



Tierney
O'Malley

Three
Christmas
Kisses

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Three Christmas Kisses

By

Tierney O'Malley

Dedication

*Tom,
You and the girls are my sunshine on a cold
winter day.
Love, me.*

Chapter One

As far as Agent Zack Akerrs was concerned, God created winter to punish humans, to make them feel miserable, uncomfortable, and so freaking cold they'd turn into blocks of ice. Right now, he felt like one. Oregon should be left alone to cougars, bears, mountain goats, and other wild animals accustomed to cold weather to inhabit. Of all the fifty states his supervisor had to send him here, in this miserable cold part of the Pacific Northwest. He supposed he should be thankful Pete, his supervisor, didn't send him to Alaska.

The wind blew disturbing the low thick fog wrapped around him like a wet cloak. He turned up his collar then zipped up his jacket to cover his exposed neck. It was a futile attempt to ward off the chill, but it was all he could do. His sports jacket was useless against the cold wind pricking his skin like sharp needles.

Isabelle Barnes, Environmental Lawyer. He was transferred here because of her. She had better show she was worth his protection, with sensible

reason for going after a government official and not just a show-off attention-seeking tree-hugger. God knows he'd arrested a lot of them who claimed to love mother earth but couldn't explain biodiversity and the difference between flora and fauna.

He wished he'd sat on Pete's offer overnight, researched the attorney's background and considered the weather instead of saying; "I'll take it." like a giddy rookie getting his first assignment. Locking his rental car, he headed toward the city hall. Oregon was hell in winter. Only this morning he thought his balls would freeze while kneeling on the frozen ground figuring out how to attach the snow chains on his tires.

He hated being cold and idle equally. But his choices were either sit on his ass or freeze his ass. Tough.

Zack surveyed the surroundings. Except for the inflatable Santa Claus standing outside the city hall, no soul was around. In fact, the whole town was still asleep. No moving vehicles, no people walking. It was so freaking sepulchral. If it weren't for the lit Christmas lights wrapped around the street posts, he'd think the whole place was deserted.

For years, he had spent most of his time working on the streets of Florida decorated with hookers, bums and transvestites. Not seeing them

around felt kind of weird. Who would have thought he'd actually miss the scars of society. Bend, Oregon was quiet and clean, still, he'd rather be chasing bad guys in his jeans and shirts or lying in a warm bed with a woman sitting astride him wearing nothing but her smile.

Hot weather and heat of a woman, those were two things that made his blood run. Not the snow or fog. Zack looked up and shook his head. He'd be lucky if the sun managed to peek through the thick gray clouds. Again, he tugged at his collar then checked his watch. Four minutes before his meeting with Captain Mark Sanders. If he were to hurry, though, he'd make it to the second floor on time.

He would have been here early, but he couldn't drive faster than fifteen miles per hour. After he fishtailed three times, he decided it was better to go slow. Besides, the fog was so thick he couldn't even see three feet ahead of his car. Zack crossed the snow-covered street. He pulled his sleeve back to check the time again. Yeah, he'd be on time.

In between walking and tapping his feet to rid of the snow clinging on the hem of his pants, he headed toward the building's entrance. He was about to reach for the door handle when suddenly it opened and out came a woman who smacked right into him. What the fuck?

"Eeek!"

The woman squealed like a mouse trapped in her own running wheel. On impulse, he grabbed her waist to keep her from falling backward and pulled her against him. "Easy, honey. What's the hurry? Is the devil after you?" She was soft, warm and smelled like a fresh baked cinnamon roll.

She stared at him with her big and rounded unblinking eyes. She looked like a teenager caught smoking a joint of marijuana. "What? Who's the...no," she sputtered and wriggled out of his hold. But she slipped. Zack tightened his hold on her to keep her from falling.

She wore a black bonnet with strings tied underneath her chin. The bonnet covered her head with only her dark eyebrows, flushed cheeks, round dark brown eyes and full smiling lips, exposed. Through her black trench coat, Zack could feel her slim waistline and the soft rise of her hips and ass. If he were freezing a minute ago, well, not anymore. The woman, although covered from head to toe, quickly warmed his blood waking every parts of his body to a full alert. Especially the parts he thought would freeze. "Honey, you should watch where you're going."

She stopped wriggling. "Me?" she asked. The sign of surprise quickly left her face. "Sweetheart," she said laced with sarcasm. "I always watch where I'm going. You, on the other hand, shouldn't stand where people walk. Not a very

good idea."

Surprised at her quick banter, he decided to keep his hold on her. Damn, he didn't think anyone could be witty in a miserable place like this. Wit, fresh womanly scent and sexy lips were his weaknesses. And this woman possessed them all. An insane feeling of burying his nose on her neck and breathing in her fresh scent helped him forget about the cold air seeping through his jacket. "Are you saying I bumped into you and not the other way around, honey?"

"That's what I'm saying, sweetheart. In my twenty-four years of life, I've never bumped anyone on this spot."

"Never?"

"Never. You are my first and I bet you will be the last."

Zack smiled. She sounded like a woman professing love to her man. He bet she was a romantic at heart. All women were. "What if you're wrong and bumped into me again?"

Her brows knotted and she licked her lower lip. He could tell she was thinking. "I've never been wrong. But if this incident happened again, you can kiss me three times."

"Is that right?"

"Yup."

Damn, she was not only pretty and witty, but bold as well. "Three kisses sound good. Do you

keep your word?" Zack liked her. A lot.

"Better believe it."

"Good. Because when I see you again, I will collect my kisses."

"Sweetheart, I didn't say I'll kiss you when I see you again. I said bump."

"Bump. I like that better. So we have a deal?"

"I never renege on my word. Can you let go of me now, sweetheart?"

"How about if I pre-kiss you right now?"

Laughing, she grabbed his ears and pulled his head down. Zack lowered his head ready for a kiss, but she stopped when their lips were barely touching. He felt her rub his ears with her gloved hands. She was trying to warm him up. The gesture warmed him even more. "Nice try, sweetheart. But I don't take rain checks."

"Maybe you should." His cell phone rang. "Damn." Zack wished it wouldn't ring again, that whoever was calling dialed his number by mistake. His wish wasn't answered.

"You better answer that; it might be important," she said.

Zack fished the phone out of his jean pocket, but didn't answer it. His eyes and mind were focused on the woman's inviting lips. "You're a bright sunshine on a gloomy day, did you know that?"

"Some people think I'm the opposite."

Zack grinned. He was about to give in to the strong urge to kiss her when his damn cell phone rang for the third time.

"Shit." Reluctantly, he loosened his hold on her waist. To his chagrin, she stepped out of his embrace.

"Stay warm, sweetheart."

"No, wait."

"Bye! Happy holidays. Be good. Santa might give you a neat present this year," she waved and walked away laughing.

Zack watched her disappear around the corner before flipping his cell phone. "Agent Akerrs."

"This is Captain Sanders. Where the heck are you?"

"Captain Sanders, good morning. I'm outside your building. I'll be there in a minute." Zack checked his watch. It was three minutes after eight. He hurried inside the building. Damn! He hated being late.

"Don't bother, Akerrs. My niece cancelled our meeting. I swear that woman will be the death of me. Once she sets her mind on something, she won't change it even if it means putting herself in danger. I'll be the happiest person alive once she's off my hands."

His niece cancelled the meeting? "Your niece sir?" he stopped on the second floor and looked at the directory on the wall. The captain's office was

at the far end of the hallway.

"Yes, Akerrs. She's the only woman I know who's not afraid of anything? Have you met anyone like her?"

Zack thought about Tiffany. His on and off again girlfriend was a hardhead, too, but would soften when rubbed on the weak spot. "Sir, I don't believe I've met a woman with —"

"Of course you haven't. Because you're late."

"Sir, are you saying your niece is Isabelle Barnes?"

"Yes. Who else would be joining us? I told her to wait, but she left anyway.

Well, that bit of information must have slipped Pete's mind. "I apologize for being late, sir. I didn't know she was going to be in the meeting."

"Isabelle is a very busy lawyer, Agent Akerrs, and every second is important to her. She said she doesn't have time to wait for slacker."

Slacker? Zack gripped his phone tighter. "I apologize again, sir."

"Your supervisor told me you're one of the few best members of his team, so I'll forget about your tardiness."

"Thank you, sir. Who's watching Isabelle right now?"

"For the past five minutes, no one. The officer who'd been trailing her for two weeks left this morning to see his wife in the hospital. It's okay.

Isabelle needs the breathing space anyway."

"Sir, I don't understand. If her life is in danger —"

"I think she is in danger. But she doesn't think so. She'll be okay for now — I hope."

What the fuck does that mean. Is Isabelle's life in danger or not?

Damn, he had a feeling this attorney was just another environmentalist who wanted her name splashed on the newspaper.

"You have my home address, right Akerrs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I'll see you at my house this afternoon at three. I'd rather meet you in my home office than here anyway."

"But, sir, I'm already here, a few steps away from your office."

"Turn around then. I already decided we'll meet at my house tonight. It's early, Akerrs. Visit the village or do some shopping."

"If you don't mind, sir, I think I'd rather —"

"Turn around, Akerrs." Captain Sanders' voice was firm. "Meet me at my house."

Son of a bitch! Couldn't they at least make an initial introduction, shake hands and bullshit a bit? He truly regretted jumping in the plane without doing his research.

"I'll be at your house this afternoon, sir."

"Good. Hope you brought warm clothes,

Agent, because we'll skate tonight."

"Skate, sir?"

"I'll explain later. Wear something warm if you don't want your ass to freeze out there."

"Will do, sir."

"You already made a bad impression on my niece, Akerrs. So don't be late again."

"I won't, sir." He hung up the phone. Who said he came here to make a good impression. He was here to work on an assignment. Whether he impressed the lawyer or not, as long as he did his job above what was expected of him, nothing else mattered.

Pete Williams, his supervisor, gave him little detail about his new assignment of babysitting Attorney Isabelle Barnes because it was a last minute deal. But he could have at least warned him he'd be working for the captain's niece. Was skating another part of his job Pete had forgotten to mention? He knew Captain Sanders and Pete Williams go way back. So, was Pete's decision for sending him to this miserable part of the west something to do with exchanging favors with his long time friend?

Not in a hurry anymore, he walked back down the steps with dread.

Outside, the wind blew. Zack felt like getting shot with a thousand sharp needles. He could tell he wouldn't enjoy working on this particular job

in this god-awful town. Standing outside was like being locked up inside a freezer. At first you feel the sting and then eventually you don't feel anything anymore. The thought made him shiver even more.

Zack walked back to his car. He scanned the parking lot for any sign of the cinnamon scented woman. She was gone. Too bad he forgot to ask her name. All he got from her was a wonderful few minutes and a cock-rising embrace. If he had gotten her name, he could easily trace her. As it happened, he didn't know anything about her except she smelled so good.

Three kisses each time they meet. Hell! He'd better find her before his job was finished. In a place like this, a man definitely needed a woman to warm his bed. Sun River was a small town in Bend. His chance of finding her would be great. Or he could ask Captain Sanders. She must be an employee here because she said she never bumped anyone here. Oh yeah, he'd find her. But first, he needed to go shopping. His ears would fall off if he didn't find a good cap.

* * * *

Isabelle hummed while driving. Her mind kept drifting back to the man with sensual dark blue eyes and full lips. The poor thing maybe cold, but

his eyes smoldered from banked fire. He looked at her as if he wanted to ravish her right there on the sidewalk. She wanted to kiss him, but a lawyer like her didn't go kissing strangers on the street. It was bad enough that she flirted with him by offering her kisses. Yaikks! She acted like a hormonal teenager.

She was shocked when they collided—or was he right about her bumping into him? It didn't matter who bumped who first. What mattered was she bumped into Mr. GQ with a jaw-dropping ass. Lordy, the moment his strong hands wrapped around her, her nipples hardened and pushed against her bra. Her whole body came to life and responded to his hard pulsing cock pressed against her belly. It was good thing electricity wasn't visible to a naked eye, otherwise, he would have seen sparks flying out of her body. She'd been intimate with a man before, but couldn't remember the last time a simple embrace made her whole body tingle. Crud! She wanted to feel his hard cock pulsing between her legs again.

Isabelle had been on a dry spell. The last real dick she'd had between her legs was Andy's. If it weren't for the pink rabbit vibrator with a clitoral stimulator Marie had given her last Christmas, she wouldn't have anything to occupy her nights at all. The vibrator worked great. She could get multiple and quick orgasms using it, but even

with its different functions such as rotating, gyrating, escalating, and pulsating, it was nothing compared to the real warm hard flesh moving in between her legs.

The thought made Isabelle's vagina pulse. She tried to clamp her legs together to stop the sensation, but the feeling only escalated. A long cold shower. She needed one. When she arrived home, she'd take one.

She could tell the man wasn't from the area. City stood out all over him. A warm city, too judging from the absence of a hat, tan on his face and ungloved hands. He had strong unshaven jaws and wide smiling lips. His rock star-hair was rich dark blond, curly and touching the base of his neck. The man had a face that could grace any magazine cover. Without a doubt, he was attractive.

She bet he was just another tourist curious about wintertime in Oregon. He couldn't be a skier. Skiers knew how to dress up to stay warm in a place like this. Isabelle doubted he was a horseback rider either. She sensed some kind of a roughness about him, but he wasn't a backdoor, trail blazing kind. Whoever he was, Isabelle learned one thing from their brief encounter—the man was as hot as a bun freshly out of the oven. And she wanted the bun even just a nip.

The memory of the embrace she had shared

with the stranger intensified her need to be touched. Isabelle resisted from fanning herself. Her body was already on fire. She bet she could melt the snow if she spread eagle on it. Holding the steering wheel with one hand, she cupped herself. Her wonder vibrator came to mind. Lordy! Her friend, Marie, must be right. She'd been spending her time saving the forest she forgot to spend time for herself. She'd been so dry she offered a total stranger kisses if they see each other again. And worse, it wasn't an empty bullshit offer.

"Ahh! Think Isabelle. You're an attorney not a common slut." This wouldn't do at all. A lawyer like her with an impeccable resume never succumbed to temptation. She was Attorney Barnes not Slutty Barnes. Ugh! Who was she kidding? She'd been using her dildo to pacify her needs. Only a horny slut would do that. It was Marie's fault and her pink rabbit vibrator.

The gravel on her driveway made the familiar crunching sound as she slowly drove on it. Shutting the engine off, she reached for her briefcase sitting on the passenger seat. She shouldn't be thinking about a man or kisses. Her case against Hertz and Mayor Boon loomed over her like thick gray clouds threatening to open and release a downpour. She must focus her mind on her case and not on a stranger with an amazing

pair of blue eyes. She shouldn't have embraced him. What if he suffered from some kind of diseases invincible to a human eye?

Isabelle looked at the cabin next to her house where the agent would be staying. Darn agent. He was supposed to meet her and his uncle this morning, but he didn't show up. If he showed up on time, she wouldn't have left the building and bumped into the stranger. Sheez! What a slacker.

Coming late to his meetings must be his style, to show his importance. Maybe he was the kind who liked to strut on streets wearing a belt with all sorts of weapons and not even bothering to hide his gun. Isabelle imagined a knock-kneed, potbellied balding agent with sweaty forehead, and pockmarked hairy and huge nose. Like the actor in one of those cop shows she'd seen on television.

