glided over her skin. He sniffed. *I didn't imagine her or dream her up!*

“Oh good, here's your wheelchair.” She thanked the orderly and pushed it up to the bed. “Hop on, Mr. Foster. You're going for a ride.”

“I can walk.” Hank stood up but reached out for Steve. “Okay, maybe a ride isn't a bad idea.”

“Let's get you home, Bro.” Steve pushed the wheelchair out of the hospital room. “We'll have you recovered and back to your normal stuck-up self in no time.” The hand on his shoulder belied the teasing. It already felt better now that he and Steve were together. *We'll find Chantel.*

Chapter Ten

Hank swung the front door shut and threw his briefcase on the couch, thankful the week had ended and he'd have the weekend to take off and search for Chantel. His first week back to work in over two months wiped him out, and all he wanted to do was concentrate on finding this mysterious woman that invaded his every minute. He was no closer to finding out who she was or where she lived than Steve.

Every time the phone rang, he picked it up and expected to hear her voice on the other end. He spent his lunch hour walking around town and searching faces in the crowds in the hopes he'd catch a glimpse of her smiling face. He asked everyone he met. They all shook their heads and claimed not to know any woman of her description.

Steve hovered over him, worried he lost his mind, and did his best at convincing him he'd help find Chantel too. With everything they shared, Steve must know this woman would love both him and Steve, but for that to happen, one of them needed to find her first.

"Maybe I just need to get away for a day," he murmured and flopped down on the couch. He stretched out his legs and rested his feet on the coffee table. The doctor warned him about the emotional disconnection that he'd feel for a while. A supposed side effect from losing a chunk of your life while lying in a coma.

He didn't believe time would heal him. Only finding Chantel would do that. She held the power to make him whole again. Without her, he knew he'd never be content, even with Steve in his life. She belonged to him. *God, that sounds insane even to me.*

The fishing poles in the corner of the room drew his attention, and a smile came to his lips. He undid the tie knotted at his neck and heaved himself from the couch.

The extra boost of energy he received over the new idea took him to his bedroom, where he got out his tackle box. He'd buy a container of worms on his way to the creek in the morning. A little fishing and he'd figure out the next step in their plan to find Chantel. It always worked in the past that way.

Going fishing with his dad and brother over the years always helped sort out his problems and brings order to his life. From a scuffle on the playground to a fight with his brother—and later, a heavy caseload at work that stressed him out—nothing solved his troubles better than a little fishing with his dad. His world usually put back on its axis.

Although his dad had passed away a couple years ago, he still enjoyed spending time at their favorite fishing spot. To sit on the bank with a pole in his hand, alone with his thoughts, maybe he'd come up with some answers. Chantel belonged to him, them, and he'd find her.

* * *

“Thank you, Mrs. Johanson. Good luck with Timmy, he should be back to his bubbly self soon.” Chantel waved at the scrunched up face of the little boy who cried over his mother's shoulder.

She shut the door and gazed over at Dawg. “You have turned in to the best dog. Did you know that? Let's go hunt you up a treat in the kitchen. You did a brilliant job of distracting that little boy from bringing the roof down with his screams. Poor little guy. Cutting new tooth must not be easy.”

She found a piece of turkey jerky and laid it in front of Dawg. “What are we going to do for the rest of the day, hm?”

The dog barked and ran over to stand by the door, where its leash hung off the hook, the dog treat fast forgotten. She laughed. She didn't need to know doggy

language to understand he wanted to go for another walk. His energy knew no bounds, and by the end of the day, they both fell into bed exhausted.

“Okay, I’ll make you a deal. Give me time to make me a sandwich, and we’ll take some bread to the ducks down by the creek.” She laughed at Dawg, who barked twice and sat down to wait for his promised walk.

Going to the park grew easier each trip they walked into town. The dog no longer tugged at the leash to search for Frank, and the nightmares that followed came less and less frequently for her. She missed Frank terribly, but wherever he ended up, she hoped he’d found happiness and contentment.

For the little time he spent with her, he left such a huge impact on her life. He gave her a taste of what having a true friend of this world was like for a normal person, and showed her what she’d missed for so many years. She’d never change the years she’d spent alone with Eve, but she vowed to become more involved in the community from now on.

She already signed up and attended two meetings with the garden club in Duluth. The first meeting, she received stares, whispers, and not one person wanted to talk with her in front of the other members. She believed they all speculated and worried if she’d give away the majority of the members’ secrets.

At least half of them came to her house on a regular basis for an ointment or to receive help for a symptom, real or imagined, she only guessed. During the second meeting, a couple of them offered a hello and a friendly smile. She held out hope that eventually they’d all accept her and she’d make some lasting friendships.

“Okay, Dawg, let’s go for our walk.” She snapped the leash on his collar and walked him out the door.

Less than a mile walk, she set a steady pace down the gravel road to Eaton Street, where they crossed the road and followed the bicycle path to the park entrance. Usually, the waterfowl congregated at the main entrance, but today it appeared a birthday party filled the gazebo, and kids ran amok near the bank of the creek. She smiled. The children yelled and chased each other in pure delight.

She tugged at the leash. "Let's walk along the creek and find the ducks."

Dawg scrambled ahead of her, tugging on the leash and barking. His little head turned left and right, as if telling her he agreed with the plan. She smiled. He probably wanted to check if the children followed him to play. For a stray dog, he never met someone he wasn't willing to play with. She lost her smile. That wasn't true.

He'd had a hard time getting used to Eve for some reason. Maybe he sensed that she came from another world, or with his doggy vision he, too, visibly witnessed her fade in and out of the house and freaked out about it. She inhaled a deep breath of clean country air. It didn't matter now. Eve definitely wasn't coming back.

Dawg ran around her and the leash tied her legs together. "How am I suppose to walk through the park, you silly dog?" She twirled in place and sped up to beat the dog's attempt at keeping her tangled up. "You are crazy!"

The quacks drew her head up, and Dawg froze from his excited frenzy. She peered down the creek. "They must be around the bend. Let's get the bread out, Dawg, and see if we can lure them up into the grass. You can't bark at them this time though, or they'll go away."

She patted his head, and he scooted away to pull on the leash. She opened the sack and removed a few pieces of bread. She broke the bread up into bite-size pieces and walked near the water. Even with the dog beside her, the ducks usually came within throwing distance to eat the treats she brought.

Dawg pulled at the leash. She juggled the bread and fistful of treats. The leash slipped off her wrist, and Dawg ran on ahead. She gasped. He always played nice with the ducks, but he was a dog, and without the leash, who knew what might happen?

"Dawg! Stop!" She jogged along the bank, careful to plant her footing on the non-muddy areas.

Out of sight, she didn't know how far Dawg ran off. She caught her lower lip between her teeth and tried to hurry the best she could down the wet slope to the creek. *I hope that he stayed near the water's edge and didn't run off.*

She pushed back the huckleberry bush, stepped over the fallen branch, and paused to locate where the sudden onslaught of barking came from. It sounded so close.

Blackberry thorns pierced her shirt, and she stopped to pry the sharp points out of the material without scratching her arm. Free of the bush, she tripped up an embankment and stopped to search the area.

Relief came fast and hard at the sight of runaway Dawg captured by a gentleman farther down the creek. She shook her head. That dog needed to mind his manners.

She worked her way down the creek and the dog's sharp *yip yip yip* stopped her in her tracks. The few times she heard Dawg bark that sharply were when Frank came around. She squinted her eyes at the man's back, and he picked that precise moment to turn around and show his face.

She gasped and covered her mouth. Her dog jumped and wiggled in the arms of a man she never expected to set eyes on again. *Frank!*

Unable to move, she used Dawg's scene of distraction to take in every inch of him. His short hair trimmed neatly around his ears and his face clean of any whiskers, he appeared healthy, happy, and different. His smile covered his whole face, and she blinked back the tears to realize he laughed and cried over his happiness at Dawg's discovery.

She'd missed him more than she admitted during the last couple of months. Her shoulders shook, and she struggled to inhale a deep enough breath to steady herself. *He's alive and he's here!*

She thought he'd never come back. To know he lived and breathed here in her world set her heart to pounding. Her sobs ended, but the tears still streamed unhindered down her cheeks at witnessing the pure joy on his face from seeing

Dawg. The view of the two of them excited over meeting up with each other again gave her hope. He must remember their time together, and came back for her.

Eve had been right. She wrapped her arms around her waist. Hope for the rest of the premonition surged forward. She wanted to run and throw herself into his arms. It'd worked. He'd come back.

She covered her mouth. No longer would he disappear. He'd finished his business and never forgot about the love they had. *Oh God, Frank. I've missed you so much.*

Dawg cocked his head in her direction and stopped barking. He jumped off Frank's lap, ran halfway back to her, and yipped, as if to tell her "Look! Look who I found!" She sniffed and wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand.

She raised her head and met Frank's gaze. His head tilted. He lowered his brows and frowned. She sucked in a breath. *Oh God, he has bad news. He did have someone else waiting for him.*

Frank stepped forward and stopped. She shook her head. *No. Don't tell me. I don't want to know.*

"Dawg, come here, boy. Come on, let's go!" She knelt down and patted the side of her leg. She wanted to run away and escape the knowledge that her plan didn't work. The realization that Eve's predictions didn't come true. The sorrow of knowing he'd never belong to her again. She'd never survive losing him again.

The stubborn dog glanced back and forth between Frank and her and came no closer. She bit down on her lower lip. She needed to get out of here so Frank didn't question her senility. He probably didn't even remember what they shared together and thought her some strange woman having a nervous breakdown over him catching her dog.

Please, boy, come on, do this one thing for me! I gave you a loving home. I let you sleep in bed with me. Please, Dawg, come back to me.

Frank stood up and moved toward her. Chantel stood up and wrapped her arms around her middle. He easily scooped up the animal and carried him closer.

She feared finding out that he didn't remember her, and if he did, what they shared came from her desire for him only.

She stepped farther behind the bush. She scrubbed at her face with the material of her shirtsleeve and blinked to dispel the tears. She inhaled a big breath, stepped back into the open, and smiled.

"God, Steve was right. You do have my dog." He stood four feet away from her with Dawg caught in a grip that told her he wasn't giving her dog back.

His dog?

Her smile fell. The utter confusion written on his face saddened her, and she ducked her head. *Why does it have to come to this?*

He stepped closer and lifted her chin with his hand. "Chantel?"

"Oh, thank God! You do remember me!" She laughed and a sob escaped.

"Where have you been? I asked everyone I ran into if they knew you, but no one back home knew a woman named Chantel." He set the dog down at his feet and reached out to hold one of her hands. "Where have you been, and why do you have Deoji?"

She pulled her hand back. "Your dog?"

How could she have been so stupid? She should have known! Dawg tried to tell her so many times that he belonged to Frank. She just hadn't understood.