If this agent turned out to be like the other officers who stayed out of her way, they'd get along fine. If not, she'd give him hell. Too bad she couldn't convince her uncle to stop hiring officers to keep her safe every time she got a case going.

Illegal loggers and companies buying illegally logged timbers, in her opinion, were nothing compared to drug lord mafias, therefore, she didn't need a gun slinging officer to trail her like a shadow.

Just to be on the safe side her uncle would say.

Sheez, last time she tripped on the officer's leg because the man was sprawled on her couch asleep. She'd be safer if no one loitered around her house. Now, her uncle went beyond hiring someone to work outside his jurisdiction—an FBI agent to follow her around. Shoot! Most likely, he'd boss her around. If he was like one of those guys on television, he must be carrying a huge gun, maybe two guns, the size of a black hair dryer strapped on his side. The way her dad used to carry his gun.

Isabelle sighed. Having an agent to follow her like a shadow was bullshit, but she couldn't tell Captain Sanders what she thought of his over protectiveness. He was only after her safety. After all he was her uncle.

Tired from long hours researching at the local library, she got out of her car. She glanced at the cabin again. Was he in there peering behind the curtain with his gun drawn looking for anything he deemed suspicious? Her dad was that way. He used to check on everything, cars driving by, kids on scooters, people walking with their dogs. Her mom used to say her dad was always tuned in even in his sleep.

She'd never marry a man in uniform. Never. But then she might not marry anyone period. At the age of twenty-six, she'd already gone through three broken engagements. And it would stop

there.

Working as an attorney was her dream. But sometimes at night, whenever loneliness sets in, she wondered if she should have just aimed for a lesser intimidating career. Like a baker or a librarian. But come morning, she was always glad to be an environmental lawyer. So what if her only companion at night was her hotdog shaped pillow and the only thing touching her clitoris when she needed release was her rabbit vibrator. If a man couldn't understand her dedication to preserving the natural resources, well, he could take a hike.

Isabelle just walked in her home when her cell phone rang. She dug in her purse slung across her shoulders. Dang, she hoped it wasn't the breath-caller again. She was tired of listening to him breathe on her on the phone. The cell phone screen showed her uncle's number. Flipping the cover, she answered, "Hey, Uncle. It's been a long time since I talked to you."

"Isabelle, don't be a wisenheimer. I talked to Agent Akerrs. We'll meet at my house late this afternoon. Of course, you can come anytime, but Akerrs will be there later. After we brief Agent Akerrs about your case we'll all go to the lake for the potluck dinner."

"He's coming, too?"

"Of course. I already told you about him. You have a case going so you need someone to keep an

eye on you."

Yeah right. Where was this agent this morning? Maybe in his cabin, eating doughnuts and chips or drinking beer. She walked in her kitchen and stood by the window. Moving her kitchen curtain to the side, she looked at the cabin. The blinds were still drawn and no lights were turned on. "Why don't I check if he's in the cabin? If he is, I can talk to him now."

"No. I don't want you intimidating my officer."

Isabelle sighed and let go of the curtain. If Captain Sanders weren't her uncle he wouldn't overreact or be overprotective. She couldn't blame him, though. Her mom was his only sister and he loved her. If he and his wife, Loretta, felt the need to keep an eye on her rested on their shoulders, it was understandable. In fact, she was grateful for that. But to hire an FBI agent? That was over the top! She wondered what the two would do if she told them about the weird phone calls she'd been getting.

"Uncle, why hire an FBI agent from Florida and not from Bend. They have a branch here."

"I know. But Pete highly recommends Akerrs to work for me. He has a good record, trustworthy, and I was told, doesn't take crap from anyone."

"But he was late for the meeting. How did he manage to get a good record?"

"I'm willing to overlook his tardiness this

morning because of the weather. And unlike the previous officers who worked with us before, Akerrs didn't complain about the snow and fog. And that says a lot. I'll see you this afternoon."

"Would you like me to bring something for the potluck?"

"No. I doubt there would be a microwave available for your frozen pot pie."

"Uncle! You're mean." She heard her aunt in the background chastise her uncle for teasing her.

"Just kidding, Isabelle. Just bring yourself and your empty stomach. Your aunt is making pot roast again to contribute for potluck tonight."

"Uncle, the FBI agent isn't necessary."

"He won't be if you stop doing whatever you're doing."

Isabelle looked up heavenward. "Someone has to protect the environment. If we let these greedy companies cut down the forests, imagine what would happen to the endangered species."

"Ah, protect the endangered species to the point of endangering yourself. Listen, Isabelle, and you'd better listen carefully. You disturbed a viper's pit this time. They will strike if necessary."

"Mayor Boon's pit, you mean. Boon is a coward and vain. He wouldn't do anything to hurt me or anything that would jeopardize his image. But that's beyond the point. Uncle, Hertz Logging Company logged the old-growth forests in Oregon

because Boon gave them the license and right to do so. I can prove it to court."

"Damn girl! You won't be able to prove anything if you end up in the gutter with your eyes wide open or worse if they find your head — I'll see you this afternoon. Bye, Isabelle."

Isabelle heard a click before she could say goodbye. She closed the cell phone and tossed it back into her purse. Her uncle worried too much. She hated it when he got so riled up like this. But if he would only listen to her...

Hertz and Boon weren't the first company and government official she had gone after. So far, her head was attached to her body and she hadn't received any death threats or warnings. If her uncle was right and she did put her life in danger for going after the two, she didn't care. She wouldn't let them get away with their crime. The hundred-year-old trees they chopped down thoughtlessly couldn't speak, but she will speak for them.

Isabelle opened her office that once belonged to her father and breathed-in the smell. The pungent smell of her father's tobacco still lingered in the room and in the furniture. She used to play here when she was little while her dad worked. Most of the time, she'd wait for him here until late at night on purpose so he would carry her to bed.

Except for the clean ashtray, nothing had

changed in this room. Her dad's books, pictures on the wall, and gold Cross pen were still here. She wished her father, too. But he and her mother had been gone for years. Still, the secret longing that one day she'd wake up and find her dad sitting on his chair and her mother in her kitchen lingered.

Dropping her weight on the chair, she turned on her laptop. She double clicked her Windows Live Mail and began scrolling through the list of emails. Her cell phone rang again.

"Hello, Marie."

"Isabelle. You answered your phone. That means you're still with us."

"Sarcasm doesn't suit you, Marie. You've been talking to my uncle."

"I see him around, you know. So what's up?"

"Nothing. I didn't call him back." Marie had been her longtime friend to know what *what's up* meant.

"You didn't return Andy's call?"

"No. I am through with him, Marie." Andy dropped her like a hot coal and left. She wasn't stupid to open their line of communication again just because she needed a dick in between her legs.

"Isabelle, you can't live with just a vibrator to keep you occupied at night? You need a real man, a real—"

"I met someone." She blurted out. The three simple words silenced her friend for a few minute. She took advantage of it and read the email from Hertz's lawyer.

"Did you say someone?"

"Yes. A handsome someone."

"Tell! Damn it, Isabelle. Do I have to pry you with questions? How did you meet him? Where? What's his name?"

"Well, I don't know." Using her left fingers, she composed a short polite rejection letter to Hertz lawyer's dinner invitation. Sheez, the man asked her out and didn't even mention anything about the case. Isabelle hit send.

"You don't know what? Isabelle, are you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm here. Just reading my mails."

"I'll kill you Isabelle Frances Barnes."

Isabelle laughed. "Get in line, girl. Uncle said someone's already plotting my death."

"Nothing is laughable about that." Marie's tone changed. She had just lost a husband. Talking about death wasn't a funny matter to her.

"Okay. I met this guy this morning. He's the very definition of a hot rod. But the thing is, I didn't get his name."

"Lame. Do you know where he's staying?"

"Now, Marie. How would I know that?"

Marie tsked on the phone. "That's too bad. Do

you think he's staying in town? Maybe you'll see him again."

I hope so. "Maybe." She heard Erik, Marie's son, calling in the background. Marie made sure she was going to the potluck and then hung up.

She was half way through reading the Rainforest Alliance's newsletter when her mind wandered back to the man she bumped into this morning.

Who was he? Would he be going to the ice-skating tonight? The idea of bumping into him again lightened up her mood. Would he recognize her? She hoped so. It would be damn fun if he asked her for the three kisses she promised she would give him.

When was the last time she had a good deep arousing kiss? Eight months ago. The last time she had spread her legs real wide, not just to accommodate a vibrator, was when Andy and she had sex. Good god! Had it been that long since she was last *boinked* by a man? Not a vibrator, but a real dick? No wonder her libido jumped the moment she felt a strong and yet gentle hold of the man on her. Isabelle sighed. After this case she would take a break and maybe join Marie and their friend Tom for dinner or do whatever just to get out and be seen. She seriously needed to find a man, otherwise, she'd live on vibrator like an addict living on dope.

Chapter Two

Zack was greeted by Captain Mark Sanders and his wife Loretta. The couple wore matching red and green knitted sweaters. He saw the sweater at the Village Market earlier. They were on sale; buy one get one free.

"Agent Zack Akerrs. Glad you made it. I'm Captain Mark Sanders and this lovely lady is my wife, Loretta."

"Glad to meet you, Sir, Ma'am." Zack shook the captains offered hand and then bowed to Loretta.

"Oh, Mark. Isn't he a polite young man?"

"Polite he maybe, but I heard he won't think twice about putting a bullet in between his enemies eyes – if necessary."

"Well, come in. Did you have a hard time finding this house, Agent Akerrs?" asked Loretta.

"No, Ma'am. You have a lovely house."

The exterior of the crafts-man style house was impressive, but the inside was even lovelier. All wood and had a touch of history in it. The house

reminded Zack of his grandmother's home in Texas. Warm, cozy, lived-in and smelled of fresh baked cookies. From where he was standing, he scanned the room. Books filled the floor to ceiling built-in bookshelves, picture frames lined on top of the mantel above the fireplace. An indoor potted fern occupied one corner of the room and the other a grand piano.

Zack assumed the wicker rocking chair and leather recliner facing the fireplace were the couple's favorite. The black leather on the recliner was worn and the rocking chair's varnish was faded. Both looked well used. He had a rocking chair in his living room, too. It belonged to his grandmother. When she passed away, he took it before he sold everything she owned including her house. The chair now sat in his living room. Marley, his main coon cat, claimed the chair as hers seconds after he put it down.

"There are only a few old houses left in Bend and this is one of them, Agent Akerrs. Later, I'll show you the Heritage Walk booklet. This house is featured on the front." Loretta said with pride.

"I'm sure this house made it on the front cover because of you, Ma'am."

"Aww, you're so sweet."

"Akerrs, your arrival here is perfect," said the captain. "Tonight our town will gather at the frozen lake for a dinner potluck and fun night of

skating. And on Christmas day, you'll see our Christmas parade. It's our holiday tradition."

"Sounds like a lot of fun."

"Oh yes! Our Isabelle would be playing the role of Mary again this year," Loretta beamed.

The cashier at the local market told him about the Sun River Lake Parade on ice. A tradition the residents followed closely, he said. Joseph and Mary, the three kings, stable people, and other characters in the bible would be parading wearing skates on Christmas day. He asked the cashier jokingly if there would be a donkey on ice, too. The cashier thought for a moment and said, "That would be a good idea!" Fudge! He was freaking joking. Oregon was part of the U.S. of A, but Zack felt he was in a totally different country. Joseph and pregnant Mary on skates. Now that's a fun thing to see.

"I'm sure Isabelle deserves to play the role."

"Definitely! You see the residents vote on who will be in the parade based on the woman's character, community service, morals, personality and all that. Isabelle always gets voted. On the parade day, you'll see chubby girls, short and tall, thin, no teeth or with buckteeth playing the role of an angel or Mary Magdalene. Our parade, Agent Akerrs, isn't base on superficiality, it's about the person's heart. After all Christmas is all about love, kindness, forgiveness, and all of those good

things. We don't know who else will be participating this year, but we'll find out soon enough. The members of the committee are meeting here tonight."

Damn, if all parades and pageants were all about character and purity of the heart, suicide rate among teenage girls would be lower, Zack thought.

"Sit down, Akerrs." Captain Sanders pointed at the couch. "Isabelle is upstairs. She'll be— Oh, here she comes. Isabelle, come and meet Agent Akerrs."

Zack looked up to see the woman coming down the wooden staircase. At first, he couldn't believe who he was seeing. He stared and stared some more. She may not be wearing a hat and black trench coat, but he would never forget her eyes. It was her. The very same woman who said he could kiss him three times if they ran into each other again. Isabelle Barnes. The woman with a mind of her own, not afraid of anything, the one who called him a slacker, and the brown-eyed angel who felt like heaven in his arms. The very same woman he was supposed to protect. The hell!

Isabelle looked as surprised as he was. For the second time today, she looked at him with her eyes wide and unblinking. Zack couldn't help staring at her. He knew it was rude, but he just couldn't take his eyes off her. The way her short

black skirt showed her slender legs and her white long sleeved blouse showcasing her high breasts did something to his imaginations. All day he wondered about her hair. Now he knew. She had jet-black short wavy hair he wanted to run his fingers through. She was one attractive woman and he, judging how quickly his dick thickened at the sight of her, was attracted to her. Big time.

"It's rude to stare, Agent Akerrs."

He smiled at her to cover up his embarrassment for staring. She didn't smile back.

"Agent Akerrs, Isabelle is our Ms. Manners."

"She was right, Mrs. Sanders. I apologize for staring. It's just Isabelle wowed me."

"You're not the first, Agent. Isabelle, this is Agent Zack Akerrs. He'll be watching your back while you're working on your case. Akerrs, this is our lovely niece, Attorney Isabelle Barnes. She's not only the best environmental lawyer in all of Oregon, but also the belle of this town."

"Uncle, please." A blush quickly crept from Isabelle's neck up to her cheeks. Isabelle offered her hand. "Pleasure to meet you, Agent Akerrs."

"Come now, Isabelle. You know you are beautiful. Our Isabelle is a tough counselor in court and will bite your head off. But outside the court room, she's an ideal model of grace among our young women, Akerrs."

Zack took her hand and squeezed it. A model

figure for seduction maybe. He wanted to laugh. If the couple only knew. Later, he would claim what she had promised him. Right now, she was nothing but a job. A fucking beautiful job. "The pleasure is mine, Miss Barnes."

"Isn't he a polite young man, Isabelle?" Loretta said.

Isabelle's brow rose. He mimicked her. Her brows slammed down quickly.

"Well, it's nice meeting you, Agent Akerrs. I'm sure you know what your job entails. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a meeting with the members of the committee. Are they all in the kitchen, Aunt?"

"Tom isn't here yet, Isabelle." Captain Sanders answered. "I'm thinking, while waiting for him, you should give Akerrs a tour of the house."

"What? Uncle, I have important things to do."

Zack jumped at the idea. "I'd like a tour, Sir. If Miss Barnes doesn't mind." He wanted a tour all right. A tour around her body and mouth.

"Isabelle?" Loretta asked.

Isabelle glanced at Zack then nodded. "Yes, Aunt. I'll give Agent Akerrs a tour."

"Good. Come in the kitchen when you're done and have a cocoa and scones. Isabelle, show Zack the library. Show him your drawings. Take your time. We'll talk about business later, Akerrs."

As soon as Captain Sanders and his wife were

out of sight, he whispered, "I knew I'd see you again, honey."

Isabelle glanced toward the kitchen. "Hope you won't call me honey in front of my Aunt and Uncle."

"You don't want them to know their Mary, a model figure of this town offers kisses to a stranger."

"If I knew you were the agent my uncle was telling me about I wouldn't have offered you kisses," she snapped.

"But you would if I was someone else?"

Isabelle crossed her arms. "Yes."

"Got something against FBI agents, huh?"

"Men in uniform—in general."

"I'm surprise considering your uncle was in service."

"I have my own reasons, Agent Akerrs. Or should I call you Agent Slacker."

"You don't know me, Councilor. I am everything but a slacker."

Isabelle tapped her foot making a staccato sound on the hard wood floor. "But you were late for our meeting."

"First of all, I wasn't informed you were part of the meeting. Second, I was late because of you."

"Ha! You were still outside of the city hall when I bumped into you and it was after eight, which means you were already late. So don't blame me."

Isabelle said indignantly.

Zack's gaze roamed on her face. With a face like hers, he wouldn't mind missing his meeting with the president of the United States just to have a moment with her. "Is it a habit of yours to offer a stranger kisses if you bump into him again?"

"No, but I figured you're a tourist and the chance that I'd be bumping into you again was slim."

"But you're wrong. And in case you haven't realized it, honey, we'll be bumping into each other until my job is over."

"I realize it. But now that we know who and what we are to each other, everything changed. You're here to protect me and you're not a tourist. So forget about the kisses."

"I don't live here. That qualifies me as a tourist. So our situation hasn't change. When you bump into me, I'll collect my kisses."

"Then I'll avoid bumping into you."

Zack took a step forward and bumped Isabelle on purpose. She took a step back. "Sorry, honey. But that would be hard to do."

"You are a despicable person, Agent Akerrs. Were you here because you did something that warrants moving you out of your jurisdiction?" she said with challenge in her voice.

"I am here, Councilor, because I don't say no to a job even if it means babysitting a woman in this

god-awful cold town."

"Ah, I see. I am a job. Good. Let's keep it that way."

"Of course we'll keep it that way. But you should know this, I know when to separate job from pleasure. And I'll try everything to get the pleasure of kissing you.

"You're a despicable flirt. Isn't flirting with your client against your FBI code—if you have one?"

"Councilor, I wouldn't flirt with you if you didn't flirt with me first." Zack touched her cheek shaking his head. Who would have thought the heavenly-scented woman who promised him three kisses would be the same person he'd be watching twenty-four-seven. How lucky could a man get?

"I'm not a flirt." Her tone was clipped.

"In your aunt and uncles eyes you aren't, *Mary*." He pressed his thumb on her lower lip then pulled it down a little before dipping in. A tiny gasp escaped Isabelle's lips. "I know you're not the perfect niece they thought you to be. I saw passion flare in your beautiful eyes this morning, hon. Tell me, Counselor. Do you touch yourself at night...or day?"

Isabelle's face turned a deeper shade of red. "Are you this rude because I called you a slacker or you were born without manners?"

"Man, you didn't think I was rude this morning. Where is the sensual woman I met this morning? Come on, release her."

"I could get your fired for this." She turned her head to the side dislodging his thumb off her soft lips.

"On what grounds? For demanding you give me the three kisses you promised me?"

"I told you I didn't know you were an agent."

"Why give a fuck about my job? What have you got against it?"

"My reason is none of your business."

"None of my business or your three kisses was all bullshit."

"Agent Akerrs, I don't bull shit. You want a kiss? Fine, I'll give you your kiss. But you'll get it if we bumped into each other by accident not on purpose. That's the deal I gave you this morning. Don't know why my uncle thinks you're a breath of fresh air."

"Because I am."

"You are horrible. You're supposed to protect me, not take advantage of me. Continue pressing me and I will start thinking you're the cancer in your squad." Isabelle smiled so big one would think she had just won a big case.

"Pulling your counselor skills, are you?" He shook his head. "I've seen passion in your eyes. Before my job is finished, you'll want me to press

you."

"You know, with your unbelievably rude attitude you just gave me another reason why I should avoid a man like you."

"Like me."

"Yes, like you."

"Must be awful to have PMS like this, huh?"

"Ugh! Ready to see the house?"

"I want to see the library."

"You don't want to see my drawings."

"Drawings? Yeah, I want to see those, too."

Isabelle rolled her eyes. "Come on, I'll show you the house."

Hell, forget the bumping deal. "Wait," he grabbed her wrists, pulled her against him and kissed Isabelle full in the mouth. She didn't pull back, but didn't kiss him either. "Kiss me."

"No. I am an attorney with—"

"—feelings." He pried open her mouth using his tongue.

To his pleasure, Isabelle groaned and cupped his face. Her tongue sparred against his. Isabelle could kiss. Damn, he wondered if she could fuck well, too. Angling his head to the side, he thrusts his tongue deeper. In his mind he was burying his cock deep inside her pussy. The taste of her, her breasts pressed against his chest, and her fresh scent drove him to cup her crotch. But before he could press his fingers harder, she grabbed his

hand and ended their kiss.

"Not too fast, Agent."

"You're a fucking kisser. Been practicing lately?"

Isabelle sighed and took a step back. "Agent, I'm not as green as my surroundings. And you, I don't care where you came from, and honestly, I don't really care if your mouth is as dirty as your mind. But you're in Sun River now. I suggest you refrain from cursing."

He raised both hands in surrender. "I forgot. This is the only place that runs a Christmas parade base on kindness, purity, good morals and right conduct. And the winner is the one with the sterling, cleanest, spectacular background. That's you isn't it?"

"What are you driving at, Agent?"

"In the eyes of this community and your aunt and uncle, you are the purest among them. Little that they know, you have a wicked nature lurking deep inside your magnificent chest." He thought if she turned any redder, she might turn into a little ball of fire. So he was right about her, a hot, sensual woman living in a cold town. "Don't worry, Councilor. Your aunt and uncle won't know about your promise."

For a moment, Isabelle didn't say anything. Zack didn't like the way she was staring at him. Her eyes were too bright, too intelligent. She was

thinking of something, he knew it, but what, he didn't know.

"You're right. I'm not the paragon my aunt and uncle think me to be. I am a lawyer who likes a good fuck here and there. I hide behind a mask of being a model of propriety and you, Agent Akerrs, hide your crudity behind your politeness. You found your match, Agent. If you think you can use your piggish manner to make me quake in my boots, you're wrong. You cannot intimidate me. You are working for me and not the other way around. I will get whatever and whenever I want from you. You're outside your turf, Agent. It's I who will make you go down on your knees. And I won't be held responsible if you remain in that position."

Damn, damn, damn! He'd try to remember to give Pete a Christmas present for sending him here. If Isabelle was the kind she said she was, his job wouldn't be as boring as he thought it would be. He liked kick-ass, feisty women. "Good. Now we are clear on the subject, I look forward to going down on my knees, honey."

"You had your first kiss, Agent." Turning around, she walked ahead of him providing him a nice view of her backside. Her skirt showcased her finely shaped butt. Each time she swayed her hips, his dick pulsed.

The woman was one temptation he knew he'd

have a hard time ignoring. Zack wondered if she had dimples on the small of her back. "I wouldn't keep count if I were you. I'll bump into you so many times you'll get tired of counting." He smacked her rump and grinned when she cried an indignant hey. "Start the tour, honey. I want to see the library."

He followed Isabelle as she took the narrow hallway where aged pictures, portraits and landscapes hung on the wall. She stopped to point at one particular portrait. It was a black and white picture of men standing on a fallen log. She was taking her sweet time showing him the pictures. He tried to show interest in what she was telling him, but her lovely womanly scent was worse than seeing a naked dancer rubbing herself up and down against a smooth pole. He was as hard as a rock. Finally, they reached a door to the right. Isabelle opened it and stepped inside. He followed.

A tournament sized billiard table stood in the middle of the room with an overhead light above it. The light was turned on giving the room a subtle glow. He smelled a faint smell of cigar mingling with the scent of an old wood. Like a cabin in the woods that hadn't been used. "Nice pool table."

"I used to play here too when I was younger. When I started college, I stopped." Isabelle leaned

her hip on the table, picked up a ball and rolled it. The ball went in the corner pocket.

Zack gently closed the door behind him and locked it. He stood behind her real close before encircling his arms around her. She stiffened at his touch, but didn't resist. Her sweet womanly scent assaulted his senses waking every parts of his body. With her back melded on his front, he kissed the exposed skin just below her ear. "No time for play?"

"No."

"We do right now." He smiled when he felt Isabelle's body quiver. Ah, so he wasn't the only one affected with their nearness. She was so smooth and round in the right places. Her ass was pressed against him with the length of his dick in between her crack. "Do you want to play?"

"Yes."

Zack lowered his hands to hold her hips. He thrust against her well rounded ass to press his erection harder. He wanted her so badly. "Are you good?"

"Want to try me?" Isabelle turned her head to look at him. Even with the subdued light, he could see arousal through her eyes.

"Thought you'd never ask." He cupped her breasts and kissed her with an open mouth, releasing the passion he bottled up since he saw her this morning. Using his other hand, he lifted

her skirt. He knew how arousing it was for a woman to be touched in between her legs. Isabelle's moan proved him right when he cupped her vagina. She was warm and plump. Zack wanted to roar. An unfamiliar powerful surge of passion ignited his fuse. He wanted to tear her clothes and fuck her from behind. But he kept his mind focused on Isabelle, on what she wanted, and how to give it.

Isabelle raised her hand to touch his face thrusting her breasts in the process. The need to touch her skin rose higher. With a steady hand, he lifted her blouse and pulled it off over her head. He unhooked and removed her bra before turning her to face him. Zack admired her slim arms, shoulders, and full breasts. "Just as I thought, beautiful."

He lowered his head and sucked one puckered nipple. The feel of her hard nipple inside his mouth was enough to lose his control, but he fought it. In silence, he lifted both breasts higher, opened his mouth and took as much flesh as he could. Without second thought, he snaked his hand inside her thong to touch her heat.

Isabelle clamped her legs trapping his hand. "Open for me," he whispered. Isabelle didn't. She stared at him with her eyes wild with desire. "Honey, open for me," he repeated. The moment her thighs relaxed, he touched her cunt. What he

found was not just a warm pussy but a wet one, too. "You're wet."

Isabelle's hand wrapped around the back of his neck. She was getting hotter every second. "How could I not be? I am a woman and...your touch excites me."

"Glad to hear that."

Isabelle's sound of protest when his mouth left her breast was quickly replaced with a sigh when he tongued her cleavage up and down. And when he left a trail of wet kisses all the way down to her navel, she whimpered lustily. Damn, he loved a scent of a woman.

Hooking his thumbs on her thong, he lowered the thin material and slipped it off her feet. On his knees, he ran his hands along the length of her legs, bunched her short skirt around her waist and cupped her ass. She possessed a body he wouldn't mind tasting all night. Pressing his nose on her dark well-trimmed pubic hair, he inhaled deeply. "You smell so great, Isabelle." He lifted Isabelle's leg and placed it on his shoulder giving him a better view and access to her pussy.

"Zack," Isabelle whispered. Both of her hands were on his head raking his hair.

Pulling back the hood of her pussy, he ran his fingers up and down her wet seam before licking her distended clitoris. He teased her clit with his tongue before he stuck it inside her weeping cunt.

Isabelle's taste nearly undid him. "You're sweeter than honey." He penetrated her with his middle finger, rotated it inside like a corkscrew before he started pumping.

Zack wanted to bury himself deep inside her, but this wasn't the place. For now, to touch and taste her would be enough...for now.

Isabelle's fingers dug in his scalp. Slowly, he took her hand kissed her palm before placing it on top of her pussy. "Spread yourself."

Isabelle licked her lips as she formed her two fingers to a V to spread her lips. And then she shut her eyes tight.

It took great control on his part not to ejaculate at the sight of her glistening cunt. His fingers withdrew an inch only to go back in again, deeper this time. Isabelle moved her hips in a very erotic way.

"Oh, Zack, this is sinful."

"Sinful and fucking good. Honey, you're mine," he flat tongued her. With his tongue all the way out, he moved his head from side to side mixing his saliva with her thickening juice. Her taste, like a drug, inebriated him. Repeatedly, he lapped at her. The sexy moaning Isabelle was doing urged him to please her even better. While his fingers mimicked the act of making love, he sucked her clitoris. His free hand cupped her butt then moved to her side all the way up to feel her firm breast.

"Zack! Oh, god...so good. Hmm."

He could feel her contract. "Yeah, that's it. Grind your hips. I want more of your pussy. Yes..." he formed his mouth like the letter O, stuck his tongue and then sucked her clit pulling it out of its hiding until Isabelle nearly spit his fingers out. Her body convulsed, but he didn't stop. When she finally stopped rocking her hips Zack pulled out his fingers only to replace them with his mouth. He continued to suck and groaned as he tasted her come. After licking her clean, he slowly kissed his way up to her lips. "You're remarkable."

Isabelle smiled sweetly. "And you Agent Wicked just went down on your knees."

Chapter Three

First meeting and she spread her legs for him. Disgusted by her own wanton behavior, Isabelle took a bite of her scone like a lion would on a fresh meat.

When she saw Zack talking to her aunt and uncle, she knew right away who he was, but instead of feeling bad for mistakenly flirting with an officer, she felt excited. She promised herself to stay away from Zack's kind—a man in uniform. But with Zack, she felt different. She was attracted to him. The attraction was in fact so strong she showed him her uninhibited side. And if she'd be honest with herself, she wanted his hands and lips on her again. She was looking forward to being with him, period.

She wasn't a newbie in terms of sex and had had her share of men, but Zack, for such a short period of time, brought the sensuality out of her. Not even Andy made her feel that way. Zack made her feel like a teenager again, discovering

sex for the first time.

Under the table, Isabelle crossed her legs. She was still slick from her juice and Zack's saliva.

How did it happen? How could she lose her mind so easily? When she led him to the billiards room, she thought about carrying on her plan of knocking him off his high horse. She wanted to show him she was in charge, that she indeed could get what she wanted and when. Her plan was to let him have a taste of her mouth. Just a taste and then she'd stop him. But when she felt his mouth on her breasts, all thoughts of showing him who was in charge fled. Lord, she was so horny begging him to fuck her was at the tip of her tongue.

She acted like a loose bitch. Isabelle bit hard on her scone again. Yes, Zack made her weep and saturate her skimpy thong, but it wouldn't happen again. It shouldn't. She must keep him at bay no matter how much her body yearned for a repeat of what they shared. Zack mustn't distract her.

For years, she avoided getting tangled with a man like him. She wouldn't start now especially if she didn't want the same life her mother had led. Zack, based on his behavior was one womanizer expert in seducing a woman, with foul mouth, and worse a man in uniform.

For three weeks, they would be together. Keeping him away from her would be impossible

but she could do this. She already let him get to third base—that was fine, but she'd make sure her home base was covered entirely. Yeah, she could do it.