"Yeah, did you find him after the accident? Steve's been searching for him for months. Damn! I'm so glad to have him back." Frank flung his arm in the air. "Ask me for anything. It's yours. Do you want a reward...or a new car? Having Deoji back means everything to me." He threw back his head and laughed. "Damn, Steve is not going to believe this."

She shook her head. *What is he talking about?*

"How do I know you? The image of you has stuck in my head for months, and I know you took care of me." He reached out to her, but she stepped back.

She scrambled up the bank and into the grass. With her back to him, she ran her hands through her hair. *Steve? It's worse than she imagined. He didn't have a wife and kids waiting for him. He's gay!*

"You are Chantel, right?" He followed her up the bank. "I'm sorry; my memory is fuzzy. Can you tell me how it is we met? The nurses at the hospital don't remember you."

She steeled her shoulders and turned. "You don't remember anything from a few months ago?"

"No. I was in a car accident. I lay in a coma for almost a month. Everyone believed I'd die." He ran his hand through his hair. "You should know this, because you helped me recover."

She shook her head. "No. I didn't know any of that, Frank."

"Frank?" He ran his hand over his jaw. "My name's Hank."

The corner of her mouth lifted, and she clenched her hands to hold herself together. She stepped back. "I'm glad that you are all better, Hank." She glanced over her shoulder and turned back to him. "I'm happy for you. I really am."

She stepped farther away and scooped up Dawg. In a repeat performance, she clung to her pet, trekked up the slope, and prepared to never run into Fr...Hank, again.

"Wait!" Hank marched up to the road. "You can't take my dog."

"But—"

"Thank you for taking care of him, and if you'll give me your address, I'll send you a reward and payment for keeping him for so long." He lifted Dawg from her arms. "You don't know how much I've missed him. We thought he'd run away and gave up hope at getting him back."

"He's really your dog?" Her arms fell to her sides. *Please don't take him. I can't lose everybody I've ever loved.*

He nodded. "Hell yeah. He was with me at the time of the accident. Steve figured he got scared with all the sirens and commotion at the scene and ran off. I was hit by a drunk driver halfway between Duluth and Chagway, out on Highway 24. He must have run a long way to come back to this town. How long have you kept him?"

She swallowed. "A little over two months."

Her gaze stayed on Dawg, and he whined. Standing on the proverbial ledge, Frank or Hank, whatever he called himself now, might as well give her a big push and send her careening to her death. The pup was the last safety cord keeping her sane this whole time.

"Thank you for keeping him safe. He looks real happy and fed." He hefted the dog under one arm and removed his wallet from his back pocket. "Here's my business card. Please call my secretary with your address. I'd love to do something for you for all you've done for me."

She raised her hand and stepped farther away. "No, it's okay. I enjoyed having him with me." *I'm going to cry.*

He hurried forward and thrust the small rectangle card in her hand. "Please! It's the least I can do. I don't know why, but I sense you've done more for me than take care of Deoji. I even think—"

"Our minds work in mysterious ways." She walked backward, not wanting to get into the details. "I really must go. Good-bye."

"Wait! There's more..."

She turned and hurried down the road, a compressing band around her chest squeezing the life out of her. She stepped on feet that weighed too much to lift, promising herself she'd never walk this strip of pavement again, nor give her heart to another. With no understanding of how she'd heal, she headed home to hide from the pain that seemed to reach out and punch her every time she turned around. *You were wrong, Eve. So very wrong.*

* * *

“Holy fuck! You found Deoji.” Steve hurried to strip off his coat and close the front door. “You found her. What did she say? When do I get to meet her?”

Deoji lay by the door. His head lay on his crossed paws, and his eyes gazed up in the most pathetic, sad expression a dog had ever produced. Steve plunked his feet on the coffee table, clasped his hands behind his head, and stretched out on the opposite end of the couch from his brother.

“Well, spit it out. I want to hear everything.” Steve barked out a laugh. “I’ve had a hell of a day in court. Give me some good news. Is she coming over? Are we meeting her somewhere?”

“You were right. Chantel had Deoji the whole time.”

Steve nodded. “I figured. That means the dreams are true. I saw Deoji with her.” He grinned. “This is perfect! So, what happened?”

“She ran off.” Hank inhaled deeply. “I wasn’t expecting her to show up in Duluth. I went to our old fishing spot to clear my head, and suddenly, there she was standing in front of me.” He flinched. “I was so happy at finding her and seeing the dog, I fucked up everything.

“I’ll talk to her. She’ll understand.” Steve sighed. “We’ll both make her understand.”

“No, I’ll find her again. I’ll make this right. At least we know what town she lives in.” Hank snorted. “I gave her a business card, but she didn’t even want to take that.”

Steve let his head fall to the back of the couch. “Don’t worry. We’ll straighten this out. We’re a lot closer than we were yesterday, huh?”

“Yeah.” He rubbed the whiskers along his jaw. “I think I broke her heart.”

“Well, you can’t expect her to take care of a dog for months and not get attached to the little demon.” Steve stood up and threw the pillow on the couch.

He gazed at Deoji and frowned. Maybe the sadness he witnessed on Chantel's face came from losing Deoji, not whether he hurt her in the past.

Yet she called him Frank, not Hank. Why did a sense of intimacy wash over him? Hell, even at night, he dreamed of having sex with her, and he knew it was the best damn sex he'd ever had. Steve shared the same experience yet believed he never met the woman in real life.

Steve's advice hit right on the money. He needed to meet with her again and set this to rest. Maybe if he brought Deoji with him, she'd willingly talk with him.

Together, he bet they'd figure out the missing pieces and he'd understand exactly how they were connected. All three of them connected.

* * *

Chantel stood back at the entrance of her greenhouse and gazed at the group of people from the garden club scouring her stock with curiosity. She delighted in hearing everyone's praise and envy at the collection of such a wonderful assortments of plants. Although, most of the plants within the greenhouse died a slow death after their productive season and she grew new ones year after year from the seeds she collected, she took pride in all that she grew.

Even Katie Perilla, who found fault in everything, held up an oversize stalk of dried heather, closed her eyes and inhaled the ambrosial aroma. Slowly over the last couple of weeks, every one of them had accepted her for the master gardener that she was, and pulled her into their social network without questioning her motives.

"Chantel, your basil is lovely. How do you grow it to become so compact and full?" Clyde, the reigning president of the club, skimmed his hand over the bristled leaves.

"I prune it within an inch of its life." She smiled. "That species can take a lot of abuse, and the more you clip, the fuller it grows. I've been very happy with what it produces."

Clyde wandered off to show the others, and she stepped over to rearrange the catnip pots. The most incessant barking from outside floated into the greenhouse, and she dropped one of the plants. *Could it be?*

“Oh dear! Let me get that for you.” Clyde hurried over and picked up the spilled pot.

“Excuse me, please. I’m going to step outside for a moment. Feel free to make yourselves at home and look everything over.” She stepped toward the door.

Once outside, she raised her hand to her face to block the sun and scanned the area. A squeal escaped, and her hands covered her cheeks. Hank set a hyped-up Deoji on the ground, and she ran to meet him in the middle of the yard.

“I’ve missed you, buddy.” She sat on the grass and attempted to hold his squirming body to her chest. “Oh, you have no idea how good it is to see you.”

He yipped his answer in her ear, and she laughed. All of her attention wrapped up in her little friend, she didn’t realize that Hank had stepped up in front of her until his shadow fell over her and blocked out the sun.

She stood up holding Deoji. Her smile trembled, and she caught her lower lip between her teeth. He looked so good, so healthy, and...gay. That was something even Eve’s radar didn’t pick up.

His skin appeared tanner, and the corners of his eyes crinkled with his smile. She returned the grin he offered and thought he never appeared more handsome. Stroking the dog’s fur, she wished instead to run her hands over Hank’s body to soak up everything she’d missed.

“I hope you don’t mind me stopping by your house. The cashier at the store in town gave me directions.” He shrugged his shoulder. “You never called my office or left a forwarding address, so I played detective.”

She shook her head, afraid to speak. All the questions she kept inside of her since he left bubbled up inside her and wanted to come out. For this one time, she wished she didn’t talk so much. She wanted to hear him out and not scare him away with all the questions she was dying to ask him.

This time, he came back for a reason. She was ecstatic that he returned, but not shocked. She always held out hope and believed in Eve's knowledge of what happens outside of this world even on the days that she surrendered to the negativity, which often crept over her moods. Eve never lied.

"Anyway...I thought I'd bring Deoji by to visit you. He's missed you." Hank shoved his hands deep in his front pockets of his jeans. "Steve even suggested I needed to come back and clear things up."

"I've missed the little mutt, too. A lot!" She kissed the top of the dog's head to cover the way her chest constricted at the mention of his lover. "You named him Deoji?"

"Yeah, like the letters in dog, but spelled out." He chuckled. "Sounded good at the time, and sort of stuck after a while."

She laughed and grinned. "I called him Dawg. Spelled d-a-w-g."

Both of them laughed at the same time. Chantel glanced back at the greenhouse remembering how many people might walk out at any moment. She didn't want any interruptions, and didn't know how long Hank planned to stick around.

"I was thinking...would you mind going out with me to eat? Even better, we might grab something and eat out at the park. I don't want to leave the dog in the car too long by himself, and he'd be able to run and wear himself out at the park. I'd really appreciate it if you'd come with me...just to talk." A whisper of a smile played at the corners of his mouth.

She nodded. *Yes! He actually eats now.*

"I'd love that." She wrinkled her nose. "But I've kind of got company right now."

She glanced behind her at the greenhouse. "I have the local garden group touring my greenhouse, but if you want to wait, we could always have dinner here instead."

“Yeah, sure, no problem. I'd enjoy that.” He held his arms out. “I'd better take the dog and let you get back to your guests. I'll come back later—”

“No! Don't go. You can stay here. The house is open. Just make yourself at home. The tour should wrap up shortly.” She handed the dog over to him. “Please stay, please. I've missed you.”

“We do know each other, don't we?” He tilted his head. “We've been in a relationship?”

She nodded and gave him a teasing grin that hinted at what kind of relationship they shared. Turning around, she walked back to the greenhouse with a smile on her face and an extra sway to her hips, knowing he watched her retreat. The Frank she knew loved her, and maybe somewhere in the new Hank's body lay a heart that would welcome her in, despite his sexual preference. She'd settle for having him for a friend, rather than lose him for good.

Chapter Eleven

Hank stepped through the threshold, set the dog down, and stared openmouthed at the living room. He entered some kind of laboratory hidden among the jungle. *Jesus, what kind of place is this?*

He dodged the bundles of plants hanging from the ceiling, and worked his way over to the shelves lining the walls. He lifted his brow at the names on the bottles. He never pictured Chantel for a health-nut guru. Hell, he looked forward to a nice juicy burger for dinner; now he'd probably end up with a dandelion salad with fresh thistle on the side. She was obviously much more than a simple gardener or florist.