Nodding to herself, she looked at the closed library door. Zack had been there with her uncle. The two were probably talking about how to better protect her. Well, the way she pressed Zack's head against her pussy, her uncle should hire someone to protect Zack from her. Finishing her scone, she took a chocolate chip cookie from the plate and chewed it with gusto. Damn it, of all the people in the world, why did she have to offer kisses to an FBI agent?

With her good sense coming back, Isabelle decided to tamp down her attraction to Zack. For sure he would make advances, but she could block them. Agent Akerrs was nothing but a disaster waiting to happen. She wouldn't let that happen.

"Isabelle, dear. You've been talking to yourself again. Did you hear what Mrs. Edel said?"

"Sorry, Aunt. I was thinking about...logs. Yes, Mrs. Edel?"

"I asked if your agent is okay."

"My agent? Mrs. Edel, Agent Akerrs isn't mine. And yes, he is good." Way too good for her taste.

"We thought so, too."

The library door opened. Her uncle came out followed by the man who had just given her a

spectacular orgasm.

Zack's faded low-rise jeans hugged his narrow hips. He must be over six feet tall, with wide shoulders and long strong arms that he wrapped around her tightly after her body turned languid. Without his coat, his black holster strapped on his side encasing a black gun was exposed. The front of his dark blue long sleeved shirt was tucked inside his pants showing his big brass buckle. The tips of his wavy light brown hair were pointing in every direction giving him a look of a rake and a scoundrel. Some might say he needed a haircut. Not her. She was a sucker for rock-star hair and would never ever suggest he get a haircut. She already knew he possessed a pair of dark blue eyes with thick black lashes, nose with a slight bump on the ridge and a tiny scar just above his left brow. A scar that added to his dangerous and sensual look. She wondered how he'd got it.

Zack raised his brow at her and then winked.

Suddenly, voices around her started fading. The whole room lost its color leaving only Zack in the spotlight for her to peruse, stare and drool over. Her insides quivered. Her toes curled. Insanely, she wanted to giggle. *Lordy, I am in deep trouble.*

"Zack, dear." Loretta started. "We are so happy you could be our Joseph this year."

* * * *

"I will be fucking Joseph for the parade wearing a robe and carrying a staff. Are you insane?"

"Zack, there's no need for you to curse."

"I will curse if I want to. Damn it, woman, do you have any idea how hard it would be to stand here on skates wearing a stupid bed sheet? On this god damn cold ice. Are you out of your mind?" Zack couldn't believe the beautiful aggravating woman standing in front of him, with an innocent look on her face made a decision on his behalf, telling the committee he'd be a good Joseph. If he weren't attracted to her, he'd wring her lovely neck.

"I already told you, Mrs. Edel asked me if you're good. I said yes. I didn't know she meant if you're good to play the role of Joseph."

"Tell me again why you didn't hear the part about me playing the role?"

"I was, uhm...woolgathering."

"You mean daydreaming."

"Same difference," Isabelle shrugged her shoulders, then gave him a smile.

"What about Tom? How could you not hear them talk about him breaking his foot?"

"Woolgathering."

"And the part when they discussed a replacement?"

"Woolgathering."

"You're unbelievable! How did you become a tough lawyer if you have a bad habit of woolgathering during a meeting?"

"I don't daydream in court. No."

Zack ran his fingers through his hair. He looked at the frozen lake full of people on ice skates. "Damn. Maybe Tom's foot will be healed before Christmas."

"Not gonna happen. It would take a month or so before his foot heals. I don't understand why you're in a tizzy."

"Tizzy? What am I a girl?"

"Whatever you call your reaction—pother, dither. Anyway, you should like the idea. After all you'll be beside me, Joseph the carpenter, as we walk around this ice rink waving to people until we find that manger," she pointed at the manger, which looked like a single stable with a missing door and walls. There were stacks of hay that he supposed would be used for later.

She was right about the advantage of being close to her. Still he wanted to squeeze her long neck for not asking him first. "I don't get it. Why do you have to skate around here when you could just have your parade on the street?"

"Agent Akerrs, where's the fun in that? We've been doing this tradition for years. Like my aunt told you, our parade is different. We do this for

fun. Look around you. These people look forward to the Christmas parade every year because it is special. And these same people will be watching *you* as you glide on ice."

That was another problem. "I haven't skated in years. But that's not the point. If something happens I won't be able to move as fast if I'm on skates."

"If something happens. You sound like my uncle. Well, if you're concerned about making a spectacle of yourself, we have plenty of time to practice until Christmas. In fact we can do it tonight, and tomorrow, and the next day. But I am available only in the morning. I have to work the rest of the day. How about we start at eight tomorrow morning? Meet me at my doorstep."

She was doing it again. Making a decision for him. He was in charge with her and not the other way around. Captain Sanders warned him Isabelle was a decision maker. Whenever her mind was set, there was no way of changing it.

Let her do what she wants and you'll get along pretty well. Sanders had told him. Shit, no wonder the woman had a bratty attitude. Her uncle helped her turn into one. Zack stared at Isabelle. Damn those beautiful eyes. Just one look from her and a man would be on his knees. And he wasn't an exception.

"Eight is too early."

"You want to be here early before the whole town wakes up. That way we can have the frozen lake to ourselves. So if you land on your magnificent butt, no one will see you."

Isabelle smiled up at him. A modern Helen of Troy. Any man would do anything just to have her. With the back of his hand, he touched her face. Her cheeks and nose were red from the cold, but he knew why her lips were unusually red.

"It's too cold. Wanna stay in my car for a while."

"And do what? We were so late coming here because I made a mistake of riding with you."

"You didn't mention anything about it being a mistake when you moaned beneath me." When the captain, his wife and members of the committee drove away in their respective cars, he didn't follow right away. Instead, waited until they were all gone then turned to face Isabelle and reclined her seat. At first, Isabelle resisted, but as soon as their lips melded, the kiss turned into heavy necking and petting. In a very short time, he was able to free her breast and suck on it. When her breasts weren't enough to satisfy his burgeoning need, he snaked his hand inside her black ski pants to cup her warm pussy. The way she spread her legs to make room for his invasion told him she was as eager and hot as he was.

"Lower your voice, Agent."

He moved closer to her then whispered in her ear, "You enjoyed what I did, what we did. You're soaking panty proved it."

"For Christ sakes. Do you have to bring that up?"

He shrugged in indifference. "I just want to make a point."

"Well, I won't be riding with you again."

"Oh yes, you will. And you'll be doing a different kind of riding before my three weeks are up. Also, don't forget that I'm in charge of you and your safety. I have to make sure—"

"Bull. Don't pull your FBI crap with me. Safety? You wanted me in that car so you could claim more kisses."

She was right. He wanted more kisses. While they were in the car, he considered continuing what he had started, but he controlled himself. And it was damn hard, too. He knew once he touched her again, he wouldn't be satisfied with just a touch. But he didn't want to make any move that could potentially lower his guard. The car was parked in the driveway, a wide-open space. If someone was out there to take Isabelle down, he could easily do it. And his gut told him Isabelle had made an enemy and they just waiting for the right moment to shut her up.

With him in charge of keeping her safe, whoever was after her would have to get to him

first. He'd lay down his life for this woman. It was his job. Whether she believed it or not his intention to keep her safe superseded his intention to bed her.

"Yes. To kiss you and keep you safe. It would be boring just to sit in the car doing nothing, don't you think?"

"Are all agents like you?"

"Maybe. But I don't think a lot of them are as lucky as me. I get to keep an eye on the beautiful woman who offered to give me three kisses, who could kiss like an angel, smells like morning sunshine and one that I want to—"

"Akerrs, my boy! Isabelle. There you are." Captain Sanders checked his watch. "We've been here for half an hour. Did you have a hard time driving in the snow?"

"No, Sir. Driving here was easy." Zack felt Isabelle jab his back, a silent warning. He grabbed her hand and didn't let go. "My snow chains came off and it took me a while to put them back." Isabelle twisted her hand, but he tightened his hold. When she finally relaxed, he rubbed the exposed skin between her gloves and sleeve. He'd never mixed work and pleasure before, but with this woman he could tell he'd have a hard time separating the two. And that meant trouble.

"Well, you made it. That's good."

"Uncle, Zack. I have to say hi to Marie and

Tom, I'll be right back." Isabelle tugged her hand free.

"I'm coming with you." Zack made a move to follow, but Captain Sanders stopped him.

"One thing you should know about Isabelle is that she'll go and do whatever she pleases. You can watch from a distance but don't hover. She'll snarl at you."

"Sir, if I have to do my job—"

"Akerrs, loosen up. You remind me of my brother in-law, Isabelle's dad. So uptight and took his job so seriously he turned my sister's hair grey overnight. Don't worry about Isabelle. She'll be okay around these people. Just make sure you can see her. Here Akerrs, use these."

Captain Sanders handed him a pair of skates. "Sir, I'd rather just watch."

"Come on, if you skate you won't feel the cold at all. Once you started moving, you won't even need your jacket anymore."

"Sir, if I skate I might lose sight of Isabelle."

"Glad to hear your eager to protect my niece, Akerrs, but give her room. The girl's used to being by herself for so long, she didn't want anyone following her around or getting orders from an agent like you. She got a long with the previous officers I hired to watch her because they gave her a wide berth. Do the same and your job will be a lot easier, Akerrs."

Ridiculous, he thought. He was here to protect her and if it meant giving her orders he'd do it whether she liked it or not. "Sir, my order is to protect her. I'll do everything I can to succeed."

"To protect her as a client or as a woman?"

"Both, Sir."

"You like her, Akerrs."

It wasn't a question but a statement coming from another man. "Yes, Sir."

"I can tell, I see it in your eyes. I'm not surprised. The officers who watched her before all fell in love with her. Then they let her do whatever including letting her out of their sights. It boggles our mind, really, because Isabelle is one pain in the ass...sometimes."

"She's a beautiful and smart woman, Sir." And not only a pain in the ass, but a pain in the dick, too.

"I'll give you a heads-up, Akerrs. Isabelle vowed not to get involve with a man in uniform. She might dance to your tune, but don't take it personally if she leaves you on the dance floor alone." Captain Sanders let out a pent up sigh as if the whole world was on his shoulders.

Zack remembered what Isabelle had said. She would offer any man a kiss, but not an officer. He wondered what happened to make her hate officers. Zack crossed his arm across his chest and trained his eyes on Isabelle.

"Isabelle is a good girl." Captain Sanders continued. "She was my sister's world. Irene wanted nothing but the best for her and that's what Loretta and I are hoping too. We hope she'd find a good man someday. Three jerks broke her heart when they realized Isabelle was too much for them. Broke the engagement and left her. She's recovered since then. And I think she was glad none of the engagements came to fruition."

Three. He wondered if she met the three men the way they did this morning. "I am sure whoever those men were didn't deserve her."

"I guess you're right, Akerrs. I understand you're not happy with this transfer. Don't worry. Isabelle's case will be over in three weeks. After that you can go back to Florida. Keep our Isabelle safe and I'll be forever in your debt."

"I give you my word, Sir."

"Thank you. Try to enjoy the night, Akerrs. And go skate. That's an order."

"Yes, Sir."

"I'll go see my wife. Don't forget to try Loretta's pot roast."

Zack nodded. In his eight-year career as an FBI agent, he never had a job as easy as *babysitting*. Following a woman wouldn't require a cocked gun ready to shoot, there won't be any need to flash a badge and no or little paper work involved. The job sounds boring compared to hunting drug

dealers or hiding behind dumpsters in the middle of the night to bust a deal. But after meeting Isabelle, everything changed. Watching her became as important as any violent case he'd handled in the past.

He couldn't understand why he was so attracted to her. Okay, she was a smart lawyer, tasted great and looked great with or without clothes. So what? He'd had women with the same qualities in the past. But after their hot interlude in the billiards room, an intense irrational craving to touch her nagged him. The feeling was so frightening. And worse, what Captain Sanders told him about Isabelle's aversion to men in uniform bothered him. Isabelle let him touch her the way a lover would. Was that her way of dancing to his tune? Eventually, she'd leave him on the dance floor.

He'd never been so infatuated this deeply before. And the weird part was, they had just met.

From his spot, Zack watched Isabelle laugh with her friends. What did she say her names were? Ah, Marie and Tom.

Isabelle must have sensed him because she looked his way and waved. Zack raised his hand and waved back.

An older couple skated in front of him. He returned their greeting with a nod. Since they arrived at the frozen lake, he'd been constantly

nodding his greetings. Everyone was in a jolly mood he began to suspect the free drinks were spiked with antidepressants.

Two young ladies slowly passed in front of him. He recognized them right away. They were the same two who'd been going back and forth trying to get his attention. Both women were blondes, with nice racks and sweet looking asses. But they failed to catch his interest. Unlike Isabelle. What had she done to him?

* * * *

She had to get away from him before she started batting her lashes in front of her uncle. All afternoon she mentally prepared herself to block all of Zack's advances. She even made herself believe she didn't like him. Why not? He had the manners of a pig, foul-mouth and an FBI agent. Zack was the kind who indulged in sex the way she indulged on Dove bar ice cream, and a one-night stander type. She liked a man who would spend time courting her, Zack was the lets-get-naked-and-fuck type of guy. He wasn't the one she'd choose to cohabitate and share a serious relationship. Except for his arousing touch and knockout looks nothing about him was desirable. But as soon as he touched her vagina, her idea of keeping him on third base dissipated. In fact, she

wanted to take her clothes off, rip his with her teeth and jump on him. If they weren't in the confined area of his rental car, she bet she'd let him run home.

Isabelle looked back to where Zack and her uncle were standing. She could tell they were talking about her. Zack was staring at her intensely nodding to whatever her uncle was saying.

Letting him touch and taste her in the billiards room was a big mistake. Zack lit her like an eternal flame she knew would be hard to douse. Isabelle groaned. This wouldn't do at all. She must block his advances before she found herself buried in a deep muck again. He'd be working for her only for three weeks.

She could handle his charms. She was a high-powered attorney for Pete's sake. Of course, it would be too damn disappointing if they parted ways without feeling him in between her legs, but early disappointment would be better than a lifetime of regret.

Isabelle waved at Marie. She could tell her about Zack and her plan to avoid his seduction, but knowing Marie, she'd only push her to abandon her number one principle—avoid an officer of any kind at all cost. She sighed and shook her head. The fates were playing hard on her. Now, she found a perfectly good hormone,

but residing in the wrong man. Where the hell was justice in this cruel world?

"Hey, Isabelle. You're glowing. Use your rabbit again?" Marie greeted her with an unusually big smile.

"Ha. Ha. Very funny, Marie."

"I tell you, Patsy's Wonder Toys is the best place to find a gift for lonely women."

"Who says I'm lonely. I'm up to my neck with research to feel too lonely."

"Fine. Sex deprived then."

"Whatever. Where's Erik?"

"I sent him over to your FBI friend over there to sell his hand warmers."

"He's not my friend, you know."

"Not yet. God! Isabelle, I've never seen such a cute ass in my life. And the cute ass is going to follow you around for weeks. Lucky!"

"You want him? Go ahead. I don't need a cute ass following me around."

"Why? Isabelle, don't tell me you're so attached to your..." Marie looked around then leaned forward to whisper in her ear. "...vibrator you don't want the real one anymore."

"Of course I want the real one. But not this one, though. And you know why."

"Yeah, yeah. He's FBI. Geez, Isabelle. I would think you'd make an exception. After all, this FBI of yours is top grade A meat."

And a wonderful seducer, too. "No exception, Marie. Zack, from what I have learned, is worse than my dad. He is dedicated to his job and would probably pick his badge first before anything else. I won't tangle with him. I'll make sure of that."

"All right then. Well, now I know what to give you for Christmas."

"What?"

"A box of batteries."

* * * *

From where he stood, he watched Isabelle mutter to herself until she reached her friend. She had muttered the whole time she was in his car especially after he ravished her while parked outside her uncle's driveway. She looked disconcerted he didn't say anything until they reached the frozen lake. Yes, he wasn't her type. He was the wrong man because of his profession, but as far as he could tell, they'd be lovers no matter what. The way she responded to his touch, he knew it would only be a matter of time. Isabelle made gestures with her hands, talking to herself like a loony again. Man, of all the women in the world, he had to feel the insane powerful attraction toward a loony.

He blew on his gloved hands. The cheapo gloves kept his hands warm only for about two

hours. Stuffing his hands in his pockets, he went back to watching Isabelle.

"Excuse me."

Zack looked down to see a boy holding a box standing in front of him. "Hey, what's up?"

"Are you cold?"

"A bit. Why?"

"I'm selling hand warmers for a dollar-fifty each. You hold it and it'll keep you warm."

"Really. You're not trying to con me, are you?"

"No, Sir. I won't con an FBI agent."

"Where did you get the idea I'm an agent?"

"Mrs. Sanders is telling everyone about you. She said you're a polite FBI agent. So are you going to buy my warmers?"

"Give me four." Damn! Might as well wear his badge for everyone to see.

"Sir, can we trade?"

"Trade what?" Zack took the plastic packets from the boy's outstretched hand and tore the plastic cover. He squeezed the packets and felt it grew warm. The heat seeped through his gloves.

"You can have my warmers. Free, Sir, if you let me borrow your gun. You got one, right?"

"Yeah. Why? Who do you plan to shoot?"

"Ben and Jerry."

Zack bent down to level with the kid. He'd seen abused children loiter the streets. Looking at the kid, he could tell he wasn't physically abused. He

looked healthy, with sparkly eyes, well groomed, and wore fairly new clothes. Still, not seeing bruises didn't mean the kid wasn't abused at home. "What's your name?"

"Erik Duggan, sir."

"Erik. That's a very good name. Strong and noble." The kid beamed at him and puffed his chest. "Now, why do you want to shoot Ben and Jerry?"

"They're mean."

"Are they your brothers?"

"No, Sir. I think Ben and Jerry are brothers, though. They live in the house next door."

"Erik, you can't shoot anyone because they're mean to you. Sorry, buddy, but I can't lend you my gun."

"Well, can you help me get my baseballs back from their yard? I accidentally hit my baseballs there, but Mom told me not to go to their yard. Ben and Jerry will hurt me."

Zack wondered how many baseballs Eric had *accidentally* hit over the neighbor's yard. "How about if I go visit you at home so I can talk to your mom and your neighbors. I might be able to help get you your baseballs back."

"Sure thing. I'll tell mom. Woohoo!" Erik spun on his skates, took off and disappeared in the crowd.

He'd ask the captain where the kid lived later.

Skaters whizzed past him. Most of them could pivot and do all kinds of moves on ice. He used to be able to do those things—years ago. He'd learned how to ice skate at Ice Arena where he could quickly grab on to the railings to avoid falling on his ass and embarrassing himself. Skating on a frozen lake was an altogether different scenario. If one suddenly lost control, he'd end up in the deep snow bank or in the unlit area beyond the cordoned zone.

Zack winced at the thought of wearing skates on pageant day. He could imagine himself sprawled on the snow while kids zoomed by him with their tongue sticking out, laughing their asses off. "Just freaking shoot me," he mumbled.

Once again, he looked where he knew Isabelle was. She was bending over putting her skates on. He decided to put his own, too. If she were going to skate around, he'd follow her. True, it had been ages since he'd skated, but isn't skating like riding a bicycle? Once learned it wouldn't be forgotten, right?

While tying his laces, his eyes were on Isabelle. But before he could finish lacing his second skate, she skated away from Marie and disappeared in the crowd.

God damn it! Where is she going? Feeling confident enough, he started walking on his skates. He tried to push one foot the way a rooster

would when scratching dirt to look for food. Switching back to walking, he tried to follow Isabelle. He spotted her but skaters blocked his view and he lost sight of her again.

Again, he tried the rooster style. He was beginning to pick up his speed when someone yelled "hey" from behind him. With difficulty, he was able to turn around. Two men in their black baggy pants, hooded sweatshirts and wearing bandannas on their heads both grabbed his arms and spun him around three times before letting go.

"Have fun skating, FBI!"

Zack was catapulted in the direction that wasn't well lit. Hell and thunder! He tried to stop by dragging the tip of his skate. Big mistake. His legs started splitting. *Fuckin' eh.*

Through his peripheral view, he saw someone coming toward him. With his speed they would surely collide. "Hey, get out of the way!" he yelled.

"Zack, stop!"

He recognized Isabelle's voice. "Can't," he yelled back. Too late. He plowed her, literally. Ear piercing scream nearly split his eardrums. Amazingly, they remained standing. He tried to hang on to her and together they glided on their skates. Zack could see they were heading toward the steep snow bank. He tried to turn around so he

could take the impact of the hit, but it was too late. Wrapping his arms around Isabelle, he braced for the hit. The snow bank exploded around them as their bodies slammed against it. Since the snow was soft and powdery, it didn't stop them from falling. Together they landed on ice. Last time he went down so fast like that was when he was dodging bullets.

Zack found himself on top of Isabelle. "Are you okay?"

"Oh my god! You are a disaster off and on the street," she said laughing.

He removed his glove and wiped the powdered snow off her face with his fingers. "Sorry, honey. It's not my fault."

"I know. The Jamieson boys victimized you."

"The freaking punks pushed me. No. Actually, they catapulted me. Bastards."

"They like to target wobbly and weak-on-the-knees skaters."

"Are you calling me a wimp?" God! She felt wonderful against him.

"I didn't mean to imply, sweetheart."

Her eyes twinkled in the dark. "Are you hurt?" he touched her lips.

"No. Are you?"

"I'm good."

"You're not cold?"

"Not since I met you. You're like a fireplace,

furnace and oven that warm me up." His dick pulsed at his melodious, sexy and arousing laughter. Zack took a deep breath and leaned his forehead against hers. He couldn't believe how worried he had felt when he lost sight of her. "Don't do that again."

"Do what?"

"Go somewhere where I can't see you."

Isabelle cupped his face with her gloved hand and stared at him intently. "I knew you'd be bossing me around."

Zack remembered what Captain Sanders had said. Isabelle doesn't do well with orders, but if bossing her around was what it would take to keep her safe and close to him, he'd do it. "I'm not bossing your around. You just made me worry. Imagine if something bad happened to you. How am I gonna get my kisses."

"I am sure you'll get them anywhere, from anyone."

He gave Isabelle a quick kiss. "But they wouldn't be as good as yours. And, Isabelle, next time you leave my side, I'll handcuff our hands together. And we'll be both naked the whole time. Here, take my hand."

"You're a rotten FBI agent."

"You have no idea. Are you sure you're not hurt?" he asked Isabelle who was shaking snow off her head.

"I'm sure."

"Come on before we freeze to death. I lost my hand warmers," he took Isabelle's hands and stood on his skates. His legs immediately begun to split.

"Try skating backward, Zack. Pull me."

"How is that gonna help me."

"I took lessons when I was a kid. Believe me it helped. Just do it." Isabelle took his hands. "You're not used to this kind of weather huh?"

Wobbly, he tried to skates backward and pulled her. "I was born and raised in Texas. I moved to Florida when I was eighteen and lived there for years. So the answer to your question is no. I'm not used to this kind of weather."

"Well that explains why you looked so miserable this morning. I noticed you're wearing a new pair of snow boots. I love the skullcap, too. But you bought the wrong kind of gloves."

"I know."

The cluster of trees around the frozen lake disappeared behind the thick fog that was slowly creeping toward them. He stopped skating but didn't let go of Isabelle's hands. Instead he pulled her closer to him for an embrace. Zack didn't like what he was seeing at all. He hated limited visibility and right that moment, he couldn't see who or what was behind the fog.

"What are you looking at?" asked Isabelle.

"The fog."

"Creepy isn't it. We're used to it though."

Zack could tell. The people around them didn't seem to mind they'd be swallowed by the fog in a few minutes. The fog doesn't bother him much, but what it could be hiding. "Let's go grab something to eat."

"You don't like the fog."

"Honestly? No."

"My, my. Who would have thought a tough looking agent like you would be afraid of the mystic fog?"

"I didn't say I'm *afraid* of it. I don't trust it."

"So defensive. All right, come on, Agent. I don't want to be held responsible if you started having nightmares about the fog."

"Ha ha. Funny. I promised to try your Aunt's pot roast. Hope the macaroons are not all gone." Hand in hand, they started moving toward the table.

"I love macaroons, too."

"So care to tell me what you've got against Hertz and Boon."

"I unearthed loads of evidence about Hertz being responsible for the illegal logging in the area with Mayor Logan Boon's permission. I have the copy of the permit he signed."

"From Hertz's lawyer."

"Yes. He said they wouldn't log the protected

trees without Boons signature. But you know what? With or without permission, Hertz would log the protected areas. Rainforest Action Network has had dealings with them in the past. We have documents to prove it.

"What about Boon. He can say he didn't know Hertz was going to log the protected areas."

"He could, but the checks from Hertz wouldn't lie."

"Hertz bought Boon?"

"Uh-huh. Like I said, I have loads of evidence against the two. All I have to do is put my files together. I have three weeks to do it. I've been dealing with illegal loggers and politicians for a long time now. I know I can nail Boon and Hertz, Zack."

"Not going to happen if Mayor Boon nails you first—literally. Based on what Captain Sanders had told me, Boon is one slick son of a bitch, a crooked official, involved in illegal drug trafficking, prostitution and gambling. His money kept him out of jail. So he would do anything to keep his name clean and his money coming including getting rid of you. Honey, you disturbed a bigger snake pit this time. We need to be careful."

"I don't think Hertz thinks I'm a serious threat. Listen to this, Hertz Logging Company has already signed contracts with different business

like Home Depot that they will deliver lumber on time. If I win this case Hertz will lose millions of dollars. But you know what? Hertz's lawyer spent most of his time trying to convince me to have dinner with him instead of offering a deal."

"I think they know you're a threat, but they're downplaying your case. And believe me, they will ask for Mayor Boon's help to fix this mess you're trying to scatter outside their doorstep." Zack tucked her lock of hair that came out of her bonnet. "Hertz and Boon are aware you're a threat. Hertz wouldn't bother sending their lawyer to meet you if they thought your case isn't serious. The lawyer was a pawn. He asked you out thinking you'd accept him and then eventually drop the case against his company."

"I won't go out with that weasel face lawyer."

"I know. Anyway, Boon...he's just waiting for the right time to move you out of the picture. Honey, to them you're not just a small time tree-hugger."

"I'd rather be called an eco-warrior than a tree-hugger. The term makes me think of a dog humping a tree."

Zack laughed. "Only the tough one's would go after big company's such as Hertz. I suppose an eco-warrior is an apt term."

"I'm not afraid of them. I'll go after anyone engaged in logging, distributing or selling

endangered forests. It's barbaric and should stop before it's too late"

"And that's why a kick-ass lawyer like you needs protection."

"From a kick-ass FBI agent like you?"

"Honey, Captain Sanders is right. You need protection." Zack's hand cupped her nape and massaged the knots away. His lips touched her forehead. "And I offer you mine. I won't hesitate to pull the trigger if it means saving you. It's my job to protect you. And I promise I'll do everything to keep you away from harm."

"Oh, Zack. I'm beginning to think you're kiss deprived. Don't worry. Nothing will happen to me. Boon, he's not even here. He's vacationing somewhere in Europe like he does this time of year. Nobody will hurt me."

"I hope so, Isabelle. Because I swear to god I will keep whoever hurt you alive so I can bleed him to death." Zack glanced at the trees again, but all he could see was the thick fog quickly creeping onto the middle of the frozen lake. "We can bag the pot roast and macaroons. I think I should take you home."

Chapter Four

Isabelle was aware Zack was only talking as an officer when he made his promise to keep her safe, but his words soothed her insides. If she weren't careful, her feelings for him could easily escalate. And she couldn't let that happen. Falling for a man whose life was always on the line was comparable to playing Russian roulette. You never know when the gun will fire. Her father was Bend's chief-of-police. Whenever he kissed her and her mother goodbye, she wondered if it would be the last. She didn't want to feel that horrible feeling again.

Unlocking her front door, she turned to face Zack. "Well, goodnight, Zack. I expect to see you right here on this spot tomorrow at eight. Don't make me wait because I hate slackers." She made a move to open the door, but Zack stopped her.

He gently moved her behind him. "Do you mind if I come in?"

"It's late and I have work—"

Zack passed her and walked inside the house.

“—to do. Sure come in.” She made sure Zack was looking before she rolled her eyes heavenward.

Zack gave her his heart-stopping grin as he stood in the middle of her living room. “Do you always leave your hall light turned on?”

“Yup. Anything wrong with that?” she answered and tapped her foot.

“No. Mind if I look around?”

“Go ahead.” Isabelle waited. A few minutes later, Zack came back in the room.

“All clear.”

“Are you sure, Agent Akerrs? Did you look under my bed? I thought I heard critters moving under there.”

“Wanna show me which one’s your bed? I can take a look.”

“Nice try. Goodnight, Zack. You know how to get to your cabin.”

“I do.” He stood toe to toe with her. “But I think I’ll sleep here tonight. That cabin is as cold as a freezer.”

“Didn’t you turn the heater on? The fireplace in there is working, too, you know.”

“I’d rather feel your heat. And I know how warm you can get, Miss Isabelle Barnes. Besides, didn’t Joseph stay in the same house with Mary. How else did she get pregnant if he didn’t?”

"Mary got pregnant through immaculate conception." Isabelle laughed and tried to step back, but Zack caught the front of her coat and pulled her against him.

"Uh-huh, but that doesn't mean they didn't fu—"

Isabelle covered his mouth. "That's blasphemy."

Zack covered her hand with his and pressed it harder on his mouth to kiss her palm. She stared at his dark blue eyes. Right then Isabelle knew if she weren't careful her heart would be broken for the fourth time.

"Don't you want to f—"

Isabelle pressed her hand back on Zack's mouth. "You need to learn to control your cursing." Warm blitz of desire whirled in her stomach as Zack licked her palm. "Is it really cold in the cabin?"

"Too freaking cold. Can I stay here?"

"Fine. Only for tonight. Tomorrow I'll go over there to check if the heater is broken again."

"Thanks, honey."

"I have extra bedrooms—"

"The couch is fine."

"You sure?"

"Yup. Unless you want to share your bed with me."

"Don't push your luck."

Zack laughed. "You have a lovely home."

"Thanks. Dad built this for Mom. I was born here, you know. Mom said I couldn't wait to come out. Her water broke and it was too late to go to the hospital. So Dad delivered me. Maybe that's why I've loved this house and the whole town for as long I can remember. Can't imagine living anywhere else."