He shuddered and stepped back to survey the room. The dog lay up on the couch asleep, and he shook his head in disgust. Traitor! He'd whined and begged the whole time back home, and here, he climbed up on the sofa and crashed without a care in the world.

He sat down on the couch. Automatically, he reached out to stroke Deoji's back. Something about this house brought out an uncomfortable desire to check behind him and find out if anyone stared at him. To make sure, he rubbernecked down the hall and behind him. *Jesus, get a grip!*

Unable to sit still and wait for Chantel, he got up from the couch and wandered the room again. She certainly possessed an eclectic taste to life, from her mismatched furniture to the odd book about demons, ghosts and vampires on the end table beside the chair. He didn't know what to make of the woman who he obsessed over every day and night.

He frowned and picked up the book. Yellow sticky notes stuck out between the pages, and he thumbed to the first one. She even highlighted passages in the book.

Ghosts are rarely seen with the naked eye. Those that do bear witnesses are said to have a connection with the spirit world and should never use their power to guide the wandering spirits off their natural path.

He smirked. He shut the book, tossed it back down on the table, and some small, shiny object fell to the floor. Bending over to search for what fell, he found a necklace. From the appearance of the piece of jewelry and the shape it was in, he'd guess it belonged to a child.

The room bore no resemblance to having a child living here, and he moved to set the necklace back in its place beside the chair. A convulsion of tremors moved from the tips of his fingers up his arm the second the chain left his hand. He shook his hand, but the trembles didn't go away.

He sat down in the chair and picked up the necklace again. The symptoms vanished, and his hand returned to normal. *Huh?*

Raising the necklace in front of his face, he studied the metal object hanging off the chain. A flower whose name escaped him now dangled in front of his eyes. He recognized it, though. Little girls picked off the petals one by one to find out if their crushes loved them or not. *A daisy! That's it. Why do I remember this necklace?*

A vision of Chantel banging her fist against an invisible barrier in an attempt to reach him flashed through his head. *Where the hell am I?* As if the memory listened, it swung around for a view. *Am I sitting on a...a duck?*

He tossed the necklace on the end table and shook his head. Dizzy and disoriented, he stood up and scowled back at the necklace. Why didn't he remember that? Hell, he'd lain in a coma. It wasn't possible to know Chantel during that time and he'd been positive he didn't know her prior to the accident. It wasn't Steve; he could tell the difference between him and his twin even in a picture.

Yet he remembered the smell of her hair, how she talked incessantly, and the way her tongue explored the edges of his lips. The yearning to embrace her and never let her go assaulted him, and he bent over and held on to his knees to keep from falling.

* * *

With one last wave to Clyde, Chantel turned and jogged toward the house in her rush to visit with Hank. The group had taken an extremely long time to end the tour, and her belly danced with desire to push each one of them out the door and into their cars. She only hoped he hadn't grown bored with waiting and left.

Relief at finding Hank still there turned to terror. Doubled over in pain, his face riddled in anguish, something terrible must have happened to him.

"Hank!" She rushed to his side.

He gasped for breath, and she helped him straighten up. His forehead was etched in lines of confusion and pain. She slid her arm around his waist, and he pulled her tight to his chest in a giant bear hug. He drew in a long, deep lungful of air, and she sensed his whole body relaxed.

"Don't let go." He rubbed his cheek over the top of her head. "Let me hold you. You can't leave me."

She tightened her hold. "I won't. I'm here for however long you want me."

"Holy shit." He inhaled and shudders ran down his back. "Son of a bitch."

She moved her hands up to his back and drew circles in a soothing manner, afraid whatever happened during the time she left him alone in the house until now rocked him off his core and he might go into shock. Having been in that position herself, she knew the best medicine was to have a friend or someone to hold her.

"Damn!" His hands came up under the nape of her hair and rubbed the skin on her neck. "Motherfu—"

"I know. This always happens to us." Her hands stroked his back. She wasn't the only one feeling that sexual pull.

His hips pitched forward, and his hard cock dug into her pelvis. "I'm harder than hell for you. Holy shit!"

She pulled out of his arms, removed her top, and her jeans and panties fell together on the floor. "I can cure this. Take your clothes off."

He tore his shirt off and struggled with his belt. Her hands itched to get hold of him. His hands shook, and he fumbled in his attempt to undo his pants. She shoved his hands out of the way and undid his zipper.

“Hurry.” She pressed her body up against him.

He grabbed her ass and ground his dick into her mound. “Fuck...need...you.” He walked her back a few steps and laid her down on the couch. “Tell me yes,” he said.

“Yes, do it!” She opened her legs.

He plunged into her pussy. His back arched, and he gave a groan that drove her crazy.

“So sweet.” He thrust back and forth. His hand found her clit.

“Oh God, yes!” Her pussy came alive and held him tighter.

Her arousal grew swift and fast. Burning to come, she pushed her hips off the couch and met him stroke for stroke.

“You fill me...” She screamed. “Up.”

“Take it,” he grunted. His cock slammed into her pussy. “All of it.”

“Yes!”

Her fingers dug into his chest, leaving half-moon imprints from her fingernails. His nipples contracted into little pebbles under her hands. She arched her neck, straining at the way he carried her into an orgasm.

“Oh God!” Her hips undulated against him as her juice ran out of her pussy. “I’m coming!”

One. Two. Three thrusts and he buried himself clear to his balls. “Chantel!”

He collapsed on top of her, his elbow holding most of the weight off her. “You belong to me.” He panted. “I know that.” He laid his forehead down on the top of her head. “You are the missing piece.”

“Yes.” She laid her hand on his chest, above his heart. “Somehow we are still tied to each other. Oh Hank, it came true. You’ve come back.”

"I'm sorry. I don't know exactly what happened. I remember you, but I don't know what I've put you through—"

"Sh..." She tilted her head back to gaze up at him. "Don't say you're sorry. I'm not."

He withdrew his cock out of her pussy and sat on the couch. She sat up and gathered his hand in hers. "Relax, and I can explain everything to you. Don't worry. We'll talk until everything makes sense to you."

"Talk? I think I need to go back to the hospital." He ran his free hand over his jaw. "This doesn't make sense. I was in the hospital. My brother visited me every day. I have proof!"

"Slow down. I'll tell you what I know. I came to terms with everything a week ago, after I ran into you at the park. It's rather simple really. I don't know why I couldn't figure this out months ago." She shrugged.

"How did I get out of the hospital without anyone noticing?" He leaned back into the cushions. "That's the only time a relationship could have been possible."

"Let me start at the beginning." She covered his lips with her finger. "I was out planting some yarrow with Eve—"

"Who's Eve?" He wagged his head. "Sorry, go on."

"Let's leave her out of this for now." She fidgeted and brought her legs up under her bare bottom. "You showed up at my house, and Dawg—Deoji—jumped the little kennel I'd built for him in the backyard."

She talked for almost an hour, only taking a break long enough to run in and grab them both diet sodas out of the refrigerator. To Hank's honor, he remained quiet and studied her throughout the whole explanation. The doubt and disbelief she perceived in his expressions confused her, but she trudged on, telling their story.

"Okay, you've told me what happened with you, but explain to me exactly how this can happen to me. I lay in a coma sixty miles away at the hospital." He rubbed

the back of his neck. "It's not possible that I woke up and sneaked away for a few hours to have killer sex with you, and returned prior to any of the nurses catching on. No, this doesn't explain a thing."

"That's where things get tricky." She stood up and crossed the room. "This book explains it all."

Hank let his head fall back on the couch, and he barked out a laugh. Startled, Deoji jumped up and came to attention. "Oh shit! You are going to tell me you drew me out of the spirit world in a séance with your girlfriends. Ha! Maybe you used one of those Ouija boards. Once I showed up, you didn't appreciate what you found and tried to send me back. What? Wasn't the sex good enough?"

Chantel sat with the book closed on her lap, her lips puckered, and she waited for him to have his laugh. He gazed at her, and chuckles burst out again. She'd wait him out. She had all night and so did he...now.

"Are you done?"

"Yeah." He crossed his arms and grinned. "Go on. Tell me a story."

"Just for your information, the sex between us is fabulous. The best thing I've ever experienced in my life. We seem to control ourselves outside, but here, in the house, we turn into sex maniacs." She giggled and wiggled her eyebrows.

"God, I must have loved that." He grinned.

She cleared her throat. "Anyway, while you lay in a coma, your body shut down. I'm not exactly sure how traumatic your injuries were, and I want to hear all about that later, but for now, I'll say that you might have possibly been at death's door, okay?"

He nodded and sat up.

"Somehow, your spirit, your core being, left your body and journeyed to a place where people go after they die. Although, in your case, you weren't dead, so you couldn't complete the journey." She smiled.

“Bullshit! If that's the case, how did you see me? Plus, you said other people saw me too.” He shook his head. “That doesn't make sense.”

“But it does. Listen to this.” She licked her finger and flicked the pages of the book. “Right here.” She tapped the paragraph. *“In odd occurrences there have been reports of phantoms that have been visible to the naked eye. They are unable to withstand the magnetics required to last any length of time on earth and often return to the spirit world to recharge.”*

“I—”

“Sh...” She glared at him. “It says... *These spiritual beings cannot live in this altered state and must choose whether to return to the living or travel on to the spirit world.*”

She plopped the book closed and set it back down on her lap. “See! You turned into some kind of ghost. Not a full-fledged ghost, but one that sought to find out if you liked it, I guess.” She laughed. “You didn't enjoy it at all. In the end, Eve convinced me to let you go, and I left you at the park to go away on your own.”

“The park?”

She gazed down at the paranormal guidebook. “It remains the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.”

“You keep saying that, except for the one night at your house, this all happened down at the park.” He cocked his head. “That park in town is where my dad, brother, and I spent hours at least one day a month fishing together my whole life. Actually, up to the day my dad died.”

She swallowed. “That's probably why you always ended up there the next morning. It's your favorite place.” She squeezed his arm. “That also answers the question about your tattoo. The wings represent your Dad, don't they?”

He nodded. “Yeah, my brother and I went out and got matching tattoos the week after we lost dad to remember everything important to us.”

“Steve?” She leaned forward. *Oh...my... God.*

“Yeah, my brother.” He scoffed. “He’s the one who sent me after you. He got tired of me talking about you all the time.”

She covered her mouth and laughed. The relief at the news that Steve was his brother instead of his lover brought more joy to her than figuring out this whole fiasco. She wiped her eyes and leaned over on his shoulder.

“Why is that so funny?” he asked.

“The day you came back and took Dawg, I mean Deoji, from me. You mentioned the name Steve, and I...” She tried not to laugh, but it came out a snort. “Oh, God. I thought Steve was your gay partner. You’d mentioned that you were missing something, and I feared you had a wife or girlfriend. I never dreamed in a million years you’d be gay.”

“My what!”

“Your—”

“I heard what you said! Holy shit, Chantel, how could you think that?” He turned her around to face him. “Haven’t I proven how much I love sex with a lady?”

“I don’t think you have any idea what you do to me, baby.” He claimed her mouth and drew her closer. “I hope now that I am back to my normal life I can show you how much you mean to me. Whether I remember the things that we’ve already gone through or not. I do remember the love inside my heart during the time that you helped me. There’s no denying I want you in my life.”

Her bottom lip trembled, and her tongue came out and trailed along the edge. Hank groaned, and she reached up and trailed the tip of her finger along his jaw.

“I’m definitely alive.” He shifted on the couch.

“Prove it!”

He swept her up in his arms. “Where’s your bedroom?”

“Down the hall.” She tilted her head and applied small, soft nudges to the sensitive area of his neck.

Once in the room, he placed her on her feet and gathered her face between his hands. His thumbs strummed her cheeks, and her eyelids closed on their own. *Yes!*

Hank walked her backward without letting go of her, and the bed brushed the backs of her legs. She sat and scooted farther back. He lay down beside her, his touch exploring every speck of bare skin.

With a gentle push, she laid him back and straddled his hips. He lifted her up and sat her down. Her cunt stroked his cock.

His hands moved up her bare sides and his smooth-shaven face broke out in the most beautiful smile, pleasure at sharing this moment with him after being apart and finding their way back to each not lost in the heat of the moment.

“I can't believe this is happening.” She gazed down between her legs at the proof of his manhood ready to make love to her again. “This is my wish. I wanted you back with me so bad it hurt. You won't disappear, right? I mean, we'll be together after this. We can share breakfast, go out on dates, walk Dawg...I mean Deoji. We can do all that together.” She inhaled. “Oh Hank, I don't want this moment to end. I want—”

He chuckled. “Come here. I can't follow a single word you are saying with you sitting on me this way. We'll talk later.” He pulled her down and kissed along her neck.

“I promise,” he mumbled below her ear.

She giggled. “I'm going to keep you to that promise, Mister.” She moved her mouth down and nipped his neck. “I'm going to talk all night.” She moved over and sucked on his lower lip and gave it a tug. “And all day.” She lowered her head and licked his Adam's apple. “I might not ever—”

Hank growled. “Shut up, woman.”

Chantel moved her hips and placed her pussy on the tip of Frank's cock. His dick slipped in easily from the juices left behind only an hour ago. Slowly this time, he used his hips to draw himself deep inside her and out again. The slow spiral of

heat spread from deep inside her belly and liquefied into all the small hidden places inside.

She caressed him with her lower lips, clenching her muscles. His cock throbbed inside her. Gently, she eased off him and crawled down his body. Her boobs hung down and rubbed against the length of him. His hands cupped the side of her breasts and pushed them together, creating a cocoon around him. His hips slid his dick back and forth between her boobs, and he moaned.

Her tongue came out to flick the head every time he plunged forward. She teased, tempted, and brought a moan of pleasure from him.

He pulled her up again and sat her back down on his cock. Her fingers came up to pinch her nipples, and she bounced. She caught her lower lip between her teeth. His eyelids lowered to take in the way she played with her breasts. She drew her finger in a circle around her tit and leaned over him.

He fastened onto her breast and sent her hips to riding his rod. His hands squeezed her hips, helping set the rhythm. She purred.

“Oh, Hank.” She convulsed around him again, sat up, and kept him contained inside her. She reached behind her, between his legs, and fondled his balls.

With her fingernails, she lightly scraped and tugged at his sac. His legs squeezed together, and he strained against her, his balls drawn tight. She continued her ministration between his legs and keep her balance upon his hips that jerked out of his control.

Warmth wrapped around her waist, not unlike two arms wrapped around her from behind. She tossed her hair to the side, and a pleasing caress swiped the bare skin on her neck below her ear.

“H-Hank?”

“God, baby, your body feels so good.” He groaned.

She closed her eyes. She couldn't talk about the feelings overwhelming her. He'd think she was crazy, but it really seemed as if an invisible person played a part

in their sex. She moaned. It must be all the dreams she'd experienced lately of having two men at the same time.

"Fuck me, baby." He ground himself into her.

Her fingers played with the area below his balls, cupping both of them in the palm of her hand and holding them. He arched up off the bed and shot his load inside her.

She lay down fully on him. Her head nestled under his chin, and her clit rubbed against the soft hair at the base of his cock. Each little thrust of his hips took her the rest of the way. Panting, she held on to Hank and let the orgasm take over her body.

"I'm yours, Hank." She kept her head on his chest. "I've always been yours."

Hank enclosed her body in his arms. His fingers drew lazy circles on her back. He sighed and chuckled. She lifted her head and smiled.

"What are you laughing about?" She kissed the cleft of his smooth-shaven chin.

His hand continued their pattern on her back. "Did your book explain to you why I can't control myself around you?"

She shook her head. "No, I haven't quite figured that out yet."

"How about we just let it be, and not worry about the little details, huh?" His happiness gave way to laughter.

She lifted her head and smiled. "Deal."

"You know, I'm curious." He lifted his head. "If you thought I was gay, why did you agree to have dinner?"

She laughed and poked him in the side. "I don't know. Maybe the thought of sharing you with another man wouldn't have been so bad."

* * *

"You really didn't have to go to the trouble of cooking pancakes." Hank poured more maple syrup over the second stack that Chantel shoved in front of him. "I'm stuffed from the first batch you cooked."

“Humor me. I've never done this for my man. I don't know how much food you eat.” She sat down across from him and buttered her two pancakes.

“Speaking of pancakes, want to explain to me about the woman you talked about last night? Something about a friend named Eve. Is she someone who helped you with me?” He waved his fork in the air. “You know, when it really wasn't me, but my phantom.”

Chantel nodded. “Sort of.”

She reached for the pitcher of orange juice, topped off his glass, and filled her own. This was the part of the whole mess she didn't want to explain to him. Barely able to swallow her bite of pancake, she drank her juice to stall. She needed to think of a way to get out of answering. She didn't want to admit it, but she feared his reaction about the fact she grew up with a ghost for a best friend now that he'd come back 100 percent alive.

He might not even believe the story about him if he thought she'd lost her marbles and somehow he found himself stuck in the house with a madwoman. She hurried and glanced up to find out if he forgot he asked the question. Maybe if she kept eating, he'd drop the subject.

Pooh! He's still waiting.

“Okay, here's the deal. You are going to think I'm insane. I'm not, by the way. Eve is...” She wrinkled her nose. “My best friend.”

She smiled and cut off a piece of pancake.

There. That wasn't so terribly hard.

“And...?” He pushed his plate away from him and concentrated on getting an answer from Chantel.

“Fine. If you are going to get pushy about the subject.” She laid her fork down, leaned back, and crossed her arms. “Eve is a ghost. She's lived with me my whole life. Because of that, I grew up with no friends, because they all thought I imagined

things.” She rolled her eyes. “It didn't help matters that Eve played tricks on them and scared them half to death.

“It made it quite impossible to lead a normal life or become close to another human being. For that reason, I stay to myself, tend my plants, and, well...stayed with Eve. She brought comfort and happiness to my life. I was content.” She stared him down. “You can choose not to believe me, I don't care, but I'd really appreciate it if you didn't laugh or call me a liar. I'm not. It is just something that if you want to be with me, you are going to have to accept.” She stopped and sucked in air.

He didn't move. The only signs that he heard what she said came from his stare, and every now and then, he blinked. She cleared her throat, scooted her chair back, and removed their plates from the table. With her back to him, she scrapped the uneaten food into the garbage and set the dishes in the dishwasher.

She busied herself with wiping down the counters and putting away the ingredients she used for breakfast. The tears slid down her cheeks, and she didn't want to have Hank catch her wiping her face, so she let them fall. She missed Eve more every day, and although she knew in her heart of hearts that everything had happened for a reason, she worried about where Eve had ended up.

Bending over to set the container of flour in the lower pantry, she rubbed the side of her face on her upper arm. Hank's arms came around her and pulled her back against his chest. A sob escaped, and she covered her face. *This is it. He's going to kiss me good-bye and walk out the door.*

Hank turned her around to face him, and with gentle hands lowered her hands. “Is Eve still here? With you?”

She clenched her teeth together to keep her chin from trembling and gave a short, hard shake of her head. She sniffed and inhaled a troubled breath.

“Where is she?” He didn't let go of her but kept a tight hold and wrapped her in the security of his arms.

She shrugged. He brought his hands up and cupped her face, his thumbs brushing away the tears.

“My coming to you in some weird phantom form drove her away, didn't it?” He kissed her forehead and pulled her to his chest. “She left because of me.”

She jerked back. “No! No no!”

“It wasn't you. I failed Eve. I should have forced her to stop, but deep inside me, I wanted her to help us keep you here. She knew me better than I know myself. What she did, she did for me. I only have myself to blame.” She dashed away her tears. “She gave us the answer we needed for you to heal, to get your life back, and to eventually find your way back to me. She knew we belonged together.”

“I don't even know why I am crying. I thought I used up all my tears. I honestly do understand why she did it. I owe her so much. I only wish I knew if she found peace, an existence somewhere that she found happiness.” She sniffed. “She deserves to have all kinds of happiness too.”

Chantel sat down at the table, leaned back in her chair. Her stomach was stuffed from breakfast. She smiled at the reason why she'd worked up an appetite. They'd had sex all through the night.

“What's the grin for?” Hank patted his flat stomach and groaned.

She ducked her head. “Just thinking about how you came back and all the times last night and this morning that you made love to me.”

Hank sat up straighter and leaned his elbows against the table. “I wanted to talk to you about that.” He set his chin on his clasped hands. “You mentioned feeling someone else touching you a few times last night.”

She shook her head. “It's just me. I think I'm just confused. I knew you as Frank, and now you show up and have the name Hank.” She laid her hand on her forehead. “Then, I've been having these crazy dreams since you walked into my life...”

“Tell me about them.” He cocked his head.

Chantel wrinkled her nose. “It's nothing.” She reached out to take his plate, but his fingers circled her wrist and stopped her.

“Please.”

She sank back in the chair and frowned. “Do you remember me telling you, back when you were Frank, how when I made love to you I would feel someone else's hands, lips, body on me?” He nodded, and she continued, “I also told you how I'd always fantasized about having two men.” She squinted one eye, afraid he'd make fun of her.

“I do.”

“Well, there's a little more to it.” She blew out her breath. “I dream about it. In fact, it's really you, but it's like your identical twin—”

He barked out a laugh.

“What's so funny?” She tilted her head.

“My brother, Steve. He's my identical twin.”

She gasped and covered her mouth.

Her eyes widened, and she left the table to pace back and forth in the kitchen. “Oh my God, oh my God.” She turned to Hank. “You're telling me the truth, right?”

He nodded.

She covered her face with her hands. “Oh God, this is embarrassing. I can't believe I told you this.”

Hank peeled her hands off her face. “Don't be. I want to hear more. Did you like it? Did you enjoy both of us touching your body?”