"And so you thought of becoming an environmental lawyer—to protect this place." He moved his thumb on her temple in tiny circular motion. It felt so wonderful she feared she'd fall asleep if he continued doing it.

"Yeah. My parents knew how much I love this town so for my eighteenth birthday they gave me a cabin."

"The cabin I'm staying in?"

"Uh-huh. I was supposed to move in there after high school, but Dad died. Mom got sick and I had to care for her so I stayed here until she too passed away."

"What a house. Full of memories. I bet if the walls could talk they'll tell me how spoiled and bratty you were."

She was glad the walls couldn't talk. Imagine what they would say about her using a dildo. "I thought I'd have my own brats. But...."

"Your exes were fools to let you go."

"Ugh! Uncle told you about my broken

engagements?"

"He said three broken engagements, but didn't tell me why."

Isabelle looked at Zack. He didn't seem to be a tattletale kind of guy. She bet whatever goes between them would not go out. "My first fiancé, a writer, realized he wouldn't like to be married to me, a woman whose name was constantly in the newspaper when his couldn't even grace a vanity press.

"What an egotistical maniac."

"Right. He was. The second one, a college professor couldn't adjust to the idea I was making more than him and broke off the engagement and married a kindergarten teacher a month later."

"Sexist."

"Exactly. The third one is Andy. He's a GAP model. He was the only one who actually liked my profession, at least in the beginning. He bragged about me being a lawyer and proposed after six months of dating me. But after a quick tumble one night, he dropped the bomb. He said I spent more time touching my briefcase than his...him. We argued. I gave him the engagement ring back and that was the end of us. The next day, he was gone."

"You don't deserve anyone who can't accept your caliber and they definitely don't deserve to have your pretty brats. Someday, you'll have

babies with dark hair, brown eyes, a stubborn chin, sweet tooth and pouty lips. Lips that could kiss and I want to kiss right now."

Zack pulled Isabelle against him. Her mouth opened when he lowered his head for a kiss. She was warm and felt good against him. He cupped one breast and kneaded the flesh until he felt her nipple pucker. Isabelle moaned. Her uninhibited side aroused him, releasing the savage need in him to take her anywhere in the house and ride her hard. She smelled of macaroons and a hint of sex. She had the hots for him, he could tell. And the knowledge made his heart pump fast sending warm blood down his already thickening cock. With her cheeks flushed from the cold, she looked so beautiful and erotic.

"Honey, I want you."

Isabelle bit her lower lip and stared at him. "I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Why?" he wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her off her feet to level their gazes. "I know you want it, too. The way you responded to my touch tells me I'm not the only one in heat."

"You said that as if we're both monkeys."

He laughed when she puffed her cheeks and pulled both her ears sideways. "What do you want to hear? Something romantic like, *how do I want to fuck thee. Let me count the ways?*"

"You are despicable!" she pulled his ears

playfully. "So you read Browning's poems?"

"The book was my grandma's. She made me read the poems while she snoozed in the afternoons."

"Well, Agent Akerrs, I want to fuck thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach. But this week isn't the right time."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My eggs are active this week."

He lowered her and looked at her body as if he could actually see her eggs, but didn't let go of his hold around her waist. "You mean you're having your —"

"No. Not yet. But I am fertile. So you must stay away from my eggs for now."

"You've got to be joking."

Isabelle shook her head, her eyes big and unblinking.

"Well, I carry my Trojan's where ever I go, honey. We'll be okay."

"I'm not."

"Fucking eh!"

"Zack, if you curse one more time, I'll kick you out of this house. I'll shoot you with your own gun and I'll permanently ruin you, you won't be able to use your Trojans."

"Gad, you must be PMSing. So tell me, why can't we use condoms?"

"I'm allergic to rubbers."

Zack collapsed on the nearby couch and stared at Isabelle. She looked so freaking good in her ass hugging ski pants. He linked his hands behind his head and thought about what she just said. Was she telling him the truth or was this only part of her ploy – to make him dance to her tune.

“What happens if you use one?”

“Huh?”

“I asked what happens if I wear a condom and we have sex right now.”

“I swell.”

Zack groaned. Why the hell did he ask. “Fine. Go to bed and stay away from my sperm. I’m sure your girls are no match for my boys. I’ll get you pregnant the first time. Damn, I’ve never heard of a woman allergic to condoms.”

“Now you have. I’ll get you a blanket.”

Isabelle disappeared in the other room. When she came back, she carried a blanket and two pillows. He noticed she changed her clothes, too. She wore a purple flannel pajama bottom with a matching top buttoned half way up showing part of her cleavage. The pajama might look cute to someone else, but with Isabelle it only made her look sexier. Shit, he’d have one hell of a long night tonight.

After removing his holster, he stretched his long form on the couch and placed the pillows behind his head. He didn’t need the blanket. Most

likely his unspent lust would keep him warm all night. "Goodnight, honey. Call if you need me," he said and shut his eyes.

"Aren't you going to remove your boots?"

"You still here?"

"Fine. Be a jerk. Goodnight."

In one swift move, he got off the couch and grabbed her hand. "I'm not being a jerk. If you'll only let me... Damn eggs." He cupped Isabelle's face and kissed her hard. His cock throbbed. He wanted her so badly his dick was stone hard. If it poked a hole through his jeans, he wouldn't be surprised. But if she was telling the truth, he must stay in control. "Isabelle, you'd better go to bed if you don't want my sperms chasing your eggs. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Zack."

Isabelle disappeared in the hallway in a hurry. Seconds later he heard a door shut.

Zack threw his arm across his eyes trying to ignore the strong urge to follow Isabelle into her room. On top of his strong infatuation with Isabelle, he was becoming real fond of her, too. Man, he was here to work not to fuck around. But how was he going to focus on his job when a few feet away from him was a beautiful nymph who let him have a taste of her pussy, captivated his interest, allergic to condoms, and didn't want to tangle with an officer like him. He was fucked.

* * * *

That wasn't easy. Coming up with an excuse about her fertility was the only thing she could think of to ward off Zack's charm. But what about if she was no longer bleeding? He wouldn't believe her if she said she bled for more than two weeks every month. Even to her, the excuse didn't sound right. God! She wanted him so much she would eventually succumb to his flirtation. And that would be her downfall.

Images of her mother walking around the house, checking the time, peering out the window with lines of worry on her face, popped in her head. For years her mother worried about her father's safety. She didn't want that kind of life. And the best way to keep it from happening was to avoid her father's kind. Like Zack.

Isabelle punched her pillow. Damn it! She was a fool to think she could handle him, that she could lead him on a merry chase to prove she was the boss. Zack's charm was too strong for her.

Her mind wandered to the living room where Zack was sleeping. His feet dangled at the end of the couch. He wouldn't be comfortable there. Maybe she should have offered one of the guest rooms. Or the one located at the far end of the house.

Isabelle turned on her side recalling how her day turned into a quagmire when she heard the door creaked open.

* * * *

Sighing, he tried to fall asleep. Each time the wall clock tick, its sound got louder in his ears. He turned on his side and covered his head with the blanket. Big mistake. The blanket smelled like Isabelle. Damn it. If he could only touch her again he'd be fine. An idea popped in his head. Yes, he could lay down with her. That way he wouldn't have to fantasize about her. Picking up the pillows, he strode toward Isabelle's bedroom. Keeping the noise to a minimum, he turned the doorknob. The door's hinges squeaked.

"Zack? If you need to use the bathroom. It's across the hall."

"Hey, hon. Go back to sleep." He walked inside the dimly lit room and shut the door.

"What are you doing here?"

He removed his shoes, socks, shirt and pants leaving only his boxers brief. "I'm sleeping here. Scoot over, Counselor." He didn't wait for her to move and pushed her butt to make room for him, then went under the sheets.

"Are you nuts? We can't sleep together."

"Why? Afraid you won't be able to control your

urges?"

"It's you I am worried about."

"Don't worry about me, honey. I might have a wet dream and spill my boys on your sheet, but I'll be okay. Now, go back to sleep." He stretched beside her and wrapped his arm around her waist. "This is a lot better. Night."

"Yeah right. You expect me to sleep with you here."

Zack ignored her. His intention was pure—to sleep beside her. If he talked to her, his thoughts might turn impure.

"In my bed with your arms around me. This defies convention." Isabelle turned on her side with her back toward him.

"Isabelle, you're not the most cooperative girlfriend I've ever had. Go to sleep."

"I am not your girlfriend. I hardly know you."

He pulled her against him. "Whatever."

"Zack, is that..."

"Ignore it. And for the last time, go to sleep."

"But your penis is poking my butt."

"If you don't shut up, my sperms will invade your colony of eggs, Isabelle."

"I'll shut up."

Okay, she didn't say anything but her butt pressed against his groin was driving him mad. Her warmth seeping through her pajama traveled all the way to his arm and down to the tips of his

toes. Trapped underneath the blanket with Isabelle was a punishment made in hell. He sighed.

"What now?"

"This situation is so fucked up."

"Well, you can go back to sleeping on the couch."

"Or we could have sex."

He nuzzled her neck while prying her legs apart with his knee. He could easily turn the situation into a blissful heaven. "I had just realized we could still make love without using my Trojans and still avoid the risk of you getting pregnant."

Isabelle buried her head on her pillow and screamed. "Zack, withdrawal is the least safe method of contraception. Soooo...oh, god. What are you doing?"

"What do you think I am doing?"

Shoving the sheet aside, he pulled her pajama bottoms down and threw them on the floor. The whole process of undressing her seemed so slow while his heart pounded so fast.

"Zack! Oh my god, stop!"

He would stop if she were serious. But Isabelle was laughing while trying to roll on her stomach. He trapped her by straddling her hips and took her top off. Her firm breasts bounced. Good god, she looked magnificent. Her arms remained above her head. The position she presented emphasized

the flatness of her stomach. Her hipbones protruded lightly. When his eyes reached the rise of her pubic bone, his dick throbbed. "You're beautiful, hon."

"Zack, this isn't right. You're an FBI agent and I'm an attorney. You're here temporarily. And when all of this is over, who knows, someday we might find each other in the same courtroom. Imagine how that would be?"

"You done talking?"

"God, you're horrible!"

"Are all eco-warriors like you?"

"Not sure. But I bet not all of them have a sexy agent to keep them safe – twenty-four seven."

"Touché."

Zack's body was as tight as an over wound string. He wanted to spread her legs and lose himself in between, but he controlled himself. He wanted her to burn and squirm for his touch. With deliberate slowness, he removed his clothes. Isabelle's eyes grew big. She licked her lips and, he noticed, the rise and fall of her chest quickened as he stood in front of her naked and fully aroused. She was wrong about their situation as temporary. As far as he was concerned, this was only the beginning.

"Show me what you got, Agent. Or are you all bullshit?"

Zack didn't need a second invitation. He parted

her legs and settled in between. His mouth captured hers. "Oh, I don't bullshit, Counselor. You have no idea the effect you have on me."

"I think I do." Isabelle reached down to wrap her fingers around his erection. "Yup, I do."

Zack groaned from the sweet feeling of her warm fingers slowly moving up and down his length. He pushed one breast up and opened his mouth to accommodate both the nipple and areola. He wanted all of her, to taste, feel and savor.

Isabelle squirmed from under him. She cupped his head with her hands and without modesty urged him to give her other breast the same attention he had given to the other one. He chuckled. She wasn't coy about what she wanted and he liked that about her. Isabelle's hips rotated, rubbing, seeking. He gave her what she wanted and reached down to touch her vagina through her thong.

"Zack, don't make me wait."

"You are one brazen woman, honey. And I like that about you." Using his thumb, he hooked the straps of her thong and slowly lowered the material. When it reached her knees, Isabelle raised both legs straight up so he could slip it off her feet.

Zack nearly lost his control when he saw how wet her pussy was. She was practically dripping.

He dropped the thong on the floor and once again separated her legs. He stared at her weeping pussy for a couple heartbeats before running his fingers along her wet seams. Isabelle whimpered.

“Like that huh?”

“Yes, please, Zack. Stop the torture.”

He didn’t want to wait anymore either. But he needed to make sure she’d be satisfied before him. Like a hungry predator, he lowered his head in between her legs and ate at her. His tongue laved, licked and penetrated her warm vagina. While looking at Isabelle, he flicked his tongue on her clitoris. Isabelle’s eyes were half-closed. Her pink tongue darted in and out licking her lips.

After a few more licks, he trapped her clitoris in between his lips and gave it a hard pull. Isabelle lifted her hips up. He took advantage and cupped her butt to keep her higher. He continued to suck her clit until Isabelle screamed his name. But he didn’t stop. Her taste and scent made him even hungrier for more. Shaking from need, he turned her on her side with her back facing him. Lifting her leg high, he aimed his cock on her vagina’s opening before slowly penetrating her. Her soft, slick and warm pussy wrapped around him like a velvet glove. The bliss was so great he couldn’t stay gentle with her. He thrust harder penetrating her deeply that he felt the tip of his cock touch her womb. He leaned forward to cup her breasts. In

the process, his cock went in deeper.

Isabelle screamed. "Zack, don't stop. Don't..."

"I won't. Come for me, Isabelle. Now."

Over and over, he pounded on her sweet ass until he felt her contract. And only then he pulled out to release his own orgasm. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. You were incredible. I want to do it again."

"What happened to the pulling-out-isn't-safe bit?"

"Stop questioning me, Zack. I am trying to be spontaneous, you know."

"You'll be the death of me, hon. Give me a minute."

Chapter Five

Wearing the skullcap, thick coat and skates Captain Sanders gave him the other night, Zack stood on the ice. He'd been yawning non-stop. Last night was the best night he'd ever had. For the first time in many years, he fell asleep uninterrupted. His re-occurring dream about the night he had spent trapped inside the meat freezer didn't visit him. Like a guardian angel, Isabelle warded off the bad spirits from visiting him last night. After four tiring sex rounds, he managed to keep his hands resting on top of Isabelle's hip without cupping her breast or fingering her for the rest of the night. How he'd done it—he had no idea. It was actually admirable.

Next time though, he was sure there would be a next time, he might not be able to pull out on time. The idea of spilling his seed inside Isabelle was tempting he was so close to ignoring the chance she might get pregnant the first time. But he wouldn't jeopardize her career, her future, or

disregard her wishes.

Stuffing his hands in his pockets, he watched Isabelle skate around. Like last time, she was talking to herself again.

* * * *

She wasn't ready to deal with one more heartbreak. But there it was, all laid out in the open for her to see. She was crazy for Zack. And the freaking attraction was too strong she'd forgotten—for the second time—that he was FBI, a man she promised not to get involved with. Last night, she let him touch home base. Good god! All he did was touched her intimately and she opened her legs real wide in a hurry. Not only once but four times last night. She was shameless the way she begged Zack to touch and suck her clit, the way she whimpered when his lips pulled her nipples hard, the way she lifted her legs higher to give him access to her pussy and bury his cock deep inside.

That was last night, this morning, when all the passion and hunger she didn't know existed was gone she wanted to die in shame. Sadly, she was full of life and healthy as a cow. Maybe she should just kill herself. How should she do it? Hang herself? No, her eyes would bug out. Not attractive. Gun would put a hole in her flesh—not

good. Knife was too scary and she'd probably pass out once she saw blood and would fail the attempt to kill herself. Maybe drown herself in coffee or eat doughnuts until she exploded. Yeah, she could do that. Later, at home she'd start killing herself before her attraction turned into something more serious. Right now, she would have to teach Zack how to skate and face the suffering of being so close to him.