She leaned over and put her head against his chest. She nodded. His hand came up to stroke her hair. He picked her up and carried her to the living room.

He sat down on the couch with her on his lap. “Hearing that will make what I have to say so much easier.”

She raised her head. He wasn't upset?

Chapter Twelve

She glanced out the front window at the fallen leaves covering the lawn. Already the ethereal glow from daylight leaving and the moon rising invaded the land. She chewed on her bottom lip. Hank and his brother were running late, and she worried about them driving to her house from the airport. They must be exhausted after their conference.

Last night on the phone, she tried to talk Hank out of planning this dinner with his brother at her house, but he wouldn't hear of it. Waves of nerves tightened her stomach. She'd never met his twin brother face-to-face, although she knew him almost as well as Hank through her dreams and experiences.

Hank had wanted to rush right over and bring Steve back to her house after he confessed to wanting to share her with his brother, but she'd asked him to wait. She wanted to wrap her head around this and make sure she could be involved with two people. She didn't want anything or anyone taking the love she had for Frank away from him.

Hank had called her a couple days later and explained that he'd be gone on a business trip and that Steve wanted to meet her on their return two days later. She paused in her pacing at the wave of tingles that spread in her lower stomach. No way would anything come between her relationship with Hank, but she didn't know exactly how Steve fit in.

He held such an important part in Hank's life. The way Hank explained it, they'd die if separated. If not physically, mentally they'd not survive.

The glow of headlights outside lit up the shelves in the living room, and she hurried to the door. She stood against the blowing wind and hugged her upper body to keep warm against the cool night.

Grateful for their arrival and finally being able to lay her hands on Hank after these long days of missing him, she bounced on her feet in excitement. She didn't think it possible to miss someone so much.

"Oh babe, you don't know how nice it is to find you waiting out here in the freezing cold for me."

Swept off her feet in a bear hug that rivaled one from any Alaskan grizzly, Chantel screamed and tugged against the arms that held her off the ground.

She shrieked. "I've missed you."

"God, me too." He captured her lips. "Mm, you taste good." He set her down. "Let's get you in the house."

She peered over his shoulder on her way in. Her breath caught in her throat. Steve looked exactly the way she imagined him.

Unable to take her gaze off him, she stood inside the door, waiting to meet him. He stepped up in front of her, his eyes moved over her face, searching. She smiled.

"I...I know you. I know that sounds crazier than hell, but I know everything about you." He lifted his hand and stroked her cheek.

She curled her face into his touch and sighed. "Me too."

"We'll go slow. You need time to adjust to everything that has happened lately." Steve glanced over at Hank. "Thank you for taking care of my brother and sending him back to me."

She scooped up his hand, reached out for Hank's hand, and cleared her throat. "I bet you both are starving. Did you have a good flight?" She pulled them into the kitchen.

“Not bad. Rumors are they are closing the airport tonight because of the threat of thunderstorms, so it's a good thing we came in early.” Hank sniffed the air. “Is that your meatloaf with the barbecue sauce and bacon on the top?”

She grinned and turned to Steve. “You better get your share right off the bat, because he can finish the whole loaf in a minute and a half.”

“Ha! He can try. I've eaten him under the table many times.” Steve punched Hank in the shoulder and jumped back to avoid retaliation. “He might be the oldest, but he can't beat me at everything.”

“Sit, boys.” She laughed. “Lucky for everyone, I made a double recipe. There will be enough for everyone, including me.” Their good-natured teasing came naturally to them.

The first few minutes after dishing up their plates, the three of them dropped into an easy silence. She sneaked glances at Steve and marveled at the identical expressions and features on the twins' faces.

He turned and caught her staring, gave her a wink, and she turned to Hank. He gave her the same wink, and she ducked her head to concentrate on eating. She always dreamed of this, but it all seemed so unreal, and she wasn't sure if she'd wake up and find this all didn't happen.

It blew her socks off to find out that Hank and his brother shared a law office where they worked for the state. Hank was a man who'd wear an apron beside her in the kitchen. He'd help her catch butterflies for her greenhouse, yet his reputation for being a hard-ass prosecuting attorney in the courtroom followed him around. She bet together the twins mesmerized the jury with the way they talked and motioned in sync.

Although her appetite had fled at the sight of Hank arriving, she finished her plate before the two guys. Steve cut another small piece of meatloaf and deposited it on her plate, and Hank scooped another small spoonful of mashed potatoes and placed it beside the meat. She shook her head, gazed from one to the other. Nothing like having two men serve dinner and wait at her disposal.

She sighed. "You guys are going to make me fat."

Hank leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Never. You are perfect in any size."

"My bro don't lie." Steve nodded. "So, Chantel, tell me about this lucrative business you run out of your house. Hank's mentioned that you have a green thumb."

She stuck her thumb up and grinned. "Not green, but I do love growing plants, and I've studied different ways to use the medicinal plants as an alternatives for common problems. A lot of the synthetic over-the-counter drugs do so much more harm than good, I think people need a choice whether to use something that came from the earth and is all natural first."

"Interesting." Steve set his fork down and leaned back in his chair. "You treat only the local people, right?"

She nodded.

"Why don't you branch out? Set yourself up to provide plants or whatnot to people in other areas. There are a lot of naturalists all over the world that would love to have a distributor with your quality of plants, I'm sure." He glanced at Hank, who nodded. "We could handle the paperwork, and that way you could concentrate on growing and maintenance, which Hank says you enjoy, and leave the selling to the general companies."

Her fork dropped on to her plate halfway through his speech, and she sat in stunned silence. How did he know she reveled in the growing process but disliked dealing with the townsfolk? She'd never mentioned her desires to Hank, and the suggestion of getting help to start the process of such a huge endeavor took her by surprise.

"I...I don't know what to say." She turned to Hank, bit down on her lip, and waited for him to tell her what to say.

“Think about it, babe.” He nodded his head in Steve's direction. “You've got both of us on your side now, and if it sounds like the direction you'd like to take in your career, we'll do whatever it takes to see it happen for you.”

She placed her napkin on her plate. “Thank...thank you. I'll think about it.”

The two brothers nodded and went back to cleaning the last of the meatloaf off their plates. Caught up in her thoughts, she went about the motions of putting the dishes beside the sink. Once she cleared the table, she brought out a bottle of wine and handed it over to Hank.

“Go ahead and open it. I'll get the glasses, and you two can sit down in the living room while I put the dishes in the dishwasher.” She moved over to remove three goblets off the shelf.

Without the men in the kitchen, she leaned against the counter and struggled to draw enough oxygen into her brain to stop it from wandering to places it had no right to go. It was simple really. The attraction she felt for Steve was just because of the way he looked. Her body didn't know the difference, but once she learned more about Steve, there'd be many little things that set the two men apart.

Two arms wrapped around her upper body, and she leaned back into Hank's chest. “I've missed you.”

“God, you have no idea. The convention lasted a lifetime, not just two days, and every night I wanted to hop a plane and get back to you.” He swayed his body against her.

“Mm, I can see how much you missed me.” She reached behind her and tugged on his pants, pulling him against her more. “We better be careful. This always goes from a carefree touch to having amazing sex on the kitchen floor.”

His chest rumbled against the back of her head. “And that would be a bad thing?”

She giggled and raised her eyebrows. “Your brother is in the living room.”

“Aw, he won't mind.” He pushed his rigid cock against her ass and moaned, his hands moving to her breast. “I explained to you how we transfer pain, right?”

She nodded unable to speak with the way his hands brought her nipples to peak.

Hank lowered his head, nibbled below her ear, and whispered, “We also transfer pleasure.”

Her mouth dropped open, but her body quivered in response to knowing that bringing enjoyment to Hank also brought Steve pleasure.

Hank's fingers lightly pinched her pebbled nipples, and her knees wobbled. “Hank, I...I...can't—”

“I got you.” He nibbled along her neck, keeping her steady. “Does that turn you on, baby?”

“You do that.” She wiggled her ass. “Only you.”

He trailed his hands down her sides, grasped her hips, and ground his cock against the crack of her ass. “My dick is always hard around you.” His breath came heavy. “I want your pants off, babe. Will you do that for me? Will you drop them to your ankles and let me take you in the kitchen while my brother sits in the other room?”

She closed her eyes. Even with her back to him, she wanted to hide the truth. The thought of two men hard and hot for her turned her on, despite how wrong society viewed the practice. She squirmed, her panties damp from the way Hank talked and moved his body.

“Do it for me, Chantel.” He caught her earlobe in his mouth, stroking it with his tongue. “Please.”

She swallowed and nodded.

The slow *zzzzz* of the metal zipper on her jeans and the pounding of her heartbeat in her ears filled the void between making out with Hank to acknowledging she faced both men with her answer. The excitement of knowing she

gave herself to Hank fully for him to enjoy and share with the one person who truly owned his heart felt right.

Hank loved her. He chose her, but he lived and breathed as one with his brother. She understood the connection and wanted to share in that special bond. Her pants slipped down her legs and puddled on top of her sneakers. The skimpy white lace panties against her skin stood out beside the navy blue tee she still wore.

The slight whistle of Hank sucking his breath in rattled what little control she maintained. She'd donned the panties earlier, knowing how much he adored sexy white lingerie.

His hands left her to stand on her own. Her legs shook, and she rubbed her hands over her thighs at the loss of his warmth and the chill of adventuring where she'd never gone before. She slipped into having a normal relationship with another person easily, and the idea to share herself, if only from a distance, didn't seem like an odd request for someone so close to his twin.

He cupped the bottom of her butt cheeks where they peeked out from the lace. "Oh baby, you wore the white ones for me, didn't you?" He slipped a finger under the lace and ran it up and down her ass, pulling the material tight against her pussy. "You're already hot and wet for me. So wet, just begging for my cock to slip in between your legs."

A shudder rolled from her neck down her back and into her legs. Hank wrapped one arm around her waist, and she rode the wave of tingles that threatened to set her on fire. The fiery way they reacted with each other never lessened but grew stronger each time.

"Bend over, babe. Open your legs for us." His hand directed her to lower her upper body.

She bent at the waist. He said us, and she wondered if Steve joined them in the kitchen. A glance over her shoulder proved they had the kitchen all to themselves. She slid her foot over, opening her legs wider. Her pants around her ankles restrained her from throwing her legs wide open.

“Aw, babe, your pussy lips are swollen and begging for some loving.” He lightly trailed his finger over her slit. “Mm, you feel so good.”

Not trusting her legs to support her, she reached out and grasped the edge of the kitchen counter. “Please...”

“What do you want? My cock? My fingers?” He moved in and teased her with the head of his cock. “I want to see you with Steve's cock in your mouth. Will you do that for me?”

She mewled. Her pussy juice wet her entrance, and her hips bucked at the heat coming from his engorged dick. On her tiptoes, she stretched back, seeking the hardness she knew filled her completely. She craved to have him push against her tightness, invading her fully and quenching the desire to have him possess her body.

“Yes!” She panted. “I want you both. I want to have my men with me again.”

Another hand lay on her back. She turned her head to glance over her shoulder and found Steve standing at her side, his cock swollen and in his hand.

“We've been together many times before, love. I want to come inside your mouth and watch you swallow my cum.” Steve moved in front of her and rubbed the head of his cock across her opened lips.

She latched on and sucked the head of his rod at the same time Hank entered her pussy. She moaned and used her tongue to caress the large vein underneath Steve's cock. The pulse of his excitement beat against her tongue.

Steve's hand slipped down underneath her and fondled her breast. Her nipples peaked, sending pleasure to her pussy. Involuntary contractions squeezed Hank's dick with each thrust. Her pussy was so wet, he slid in and out of her easily.

With each thrust, she swallowed more of Steve. Her fingers dug into his thighs, and she relaxed her throat muscles to take in more. He straightened up and wound his hands in her hair.

“I love”—he thrust his hips forward—“your hair.” He grunted. “Don't ever”—his hands tightened and pulled the strands at the back of her neck—“cut it.”

“I'm going to come.” Hank groaned and picked up the pace.

His balls slammed into her pussy at each plunge, stimulating her clit. She moaned. Her legs shook, and the heat grew low in her bellow and spread down into her pussy. She sucked harder on Steve. Pleasure grew inside her womb, higher and stronger, becoming unstoppable.

“Come, love.” Steve's cock pulsed in her mouth. “Come with us.”

She screamed around Steve's cock in her mouth. Her pussy squeezed down on Hank's dick. Warm cum shot into the back of her throat, and she greedily swallowed, wanting to take it all. Hank thrust one last time and held himself still engulfed inside of her. Her cunt spasmed and milked every drop from him.

Hank's arm slipped around her waist. “I got you.”

She didn't let go of Steve, and walked her hands up his body. The two men stepped closer together, sandwiching her between them to hold her up. Every muscle exhausted and lax, she would have fallen if not for their support.

“You okay, love?” Steve ran his hands down her face. “We didn't rush you?”

She shook her head and gazed up at him. “This isn't the first time we've been together.” She reached behind her and stroked Hank's bare hip. “It definitely won't be our last.”

Hank kissed the side of her neck. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.” She stared up at Steve. “Thank you for having a twin brother.”

Steve chuckled. “Yeah, thanks, Bro.”

She laughed, but her legs wobbled underneath her in liquid bliss. “I love you too, Steve. I fell in love with you through Hank, but I knew the moment you walked into my house that what we shared...” She swallowed. Her eyes filled with liquid.

“I love you too.” He strummed his thumbs under her eyes and wiped the tears that came. “Our lives are just beginning.”

* * *

Often, she'd find herself talking aloud during her chores to Eve and forgetting she no longer existed in her life. She missed the one person whom she'd run to for help, cried to, and depended on for guidance more times than she could remember.

She needed to know if Eve foresaw this future for her. Did Eve really set this up somehow? Did she have a way to do that with Hank lost in limbo?

The knocking on the door caught her the moment she walked out of the bedroom. She hesitated at the mirror in the hall and took one last look. *Ugh. I'd give anything to have straight long hair that didn't fly around my head and shoulders in a mess.*

With one last big breath, she opened the door and smiled. "Hi."

Steve stood in the doorway, bundled up in a heavy coat, scarf, and looking exactly like Hank. The breath she inhaled rushed out. She held on to the door, dizzy and caught up in trying to keep the fact that this was Steve, not Hank, and she shouldn't throw herself into his arms.

"You look wonderful, love." He lifted her hand, turned it over, and placed a kiss on her palm. "Let's grab your coat. I've got our evening all planned."

She grabbed her winter coat off the hook. Earlier, Hank told her to prepare for outside weather, and since fall already had hit down in Duluth, temperatures dropped once the sun went down.

Steve stepped to the side and let her out the door. She squealed and hurried down the steps. Two big beautiful bay horses harnessed to the most elegant wagon she'd ever set eyes on sat in her driveway.

"I thought you'd enjoy a ride along the back roads." Steve guided her out to the animals.

She stopped beside the horses' head and turned to the man sitting up high in the driver's seat. "May I pet them?"

The driver nodded his head and smiled. "They'd like that, ma'am."

Lifting her hand, she stood up on tiptoes and stroked the horse from the middle of his eyes down to the tip of his nose. She smiled and turned to Steve. "I've always wanted a horse."

"Really?" He glanced back at her house. "I think you've got enough room for a horse or two here."

She laughed. "I haven't a clue on how to take care of such a huge animal. Deoji was the first dog I've ever been around on a day-to-day basis."

"Come on. Let's go for a ride. I think we might be racing against the weather, though. I hoped it wouldn't rain, but it's clouding up now that the sun is going down." Steve walked with her over to the wagon, turned her around, and with his hands on her waist hoisted her up to the high step.

Chantel sat down on the little bench seat at the back of the wagon. Steve sat and reached for a wool blanket to cover their legs. Once settled, the driver clicked his mouth and got the ride underway.

Enraptured with going on her first carriage ride, Chantel reached under the blanket. "This is so exciting. I've never done anything like this." She turned. "I wish Hank could have come." She wrinkled her nose. "Oh God, I'm sorry. I..."

Steve laughed. "Don't worry about that." He squeezed her hand. "I do too, and I know he really wanted to come, but he was running late and said he'd try and catch up with us later."

She stuck out her lower lip and blew the hair out of her bangs. "You two work so hard."

Their driver drove them around the country roads at a sedate speed. Hank produced a thermos of hot chocolate and a container of apple fritters to fortify them and keep them warm against the wind that picked up the darker it became outside.

"Open your mouth." He nudged her with his leg.

She cocked an eyebrow but did what he asked. He dunked his pastry in his steaming drink and gave her a bite. Her eyes closed and she moaned. The delectable sugary bite warmed her insides.

"Mm...mm..." She chewed and swallowed. "God, that's good." She licked her lips to get any crumbs.

Steve reached up and ran his thumb along her bottom lip. Her mouth opened, and her tongue came out to touch his thumb. A shiver of excitement ran down her spine. Her nipples peaked under her coat, and she lowered her gaze.

"Hank knew you'd feel guilty alone with me for the first time. He told me to tell you that you shouldn't. He's real proud of you." He lifted his brows. "Actually he advised me to call you babe to put you at ease, but I told him I prefer to call you love." He leaned closer still keeping a hold of her chin. "You don't mind if I call you love, do you?"

"N-no." Her chest heaved with shallow breaths, and she leaned closer. Their lips only inches apart, she tilted her head to the side and stared down at those full, gorgeous lips. The strong desire to taste him overrode any worry that Hank was missing out.

His lips touched her bottom lip, gently tugged, tasted, and suckled. Her breath came out in little shallow pants. She didn't dare move, but inside she screamed for him to capture her whole mouth, to let her join in the kiss.

He moved his mouth on top of her, barely touching, skimming his lips against hers but remaining out of her reach for a full kiss. "You like this." The tip of his tongue ran along her inside of her top lip. "I like this." He growled deep in his throat, never breaking the contact with her mouth. "Hank likes this."

She moaned. He captured her mouth. Her hand clutched the front of his coat, and she lost herself within his kiss. The chill of the night mixed with the heat he created in the pit of her stomach. Her pussy spasmed at the way his tongue teased and slid between her lips. She never wanted these jolts of desire to lessen.

Steve pulled back, yet didn't leave her completely. His lips hovered over hers, occasionally brushing against her mouth.

"Do you feel it?" His breath was warm against her face. "Is your belly tight and wanting more?" He lowered his head and sucked the sensitive skin under her chin. "I want you, love."

She closed her eyes. Her body was a pile of melted emotions. God, she wanted him too.

His mouth left her neck, and she opened her eyes. She stared at him. Amazed at the way she lost herself in his kiss, a kiss that woke up her body in the most pleasurable way. He smiled and leaned in again, but the loud crack of thunder overhead drew his head back.

She lifted her chin and gazed up at the dark sky. A splash of rain hit her on the cheek, and she groaned in frustration.

"Driver? Can you take us to the park off Main Street please?" Steve grabbed hold of her hand. "I left my car there and hitched a ride on the wagon to pick you up. I'll get you out of the rain."

The sky opened up a minute later, and Steve hurried to throw the blanket over their heads before they got soaking wet. Chantel drew her knees up to her chest to keep her legs dry. A giggle escaped, and soon they were both laughing hard enough it didn't matter if this was their first official date or that she'd almost come at the touch of his lips.

The wagon came to a stop, and Steve hurried out and lifted Chantel, blanket and all, to the ground. He reached into his back pocket, removed his wallet, and handed a fistful of bills to the driver.

"For the rain," he shouted up at the sopping wet older gentleman. Steve turned and wrapped his arm around Chantel and ran with her into the park.

"Where's your car?" Lightning flashed in front of them, and she screamed.

Steve dropped his arm, grabbed her hand, and pulled her along. "There's a gazebo over here. We'll get under it until the weather breaks."

She arrived at the open shelter out of breath and laughing. "Oh that was horrible. I haven't seen it open up and rain like that since last year."

Steve removed the wet blanket from her and tossed it over one of the benches nearby. His clothes molded to his body, and his short hair lay plastered against his head. The laughter inside her died away, and she stood in awe. This wasn't Hank. This was his twin brother, Steve. Two very different people despite their identical appearance.

He stopped three feet from her, and she raised her eyes from the front of his pants where a definite hard-on lived. The corner of his mouth lifted, and he winked. She stepped closer and stopped.

Without a word, she unzipped her coat and let it fall to the wooden floor of the gazebo. Steve tilted his head in question, but she didn't stop to explain her actions. She kicked off her shoes and stepped on the toes of her socks to peel them off. Barefooted, she wiggled her toes and delighted in the way he stared at her feet with such intensity.

She unbuttoned her blouse, one button at a time, and caught her bottom lip between her teeth to find Steve removing his coat. She unzipped her jeans, stepped out of them, and stood before him in a matching bra and panties. Black.

Steve groaned. "How did you know?"

She lifted her shoulder. "I didn't want to wear white. That's Hank's favorite color. I pictured you liking the mystery of black."

"Aw, love, you guessed it spot on." He kicked his shoes off and peeled his shirt off his back.

He stood before her barefoot, bare chested, with only his jeans on. "Well, love, you made this move. I think if you want to go the rest of the way, you should be the first." He nodded his head at the remaining lingerie she wore. "Take it off. For me."

She caught her breath. Her breasts strained at the material. Despite the cold and wetness, her body ran hot. She reached behind her and unclipped her bra. She slid it down her arms, not making a move to cover herself. A flood of juice coated her pussy at the way he licked his lips at the sight.

The contrast between the heat of her body and the outside air on her nipples tightened the nubs into rock-hard points. Pleasure-pain shot through her body, and she had a hard time keeping her eyelids open. She wanted to close her eyes and relish in the delightful feelings, but she wanted Steve more and continued to undress.