Her stupid feelings toward him must stop. He was just having fun with her. After a few weeks, he'd leave. If she weren't careful, he'd take her heart with him when that time came.

She glanced at Zack. He'd been watching her skate intently. "Are you ready to skate?"

"I'm just waiting for you to finish talking to yourself, hon," he grinned while trying to stay upright on his skates.

"Very funny. Let's get this done so we can go home."

"Why do this? Let's just go. I told you we should just stay in bed."

"When I go home, I'm not going back to bed. And you are going to your cabin not mine."

"Isabelle, are you still ticked because I said you snored?"

"Zack, I am not ticked and I don't snore. How many times do I have to tell you that?"

"So why are you scowling?"

Because I am stupid. "Nothing. Are you ready?"

* * * *

Zack could tell something was bothering her, but he didn't want to force the issue. Although he had an idea her bad mood had something to do with their spectacular sex last night. She made love with him—a man in uniform. Darn stubborn woman and her stupid vow.

She demonstrated how to lean on her left foot then push in a diagonal direction outward with her right foot as if she was shoveling snow behind. The simple action propelled her forward. Isabelle repeated the process. She looked so graceful, like a swan gliding on water. He'd tried the technique already but he found himself doing the splits and landing on his ass.

He couldn't believe how easily Isabelle made him agree this morning to leave her bed. All she did was crook her fingers and he was off the bed. The woman wrapped her fingers around him as easily as punching a man in the gut.

Zack scanned the frozen lake. Without the music and skaters, the place looked spookier and more dangerous. Just as he thought the fog had not lifted and at present covered the frozen lake. He felt his gun strapped into his ankle. It was the only spot where he could put it that was easily

accessible. His coat was so thick it would take time to reach in the pocket to take it out if the need called for it.

He inched closer to Isabelle. Captain Sanders believed the threat on her life lies with the mayor. He believed the same.

"Now what made you scowl? Because I dragged your lazy butt out of bed?" Isabelle pulled his cap to cover his ears.

"Yes and the fact that we're on a clearing. If bullets started flying, there's no place here to hide except behind those haystacks. You know this is a bad idea. I am responsible for your safety. If something happens to you right now —"

"I know, I know. You won't get your kisses. I thought after last night, you wouldn't care about my promise anymore."

"Do you think I am keeping you safe because all I think about is kissing and fucking you?"

"Well you threatened to cuff me naked. What am I supposed to think?"

"I want to keep you safe from someone who is after you."

"You sound like my uncle. Why won't you two believe me when I say nothing bad will happen? I've dealt with bigger companies, Zack. This time is no different from the rest of them."

"Isabelle, the mayor is as corrupt as a public official can be. Maybe you're not after him, but

you're after the company he let cut the trees in exchange for his own *cut*. You connected his name to the illegal logging in this area. He will come after you. Captain and I think it is just a matter of time before he makes his move."

"Zack, Mayor Boon is not stupid. If something happens to me, he would be the first suspect. The court knows I have a case against him so if I suddenly disappear or die, he'd end up on an even hotter seat, therefore, he won't do anything to hurt me."

Zack wished she were right. Something told him though that she was wrong. "Either way, I'll be here"

"And the parade committee thanks you for being *here*. This is the first time in many years that we're going to have a different Joseph. The whole town is already talking about how good you'll look wearing a long beard and a turban. Now, let's start practicing."

Captain Sanders was right. This woman had a mind of her own. In short, stubborn. He'd just keep his eyes open to keep her safe whether she thought danger wasn't lurking around or not. "I don't have time to grow a long beard in three weeks."

"Don't worry, we'll give you a fake one. Tom, the supposed Joseph for this year kept the fake beard he used last year. We can borrow it."

"I'm not going to use someone else's fake beard."

"It's okay, Zack. I think he made the beard out of his horse's mane and washes it after each use."

"Very funny." Zack took her hand and tried to skate backward the way he had done last night. "So tell me, how did you get the lead role as Mary? Did you offer to kiss Mr. Padraig three times if you got the role?"

Isabelle pushed him with her shoulder. "I've been playing the role of Mary since I was sixteen. Mom was the head of the committee and she suggested that I be Mary."

"Ah, got the inside pull, eh?"

"I didn't ask for her *pull*. She suggested my name to the committee because the previous girl who was voted to play pregnant Mary refused to do it. And well, she was a *special* girl so the committee didn't force her."

"What role did she want to play?"

"Mary Magdalene. Since Mom was the president, she had to come up with a name. My name. Since then, I've been voted to be Mary."

"And you're proud of it."

"Yeah. Too bad they weren't here to see me with a hunky Joseph as my escort."

Zack placed an arm around her shoulder without stopping skating. "I'm sorry. It is hard losing both parents. There's just no word to

explain how it feels."

"I know. It has been nine years since they both passed away, but there are times when the horrible feeling of shock and pain followed by numbness comes back especially when I hear news about cops getting killed."

He kissed the side of her head. Through Captain Sanders, he learned that Isabelle's father was in service, too, and died two years before his retirement. Isabelle had witnessed her mother live with fear, grieve for her husband's death and she would have none of those. Reasons why she was bent on avoiding men in uniform. And he couldn't blame her for vowing she should. "He died doing what he loved to do, Isabelle. To protect and to serve."

"Was it worth it? He got killed, Zack, leaving me and mom. Mom grieved for him until her heart gave out. It sucks losing them both."

"Life sucks and living it makes it even worse unless you face it head-on."

"Are your parents not around anymore?"

"No. Don't know my mom. She left when I was just a baby. Dad and my uncle raised me until both died on a shootout."

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

"Me, too. I learned a lot from them. All male household has its advantage and disadvantages."

"Tell me one of each."

"Hmm...one of each. Well, the advantage is I grew up tough. I could beat older kids in the neighborhood and I could curse any time of day. Disadvantage would be I had to take care of myself because dad and uncle were always busy. I wore practically the same clothes everyday—unwashed or poorly washed and I lived on peanut butter sandwiches every single day."

"Not bad compared to some. Now, tell me about the shootout...if you don't mind."

"Dad and Uncle were both in the police force. In fact, they were partners. They both responded to a call about a domestic problem. A man apparently held his wife and daughter hostage. But when they got to the said address, Dad didn't even get to park the patrol car."

"It was an ambush."

"Yeah. Dad and Uncle were targeted because they put Emilio Valez behind bars."

"I've heard of him. He's the leader of the Chicano gang."

"Right. From his hole, he was able to use his connections. His right hand, orchestrated the ambush. Uncle died at the scene. Dad made it to the hospital, but died after he saw Grandma and I come in the emergency room. After that Grandma raised me."

Isabelle blinked her tears away. "So horrible. Zack, you knew how dangerous it was to become

an officer but you still chose your profession. Did you do it so you could get even with the criminals who killed your uncle and dad?"

"No. I did it because I think it is my calling. Isabelle, if everyone would think like you there wouldn't be any police patrolling the streets, no FBI agents like me to protect a lovely sensual woman like you, and no one to keep peace in our cities or towns or country."

"Where is Grandma?"

Zack smiled. She asked the question as if she knew his grandma. "Four years ago, she passed away. I went back to Texas, sold her ranch and home and went back to Florida."

"So Florida is your home now?"

"Home is here and there."

"No siblings?"

"Maybe, but none that I know of. I know a few of my cousins but I don't have solid communication with them."

"We're almost the same in that area. Mom and Dad were both an only child. Mom was an Ohmstead from Boston. She met dad while skiing at Mount Bachelor. Dad was a student at Western. They fell in love. Dad became a police officer, Mom a housewife. I know a couple cousins, but we hardly communicate. So, Aunt and Uncle are my only solid family."

"Good family to have. Protective and loves you

so much to let you do whatever you want. They raised a brat."

"Sheez, I am a brat with a good heart. How did I ever manage that?"

"You tell me."

"Uncle said you're supposed to be on vacation, but you took this babysitting job instead."

"Yeah. I'm supposed to be on vacation, but I was tired of sitting on my ass for two days doing nothing like some retired employee and wasn't looking forward to sitting again for the next two weeks. Vacation, I thought is a waste of time. So when Pete offered me this job, I took it without second thought, without checking the job file."

"And do you regret it? I mean taking this job."

"Yes, at first. After meeting you, I realized I just made the best decision in my life. I'm glad I decided not to sit on my ass for the holidays because a beautiful woman bumped into me and offered me three kisses—can't get that anywhere in Texas or Florida."

"Don't you have a special someone to celebrate the holidays with?"

"I do have someone waiting for me in Florida."

Isabelle's smile wavered. She took a deep breath and nodded to herself. "I'm not surprised. Well, she's lucky to catch a fine-looking buck like you."

"I'm not sure Marley likes to catch men."

"Of course she does. She's got you right?"

"Yeah, but I've never seen her chase men except mice."

Isabelle stopped skating and placed her hands on her hips. She reminded him of his grandmother when he did something naughty. "You mean Marley is a cat? Marley's not your girlfriend?"

"The way she likes to cuddle with me, I think she believes I am her boyfriend."

"How about a real girlfriend? One that's not furry but with shaved legs and armpits."

"I do have a girlfriend."

"You do," her voice was barely a whisper."

"Yup. But she doesn't like me because I am an FBI agent. Her uncle also told me she's a brat and wouldn't take no for an answer. She also makes me laugh, and kisses me until I'm breathless. She lives on microwavable dinners and hogs the sheet at night. She's a hot, kick-ass environmental lawyer who is fascinated with broccolis. Her name is Isabelle Barnes.

"I beg your pardon. I don't—what do you mean fascinated with broccolis?"

"Oh, the drawings that you showed me in your uncle's library, aren't they broccolis?"

Isabelle let go of his hand and punched him in the stomach playfully. "Those were trees!"

He laughed and pulled her for an embrace. "Just kidding, honey."

"Very funny, Zack. And to set the record straight, I am not your girlfriend."

"So what are you then? My fucking partner."

"You are a scuzzball!"

"You don't mean that. You are my girlfriend whether you like it or not."

"A temporary girlfriend."

"A temporary girlfriend," he repeated. *We'll see.* "Ready to teach me?"

"Okay. Let's see if you can follow me all the way to back to the manger." She started skating backward. "Come on, Agent Akerrs. If you don't fall down once, I'll take you to the best breakfast place in town."

"I'd rather we go home and have you for breakfast."

Isabelle laughed. She took off in a faster speed.

Zack tried to follow, but the faster he went, the more wobbly he got. Isabelle was still skating backward facing him when he noticed someone standing on the edge of the lake. A man. And he was holding a box. Blood started pounding hard on his ears. "Isabelle, stop!" He tried to run and skate at the same time.

"Why? Come on you can catch me."

The man started moving. He continued to walk toward Isabelle. He reached down and pulled his gun out of the holster he tied from his ankle. "Isabelle, stop!" Zack repeated, but his eyes were

trained on the man yelled at him "You! Stop or I'll shoot!"

Isabelle turned to look where he was looking at and then back at him. "Oh my god! Zack, put your gun down. Please." She skated back to him. "What in the world are you doing?"

"Trying to protect you," he answered without taking his gaze off the man with a shocked look on his face. Good, he thought.

"From Andy?"

"You know him?"

"Yes. Andy, good morning," she yelled and waved at the man. "Come on, I'll introduce you to him."

Andy, her ex? They skated toward the edge of the lake. With his gun still in his hand he followed Isabelle. When they got closer to the man, Zack noticed the rectangular box he held was tied with a red ribbon. Andy nodded at him. He was only a couple inches shorter than his height, well built and with neatly cut blond hair. Andy, without a doubt, had a face women would categorize as handsome. The GAP model.

"Andy, this is FBI agent Zack Akerrs. Uncle hired him to protect me. Zack this is Andy, my ex-fiancé."

Hearing the word fiancé, Zack gripped his gun tighter and wished he had shot the guy between his eyes. He could always claim it was an accident.

Chapter Six

Isabelle sat on the counter stool and watched Zack fix their coffee. She'd had different officers following her around before, but Zack was the first one who actually pulled a gun out of the holster. It was unbelievable! And the look on Andy's face with his eyes big, lips pale—priceless! Of course pulling the gun out was a bit over dramatic, but she couldn't tell Zack that. If he looked like a bull seeing red when he spotted Andy, he looked like a caged cougar right now.

Zack opened her cupboards and closed them again, hard. Isabelle winced at the sound but didn't say a thing. Her protector was still enraged about Andy's unexpected visit. So, she just settled in her chair and watched him try to prepare their breakfast.

He looked great in jeans. If he'd work for her as a houseboy she wouldn't leave her house ever again. She recalled how his hips moved against hers, how his strong thighs rubbed against the

inside of her own thighs. Warm feelings in the pit of her stomach started churning. Good god! She was one slutty slut! She quickly inspected her nails when Zack turned around to hand her an empty plate.

"I cannot believe you pointed the gun at Andy."

"What's wrong with pointing a gun at your ex?"

"What if your gun went off? You could have killed him."

Zack gave her a smile that looked more like a snarl showing his straight white teeth. "Darn fucking bad, it didn't. I'd gladly shoot the guy – right in his balls and in between his eyes."

"Why? My god! He was just coming to see me and to give me the flowers, which by the way you threw in the garbage when you could have given them to the church."

"For one, he freaking made my blood boil by not announcing himself. He just stood there watching you like some stalker. Second, he doesn't need to give you flowers."

"Why? I thought it romantic."

Zack braced his hands on the counter and leaned closer. She could see his nostrils flaring and his jaw muscles working like gills on a fish. "Romantic my ass. You want flowers? I'll give you flowers."

"Oh, so it's okay for you to give me flowers, but not other men."

"Yes. Because you're my girlfriend."

"Temporary."

"Still the same. And, it's a rule among men that you don't give flowers to a woman when she's with another man."

"That's a stupid egotistical rule."

"No, the rule is about respect. How did he know you'd be at the lake anyway?"

"He probably came here. No one answered so he went to the lake."

"He's stalking you."

"Andy wouldn't do that. He's been calling but I refuse to answer his calls."

"And you just thought to tell me this?"

"I didn't think it important."

What she said made his expression even worse. If steam started coming out of his ears she'd be out of there. Isabelle wished she could hear his thoughts, but maybe it was good that she couldn't. In her experience with men, it would be easier to solve problems in the Middle East than learn the workings of a man's mind.

"What is he doing in town? No, let me rephrase it, what is he doing seeing you?"

Isabelle had to put her tongue in her cheek to keep from smiling. If she knew better, she'd think Zack was jealous of Andy. "Well, I didn't get a

chance to ask him, did I? Because you insisted that we leave right away. You said were hungry."

"I was hungry." As if he just suddenly realized she could be hungry too, he changed his tone. "What do you want for breakfast?"

"Scrambled eggs, toast, plus a cup of coffee with sugar and cream...please." She could get used to this, she thought. Too bad, he was just a temporary guy, a temporary boyfriend, hired to keep her safe until she presented her case. She wouldn't mind if he stayed longer or...permanently?