Hooking her thumbs under the elastic at her hips, she peeled the panties down and stepped out. Fully naked, with nothing blocking her view or keeping him away from her, it was her time to stare.

She studied his naked body and found it exactly like Hank's. Even down to the way that his chest hair narrowed into a trail down his stomach and spread out at the base of his cock. A cock that stood out from his body, proud and determined. Her chin quivered, but not from the cold. A bead of precum graced the tip of his cock.

A boom of thunder rocked the gazebo, and the overhead light buzzed and then went out. Steve stepped in front of her. Her nipples skimmed his rib cage, and she moaned.

“May I join this party?”

She gasped, turned, and smiled. “We would love to have you.”

“You look beautiful, babe.” Hank stepped forward and shook the rain off his hair.

Steve motioned to his clothes. “You're late.”

Chantel reached over, stroked Steve's cock, and hugged him for warmth. Hank hurried and undressed.

She held out her hands to both of the men. “Feeling a little adventurous?”

Steve tilted his head to the side, and the corner of his mouth lifted. "Hell yeah."

"Come, my two men, let's go play in the rain." She ran outside, screamed in delight, and danced upon the rain-soaked ground. "It's beautiful out." She pulled them closer. "Fuck me in the rain, boys."

A flash of lightning sizzled through the air, and she caught the puzzled expressions on both their faces. She stepped in front of Steve, and the rain beat down on her skin, soaking her hair and running down her face. Raising her hands, she cupped each side of his face and pulled him down closer to her mouth.

In a repeat play, she skimmed her lips over his. "Yes, you turn me on." She licked his bottom lip. "Yes, I like the idea of you and Hank loving me." She nipped his lip and gave it a soft tug. "Yes, as crazy as this might sound, I love you both equally." She held still, their lips barely touching. "In my head, you two men are one. We three..." She moaned. "Together." She flicked her tongue between his lips. "Make up each of our hearts and belong together."

His arms came around her and lifted her up. Pressed against his bare skin, she locked her mouth on to his and tasted. A hint of mint, hot chocolate, and all man drove her wild, and she wrapped her legs around his waist. He groaned, and she slipped.

"The ground, Steve." Her hands wound in the short locks of his hair. "Fuck me on the wet grass." She reached out for Hank. "I want your cock between my breasts, fucking me. I want you to shower your cum all over my chest."

"Demanding. I love it." Hank stroked his cock.

She slid down Steve's rain-soaked body. "Top or bottom, love?"

"Oh God, top." She ran her hands along the width of his chest, wanting to hold on to the curved muscles and ride him.

He pulled her down on top of him, and perched her on top of his thighs. She found his cock and stroked his hard length. Rain splattered his chest and ran off her own body to pool in the shallow bowl of his stomach. Her hair, beaten down by the

rain, hung clear down the middle of her back. Her breast, firm and hard from the cold rain, stood out, and his hands rubbed warmth into the skin, although inside she burned up with heat to complete the circle.

“Give me your hands.”

She entwined her fingers through his, lifted her ass, and slid down on his cock. A short scream escaped at the way the heat from him contacted her cool skin. Unable to find traction on the slippery ground, she dropped to her knees and rode him back and forth, rubbing her clit against the hair at the base of his cock.

“Hank. Please.” She moaned over the clap of thunder. “Your cock.”

Hank straddled Steve's chest, positioned his dick toward her mouth. She leaned forward and enclosed the head with her lips. She mewed. *Oh God. I love these men.*

Her hands clutched at Steve's chest, supporting her weight. His nipples were rock hard beneath the palms of her hands. She stared up into Hank's face, wanting to view the pleasure she brought him but unable to make out those gorgeous green eyes that gave away all his secrets.

A clatter of thunder rent the air, traveled through her, and she moaned. She gyrated on Steve's cock. Waves of pleasure intensified, and her fingernails dug half-moons in his chest. His hands gripped her waist and moved her back and forth. The friction on her pussy combined with Hank's groan of pleasure swept her over the edge into an orgasm

The sky lit up above them, and she only needed a glimpse of his eyes to scream with her mouth compressed around Hank's cock, her pussy convulsing around Steve's cock. He bucked against her with a groan that planted his seed deep within her womb at the same time that Hank shot his load in the back of her throat.

She swallowed all but the trickle that leaked out from her parted lips and trickled down her chin. Her breath came in pants, and she luxuriated in the experience. Her heart filled near to bursting with love for these two men.

They fit perfectly into her eccentric way of life and brought her only love and goodness.

Rain beat down on her bare back, Steve's cock slipped out of her, and Hank stumbled back. She shivered. Without both of them attached to her, the cold seeped in, and she trembled.

"Come, love, we need to get you home before you catch pneumonia." He took her hand, held her steady, and passed her to Hank's waiting arms. She lifted her leg to climb off, but her foot slipped, and she fell on her butt beside Steve, pulling Hank down with her.

"Are you okay?" Steve leaned up on his elbow and turned toward her.

Hank rolled over and brushed the hair out of her eyes. "You're not hurt?"

A quiet giggle grew and filled the night with laughter. "Oh man, I must look a sight. I'm so glad for the darkness right now. I bet I resemble something that crawled out of a swamp. My hair is hanging down in my face. I've got grass and mud on my knees, hands, and now my ass."

Steve laughed and kissed her arm. "You should see my back. I think I'm coated in mud. You scooted me a hundred feet from where I lay down. You're a hell of a top rider. We probably made a path in what used to be thick grass."

Hank laughed. "You didn't notice me walking backward while you were sucking my cock?"

She laughed, although her body shivered from the cold. Together they held on to each other and gained footing to walk back up the slope to the gazebo. Their feet sank into the soaked grass. She shook her head to dispatch the drops of water coming off her hair. It didn't help, because the rain kept coming down.

"How am I going to get my wet clothes back on?" She searched the floor with her foot, unable to see the clothes without the light.

"I found the blanket. Throw this around you. It's wet, but it's wool and should help you find a little warmth." Hank wrapped it around her shoulders, and she

groaned at the uncomfortable material against her skin. "Stay there; I'll look for our clothes."

She squeezed her legs together and pulled the blanket around her tighter. This didn't help with the cold.

"Hey, Hank, grab mine too. I'll keep Chantel warm." Steve wrapped his arms around her from behind.

"I'm missing your panties and a shoe." Hank's voice came from the other side of the structure. "I'm leaving them. I'll buy you a whole new wardrobe. I want to get you home and warmed up."

"But—"

Steve picked her up in his arms.

"I can walk." Her words belied the truth, and she snuggled her head in the crook of his neck, seeking heat.

"Okay, love, here we go. I'm running, because there is no way in hell I'm slipping into those cold clothes." He took off running across the grass toward the street.

Bouncing in his arms, she imagined the sight they must present and hoped like hell the electricity didn't come on before they reached the car. He set her down beside the car, out of breath. He pulled the pants down from over his shoulder.

"Shit."

"Wh-what is wr-wrong?" Her teeth clickity-clacked together at a fast pace.

"I lost the keys somewhere between the car and the gazebo. I'm going to—"

"Nevermind that. She needs to get warm. I've got my car over here." Hank waved them to follow. "Come on, Steve. Let's get her out of here."

"Hang in there. I'll get you settled in the car, in front of the heater." Steve kissed her wet forehead. "Here you go."

He deposited her on the seat, and reached around her to buckle her seat belt. The car idled, and heat blasted her in the face. She held her shaking hands in front

of the heater, and goose bumps ran down her back at the difference in temperature from outside.

“I was just pulling up to Chantel's house when I got a feeling the sky was about to open up and storm.” He looked in the rearview mirror. “I'm glad I got there in time.” He reached over and rubbed Chantel's bare leg.

“Me too.”

“Me three.” Steve laughed from the backseat. “Did you see how Chantel was going to drag me out into the rain to my death? I swear this woman is going to lead us on a merry chase.”

Chantel turned and caught the smile growing across Hank's face in the light off the dashboard. He turned his head toward her, and she shrugged a bare shoulder.

“I couldn't help myself.” She grinned. “He's part of us.”

Chapter Thirteen

“Keep her eyes covered, Hank. I don't trust her not to peek.” Steve held both of her hands and pulled her from the car. Hank stood behind her, his body pressed into her back, his hands covering the scarf they tied around her eyes blinding her to the big surprise they had for her.

“Come on, guys. When do I get to take this off?” She whined, but her mouth curved into a smile. They'd whispered and connived behind her back for months, and all they'd tell her was that they were working on a surprise for her and she'd have to be patient.

“What did I tell you? She'd never go along with this.” Steve chuckled. “She's too curious for her own good.

She squeezed his hands. “Hey, I lived up to my promise not to dig for hints...sorta.”

“That-a-girl, babe.” Hank nibbled the curve of her shoulder. “About twenty more steps, and you'll get your surprise.”

“Can't you give me another hint? It seemed like we drove for a long time.” She caught her lower lip between her teeth. “I don't even know where we are anymore.”

Hank laughed. “That was Steve's idea. He thought driving the long way and backtracking over roads we'd already traveled would confuse you. Guess it worked.”

“Okay, love, you can stop.” He dropped one of her hands. “Hank's going to let go of your eyes, but don't remove the scarf, okay?”

“Okay.” She bounced on her toes in anticipation.

Hank gathered up her other hand, and they stood beside her, shoulders touching shoulders. "Now?"

"Hang on, Mrs. Foster." Hank laughed. "I love saying that. Have I told you how much I love you today?"

She giggled. "Yes, about five times already."

"How about me? Because I love you too." Steve leaned over and gave her a quick kiss.

"I think you've beat him by one." She laughed. "Now, come on, let me see my surprise."

Hank moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. Steve undid the scarf but held it in place.

"One," Steve said.

"Two." Hank continued the count.

"Three." They spoke together.

She blinked and squinted against the early afternoon sun. A huge white colonial two-story home sat in front of them. A green sign hung from the rafters on the wraparound porch above the door.

THE FOSTERS

"Oh my God." Tears welled in her eyes, and she leaned over and kissed both of her husbands. Legally she'd only married Hank, but they celebrated their own ceremony afterward, just the three of them, and she'd pledged herself to Steve for the rest of her life.

"We knew you were concerned about having to move out of the smaller house and didn't want to move and leave all your plants, but we have something else to show you." Hank winked at Steve and tugged for her to come along with them. "We have a feeling you're going to like this."

They linked hands and walked around the house together. She pulled to a stop at the sight of not one but three greenhouses twice the size of the one she owned

back at her house. Her hands covered her cheeks, and she shook her head. It shocked her that they pulled off such a huge surprise without her finding out.

“Jeez, Hank, I think she's finally speechless.” Steve threw his arm around her shoulders and pulled her in for a hug. “I wonder what she's going to do when she goes in the barn?”

“I don't know. She probably wouldn't enjoy a brand new barn that we're using to stable the three horses we—”

She screamed and took off running for the big red barn that sat to the side of the pasture, leaving her husbands standing in the yard. Halfway there, she stopped and waved for them to hurry up. She'd always wanted a horse.

Hank and Steve pulled open the barn doors, and Chantel walked in slowly. A horse nickered and stuck its head out of the stall door. She swiped the tears off her cheeks. They gave her the world. Absolutely everything she'd ever wanted, these brothers bent over backward to make sure she received it.

She threw herself into the closest arms. Hank picked her up, and she wrapped her legs around his waist. She kissed him all over his face until he groaned, and settled on his mouth to show him how much she loved her surprise.

Sliding down his body, she squeezed his cock with her hand, and he moaned. “I do believe, Mrs. Foster, we have one more surprise to show you before we show you the rest of the house.”

She turned to Steve. “Take me. I want to see.”

Steve led her through the back door of the house. His hands covered her eyes. They each helped guide her up the stairs.

Removing his hands, he whispered in her ear, “I think you'll like this room.”

“We worked really hard at making it perfect for you.” Hank swung the door open, and she squealed.

The biggest bed she'd ever seen sat in the middle of the room. A canopy draped with white and black silk surrounded the bed and reminded her of her husbands

and their preference for the opposite colors. Her pussy spasmed in delight at the nights they'd share together beneath the lovely canopy.

Pictures of flowers and shelves topped with vases filled with baby's breath, yarrow, and wild white roses graced the walls. She inhaled. Yes, the scent of outside brought into her new house. She'd come home.

Steve's arms wrapped around her waist from behind, his cock hard and swollen pressed against her lower back. Hank moved to stand in front of her and captured her face in his hands. He lowered his head and delved into her mouth with his tongue. She moaned and wiggled against Steve.

"Do you think you can leave all your surprises for a little bit, and we can break in the bed?" Steve whispered against her ear.

Hank raised his head, and she nodded. "I'd love to try out the bed."

"God, we've been fantasizing about this exact moment since drawing up the blueprints all those months ago." Hank tugged at her bottom lip and lowered his hands to her waist. "I can't tell you how many times Steve and I came back to the house, to you, and fucked you crazy after discussing our dreams for this room."

She mewed. "I didn't have a clue."

Steve lifted the bottom of her T-shirt, drew it over her head, flung it to the corner of the room and undid her black bra. Hank squatted down, unbuttoned her jeans, and slid them down her legs, kissing the front of her white thong before stripping it off her too.

The men's gasp pleased her. She'd tried to do little things to take them by surprise, and this morning's choice to mix up her lingerie seemed to do the trick. Each one seemed pleased with her variety.

She stepped away from the men and moved over to their new bed. Lying on her side, she waited for them to follow suit and strip off their clothes. She caught her bottom lip between her teeth, her hand came up to tug at her nipple, and she raised her knee to show them how wet her pussy was over the thought of fucking them both in her new bed.

“Please.” She trailed her hand down her stomach, over her mound, and stuck her finger in her pussy. “Come to bed, my lovers.”

Hank in his white jockey shorts and Steve sporting his black tighter-than-sin skimpies hurried to lose the last of their clothes and join her in bed. Her husbands, yin and yang, came toward her, together as one. She rolled to her back, and the two men lay down on each side of her. She threw a leg over each of them and purred. Each day with them brought new excitement over ways to pleasure each other.

Each of them latched on to a breast, and one hand concentrated on her clit, already damp and swollen. Another hand wiggled under her leg and came up to draw little circles around her anus. Her back arched against so many erogenous zones stimulated at the same time.

It took them a few times at the beginning, but she'd learned how to take both of them at the same time, and it remained her favorite position. To have the two men who filled her heart and soul with love consume her body and come together with her bound them together even more. Much more than she ever thought possible.

Steve moved up and captured her mouth, his tongue giving her a taste of what his cock wanted to do. She moaned and thrust her hips against the pressure on her clit. Her ass squeezed Hank's finger. She wanted more.

Hank moved down and settled between her spread legs. His fingers opened her up fully, and his mouth seized her clit between his lips. She moaned in Steve's mouth, her hand searching beside her for his cock. He moved up, knelt beside her head, and put his cock over her mouth for her. She lifted her head and sucked the head of his beautiful hard cock.

“Aw, love, I'll never get used to your mouth on me.” He gazed down at his brother licking and sucking the juice off her pussy. “Having you here and sharing you makes this special every moment we have together.”

She mumbled in agreement, and Steve's hips bounced his cock farther into her mouth. Unable to take more without losing herself, she let go of Steve's cock. He

winked and moved down to lie on his back. Hank's mouth left her pussy, and he held his hands out to pull her up. They knew exactly what she wanted and needed.

Chantel straddled Steve's hips and sank down on his cock. Sliding her feet down the sides of his legs, she lay prone on top of him, her body stretched out fully on him. Hank leaned over both of them, his arms straight and braced against the bed. His cock poked at her ass, and she bore down to accept him. He let his precum wet her hole and then gently entered her and held still.

"You okay, babe?" His arms bulged with the power of holding his weight off her and Steve.

"Yesss..." she hissed "Move. Do it for all of us."

Hank pulled back and plunged back in slowly. Steve barely moved under her, but through the thin lining separating one hole from the other, the fullness and movements against all three of them set them all into a heated frenzy.

"Oh love." He groaned, his hips lifting both of them into Hank, who timed his movements to plunge into her ass. "It's unbearably tight, sucking my cock in farther."

"I." She gasped. "Want—"

"What, babe?" Hank drew his cock out farther, leaving the tip at the ring of her ass. "This?" He plunged in hard and deep.

"Yes!"

Steve groaned loud, long, and thrust into her pussy. Her legs quivered at the lack of control. She was at their mercy. Taking every inch of their cocks into her body, filling her with the love they showed her every second.

Back and forth, they carried her higher until both cocks shot their loads deep inside her and sent her convulsing around them both. Showers of pain-pleasure all throughout her pussy and ass squeezed every drop of cum from their cocks.

Exhausted, she lay limp on top of Steve. Hank moved off, and sprawled out beside his twin. She threw an arm across his chest and smiled lazily over at him.

Out of everything they gave her today, this moment, this love they shared, meant the most.

“I love you two.”

“I love you too, babe.”

“I love you three, love.”

* * *

Chantel walked through the greenhouse, picked up the pitchfork, and scooped a small amount of horse manure onto the compost pile. She couldn't believe that one year had already passed since they'd all moved into their new house. Her plants had taken the move beautifully, and already two greenhouses were bursting at the seams with herbs and perennials. With only two weeks to go until the first frost, she'd have to hurry to get everything protected from the cold winter they expected.

She turned back, reached for another load, and the pitchfork fell out of her hands. She covered her mouth to smother the cry of surprise. Eve stood beside her. A mist of her former self, she'd never appeared more beautiful.

She lowered her hands. “You're back.”

Eve shook her head. “Only to tell you good-bye and thank you.”

“Didja have to go somewhere else?” Chantel reached out but drew her hand back before she encountered her best friend.

“I no longer have to play the game, Chantel. Everything has changed. I've crossed over to the most wonderful place in the world. There are people there exactly like me, and I'm happy. So very happy.” Eve's smile glowed despite the faded aura she projected.

“I've been so worried about you. I didn't know where you ended up or what became of you.” She blinked. “I've missed you so much. You'll never know how much I think about you every day since you left. How long can you stay? I have so much to tell you.”

Eve smoothed the front of her dress, the same dress she'd worn since Chantel claimed her for a best friend when she was six years old. "I only came back to tell you good-bye for good, and to tell you congratulations." She smiled. "I also have a little confession." She waved her hand in the air. "It's the whole part of this new place. I've got to come clean with my life."

"I don't understand." Chantel frowned.

"I brought Hank to you after he slipped into the coma." Eve's eyes twinkled. "Do you remember a long time ago when you played Didja with me and I asked you what your deepest secret was? You told me you wanted to have sex with two men at the same time."

Chantel laughed. She remembered. She wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes. "Oh Eve, what would I have done without you?"

Eve shrugged. "I would have done anything for my best friend."

"Thank you." Chantel sniffed.

"I'm just happy things worked out in the end." Eve patted her chest over her heart. "And now I can come and tell you congratulations, and we can both live happily ever after."

"You know?" Chantel covered her stomach with her hands.

She nodded. "There are ways I can keep an eye on you from where I am at, and you better believe I'm going to keep up on all the exciting things that will be happening to you and your special family."

"Eve—" She stopped. Hank called for her outside.

"I don't have long. They gave me special permission to come back and see you one last time." Eve held her hand over her heart. "Do me a favor?"

"Anything," Chantel whispered.

Eve pointed at Chantel's stomach. "Name your daughter after me." She grinned.

She stifled the sob that escaped and nodded her head. She hadn't even told the guys she suspected she carried their child. The small mound barely showed, but she knew a baby lay within her womb.

"I will."

"Good-bye, Chantel. Thank you for being my friend." Eve stepped back.

"I love you, Eve. Be happy." Chantel patted her chest, directly over her heart.

"I love you too." Eve moved toward the entrance of the greenhouse, then she stuck her head through the door without opening it and pulled it back inside. "Didja notice that fleabag of a dog didn't bark or growl?"

Chantel laughed. She gazed at her friend and again witnessed her leaving this place for another and smiled. She didn't mourn the loss but looked forward to the future. Eve had found her way to happiness, and now she too could go on without any doubts or guilt.

"What's taking so long?" Hank walked into the greenhouse with Steve behind him.

"I was busy telling an old friend good-bye." She laid her hand over the tiny bulge only she detected in her lower stomach.

"Eve?" he asked.

"Yes." She raised her chin and kissed first one brother and then the other. "We are both finding everything we always wanted."

"Mm, I'll agree with that." Steve threw his arm around her shoulders.

Hank held out his hand. "How about we all sneak up to the bedroom before we have to head over to the community center?" He glanced at his watch. "I think we got some time to spare."

"Um." She stepped away from the men. "About that, you see. I've been meaning to tell you something."

"What?" Hank cocked his head.

Steve gazed at his brother and shrugged. "Beats me. What's up, love?"

She stuck her lower lip out, blew her unruly hair out of her eyes, and gave them a naughty grin. “On second thought, why don't you two take me in the house and see if you can get me to spill my secret?”

“Deal.” Her husbands' voices blended into one.

THE END

Loose Id Titles by Abby Wood

Didja Know...?
Throwing a Kink in the Kidnapping

Abby Wood

Abby Wood lives in Oregon with her husband and kids. An outdoor enthusiast, she enjoys gardening, tennis, and long motorcycle rides. A big animal lover, she enjoys the multitude of animals that come and go in her life. She likes nothing more than to delight readers with a book that will take them out of real life and put them in between the pages of a whole different world...if only for a little while.