Isabelle shook her head. She didn't like where her thoughts were heading. *This is stupid.* Lordy! She needed a break from him, to recoup, to stand back and pick up her scattered senses again. The way things were going between them, it would be wise to take a step back. "I don't plan on going anywhere today. I have work to do. You can, uhm, explore the cabin or take a nap."

"Are you always this stubborn? How many times do I have to tell you that my job here is to protect you? Nap? What the fuck!"

"Zack. I will really shoot you between your eyes if you swear one more time. Or I will lock my bedroom door every night until you learned to talk without the use of foul language. You'll be Joseph for the parade. I am sure Joseph didn't swear in his time and you shouldn't either. This is

a nice town with nice people. We don't want to hurt their sensibilities because you couldn't control your urge to swear."

"You know what? You remind me of those people I see on television living in a place like this. When something bad happens they say, *oh, we didn't think this horrible thing could happen in this neighborhood*. You've been living in a bubble, Isabelle Barnes. This whole town is living in a bubble."

"I'm not. I'm just trying to live my life differently. My mother had lived her life looking over her shoulder thinking someone would come after us because Dad had said something rude and had angered someone. He was like you, you know. Always cursing. I know mom was worried about it but didn't say anything. I won't be like her."

"Cool. Then let me do the worrying. Do whatever it is you need to do. You can fu...ding ignore I am here, too, if you want. But the point is, I'll be here. And I am not going to nap," Zack snapped.

"Okay. Sheez! So grumpy. Maybe you don't need a nap, but you need fresh air. Would you like to go for a walk, visit the town?" Going out would be good. The trees, fresh air might help her focus on something else other than his cute butt. Space was what they needed right now.

"Sure. I promised to visit a boy."

"A boy?"

"Yeah, I met him the other night at the lake. He said his name is Erik Duggan. Do you know him?"

"Yeah. His Marie's son. They live not too far from here. Why do you want to visit him?"

"So I can shoot Ben and Jerry for him."

"Good. It's about time. I hate those dogs."

"Dogs? Good, I thought I was going to have to shoot humans. What kind of dogs?" Zack asked.

"Rottweilers. There's gossip circulating about the owner, Mrs. Lewis, and the mayor, being intimate. I think that's why she gets to keep the dogs even though they attack people. They attacked me once when I tried to retrieve Erik's baseballs."

"Good. That's good enough reason for me to shoot the beasts. Let's go see Erik."

Isabelle grabbed her coat hanging at the back of the chair. When she was ready, she fixed Zack's skullcap to cover his ears before giving him a kiss. It was too late when she realized what she had done. Kissing him seemed natural as if they'd been doing it for a long time. *This is not good.*

* * * *

He and Isabelle trekked through the wooded area. She said it was the shortcut to the Duggan house.

Be that as it may, but the snow was calf deep. "I am sure there's a regular street to Marie and Eric's house. Why do we have to take this route?"

"Because you insisted that I come with you. When I visit the Duggan's I always take this route. It's lovely here. Now, if you're afraid of being in the woods, I can show you the other way, but you're going alone."

"Damn, are all women like you when they're PMSing? Happy one moment and then sour the next?" Isabelle glowered like a madwoman. He mentally noted not to mention the pre-menstrual syndrome again. "I am not afraid of the woods, Isabelle. It's the effing snow that I don't like."

"Because you grew up in a state where the sun is always shining."

"No, because I've been stuck in a freezer all night and know what the cold can do to a man especially to a small child."

"Oh, Zack. I am so sorry. I didn't know," she stopped to face him and cupped his face. "How about this, going home we'll take a different route. I didn't know."

"It's okay. Just stick with me."

Holding Isabelle's hand, they continued walking. Once in a while, he would hear a branch break followed by the sound of wings flapping. Burning wood and the mouth-watering smell of baked bread mingled with the snow scented fresh

air. He took a deep breath. There was something about the place that rendered him speechless. The serenity and cleanliness that surrounded them was a world different to the one he knew. For the first time in many years, he felt relaxed, content, like being in her grandmother's home.

Home. How could it be? He hated the cold. He loved sunshine not the snow. And yet, there it was, that strange feeling he couldn't understand. He looked at the woman walking beside him. Something stirred deep inside him.

Could it be that Isabelle was his home?

They reached a wide-open area with high snow hills on both sides. He noticed footprints, on the snow. He stopped walking. Hair at the back of his neck stood. Something wasn't quite right. Suddenly he felt like he was once again standing alone in the middle of a dark alley. He could hear subtle movements. They weren't alone. He touched his scar above his left brow.

"Zack, what's wrong?"

Before he could respond snowballs started flying. One hit him on the right temple followed by another on the neck.

"Son of a bitch!"

"Snowball zone. Run, Zack!" Isabelle took off laughing.

Little faces showed up on top of the snow hills.

He stopped to grab a handful of snow and

quickly formed it into a snowball. He threw it on the kid peeking from behind the tree. "Take that!"

It was unbelievable. Children started appearing like black ants on a hill. And they were all armed. Within a space of a heartbeat, snowballs rained on him he couldn't even see. Laughter echoed all around. He heard Isabelle's voice yelling at the kids. When he looked up, she was throwing snowballs like a pro, fast and accurate.

"Run, Zack!" she called.

Finally, they managed to cross the snowball zone. "Bastards," he mumbled. He looked at Isabelle. She was bent over, holding her middle, laughing. "Oh, you think that was funny?"

"Yes, very. Especially when you got hit on the face. Too bad I didn't bring my camera. Don't look at me like that. I didn't throw snowballs at you."

"You'd better run, Isabelle. I won't be responsible for my next action if I catch you."

Laughing, Isabelle ran. He gave her a head start. He maybe bad at skating, but he could run. He wouldn't hold a high record of catching criminals on the street if it weren't for his speed.

In no time at all, he caught up with her. He grabbed her middle and spun her around. She looked so beautiful with her cheeks flushed and eyes dancing with glee. He kissed each corner of her mouth before claiming her mouth for a full kiss. Like a strong wine, she warmed his whole

body. Her house came to mind and what they could be doing inside. His whole body came to life. His blood pumped down to his already hard dick. He couldn't get enough of her.

"You bewitched me. In three short days, you bewitched me."

* * * *

Bewitched. Isabelle had to keep her knees from buckling when he said the word. She shouldn't make anything out of it. His attraction was just that. A physical attraction. Of course, he was attracted to her, otherwise, he wouldn't make love with her so passionately. She on the other hand, must keep her guard. Zack was wrong for her. Her father was once a chief-of-police in Oregon. He placed himself in danger far too many times, so many that her mother aged quickly. Whenever her father left the house, a black cloud would settle over their house. It was as if he'd already died. No. She wouldn't place herself in that situation. Falling for Zack would be a big mistake.

After the case, he'd leave. She would move on, fight another logging company or do something else. And Zack—she would forget him. Isabelle kicked the snow. Who was she kidding? She'd already fallen for him.

Quietly they walked on the snow-covered path.

Once in a while Zack would stop to investigate a bush or watch a squirrel. She watched him throw a stick where the squirrel went. An idea popped in her head on what to give him for a parting gift.

* * * *

Erik and Marie were waiting at the front porch when they arrived.

"Hey, Marie, I hope we didn't keep you waiting."

"No. You're fine. Agent Akerrs, thank you for coming."

"You're welcome."

"Agent, uhm, did Isabelle tell you I am a widow?"

"Yes, she mentioned it."

"Well, did she mention I own a house, own a jewelry store and have a handsome son, Erik."

"Yes, she mentioned that bit of information, too."

Isabelle scowled at Marie, but her friend ignored her. She met Marie in college and they'd been friends since then. She even stood as Marie's maid of honor and Erik's godmother. She loved her, but right now seeing her flirting with Zack, she wanted to wring her neck.

"Do you think you could mention me to your friends, Agent?"

"With my friends?"

"Yeah. Agents like you. I doubt Isabelle would want to share you with anyone."

"Marie!"

"Oh shush, Isabelle!" To Zack she said, "She likes – oww! Why did you pinch me?"

"There was a mosquito on your arm. Hey, Erik, Agent Akerrs is here to help you get your baseballs."

"Agent Akerrs, did you bring your gun?" asked Erik.

"Yes, Erik, but not to shoot the dogs." Zack ruffled the boys head.

"Can I see it though?"

Zack looked at Marie. "If it's okay with your mom."

"Of course. Go ahead, look at his gun, Erik. But don't touch."

Zack knelt on one knee to show Erik how to remove the magazine and what the safety lock meant. He also told Erik about the dangers of playing with a gun, loaded or not. Isabelle watched the two. She could tell Zack wasn't just appeasing Erik's curiosity, but also teaching the kid a lesson. Erik on the other hand, was giddy. She wouldn't be surprised if he didn't learn a thing. The kid looked ready to grab the gun and play cowboy with it.

* * * *

Mrs. Lewis in her red silk nightgown was standing on her front porch when they made it to her house. Contempt was written all over her face. She knew why. Mrs. Lewis only got visited if someone complained about her dogs. And it was quite often, too. Complaints from the neighbors about her loud and aggressive dogs piled as high as the snow.

"Mrs. Lewis, this is Agent Akerrs. Zack, this is Mrs. Lewis, Ben and Jerry's owner."

"Ah, an agent." Mrs. Lewis boldly stared at Zack as if he was a prime meat. "If you're all here to complain about my dogs, better take it to the Mayor. Or I'll release my dogs on you. But if you, Agent Akerrs, have a totally different reason for this visit, you're welcome to come in."

Marie, who was standing beside her, muttered the word *slut* loud enough for all of them to hear. Mrs. Lewis narrowed her eyes at her, but Marie merely shrugged her shoulders in indifference.

"Mrs. Lewis, releasing your dogs to attack anyone is against the law," Zack said in an all business tone.

"Is that why you're here? To tell me about the law?"

"No. But might as well since it's obvious you know nothing about it. In case you are not aware,

it is unlawful to own or keep a dangerous vicious dog, in your case dogs, that is considered a public nuisance. Your dogs, Mrs. Lewis. Not only do they disturb the peace by barking incessantly, they are also a danger to the public. Your dogs attacked and bit more than a handful of residents."

"You can't prove that."

"Oh I can, Mrs. Lewis, and I can prove Mayor Boon is responsible for the missing records."

"Keep the Mayor out of this." Mrs. Lewis hissed. "What do you want?"

"Where are the dogs, Mrs. Lewis?"

"In the house."

"Keep them there and never ever let them out of the house again without their leashes. Consider this a warning. Next time I come here, I will not remind you about the law, but to take your dogs. Erik let's go get the baseballs, buddy."

"Cool! You're awesome."

Lugging two grocery bags full of baseballs, they all went back to Marie's house where they shared freshly baked brownies and potpie. Zack played with Erik until the poor kid couldn't throw his baseball anymore. When it was time to leave, Erik handed Zack a bundle wrapped in a newspaper.

"Go on, Sir. You can open it now."

Zack opened the bundle and found an old mitt. On the heel, Erik neatly wrote, *To Agent Akerrs. A hero. Erik*

"Thanks, buddy."

* * * *

Zack insisted they walk in the woods again on their way home. Snow crunched beneath their feet, but Zack's baseball smacking on his mitt drowned the sound. "It's been ages since I played baseball." Zack threw the ball up in the air and caught it.

"Really?"

"Yeah. I remember playing with the neighborhood kids. But when dad died, I didn't have time to play anymore. Grandma needed help around the house and the ranch so I spent more time doing household chores or mucking up stalls. And then I went to college, started working and then finally moved out to live on my own. I forgot how good it feels to hold a ball."

"I have a mitt in the house."

"You play?" he grinned at her.

"Yes."

"Are you good?"

"Wanna try me?" Zack pulled her against him laughing.

Chapter Seven

Isabelle stared at the black duffel bags on her living room. After a week, Zack decided it was time for him to move in. Actually, to move his things since he'd been staying in her house the first night they'd met.

This morning, after a long erotic kiss, Zack left the bed to retrieve his things from the cabin. He came back right away then went straight to the shower.

Isabelle leaned down to read the tags. Zachary James Akerrs. What a strong name. Just like its owner. Built with powerful legs and arms, strong and hard torso, handsome face she could kiss all day long and possessed a thick long dick she longed to feel inside her right that very moment. Not to mention a great cook.

Zack walked into the room. His hair was still dripping wet.

God! What was it about men in their low rider jeans, no shirt, and freshly showered look that

never failed to make her whimper.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I was just thinking about using my, uhm, computer to email, uhm, a friend." Isabelle's heartbeat quickened when he started walking toward her with a predatory look on his face. "Did you enjoy your shower?"

"Could have been better." He placed his hands on the underside of her breasts slowly teasing his way up. "I miss you."

"Zack, we were separated only when you went to the cabin a few feet away from here to get your things. And then you came back here to take a shower. I'd say that was about ten minutes."

"And that's too damn long."

"You're silly. What are ohh..." his mouth captured her nipple through her blouse.

"You were saying?"

"Nothing."

Isabelle groaned when Zack cupped her vagina with one hand while the other massaged her breast. It didn't take long before his fingers found their way inside her sweat pants to touch her slit. Right there in the middle of the room, she stood, helpless.

Zack worked his fingers inside her expertly she thought she would surely come. "Zack, more..." But Zack's fingers retreated.

"Be patient, honey. I'll give you more. First,

take your clothes off. Be right back. I have to protect you."

Naked, Isabelle stood in the middle of the room. When Zack came back, she noticed his fly was unbuttoned and he was pulling a chair. She wondered how he'd use it. Zack had shown her positions in bed she never thought possible and loved every one of them. Was he going to make love with her using the chair?

Zack pulled her against him for a scorching kiss. His tongue plundered repeatedly before sucking her lips and biting her neck lightly. She wrapped her arms around him, but Zack removed them. And then he turned her around.

She found herself facing her full-length mirror. Through their reflection, she could see him removing his pants looking at her unsmiling. He looked so gorgeous. A heartbeat later, she felt his cock pressed against the small of her back. Zack clamped his hands on both sides of her waist and then sat down on the chair taking her with him.

"Zack, what are you doing?"

"Showing you how wicked we could be. I want to show you how perfectly molded we are. We suit, honey. God. You're beautiful." He moved his hand up and down her thighs, on her sides and arms. "I want you to look. Watch my hands."

Sitting on his lap, Zack slowly spread her legs. The image of herself wide open embarrassed her,

but Zack quickly replaced it with lust. Seeing his hand on her throbbing vagina was the most erotic thing she'd ever seen. He spread her lips and asked her to look before inserting two fingers inside. Slowly at first, he rotated his fingers. Through the mirror, she watched Zack run his tongue along the column of her neck and kiss her shoulders while his other hand massaged and pulled her nipple.

"Do you like what you see?" Zack asked.

Isabelle moved her hips against his fingers. "Yes..." She was nearing her peak. For the second time, she felt her oncoming orgasm. "Zack, now. I want to come now, please."

"Not yet." Zack pulled his fingers out of her and spread her juice around her vagina. He surprised her by touching her lips with his wet fingers before claiming her mouth for another hot kiss. "You are an aphrodisiac, a man's fantasy, and I want you." Gripping her hips, he lifted her hips. "Spread your legs, babe." And he entered her.

She half moaned and half cried. "Oh, oh, Zack. I love...this."

"You're great, Isabelle." he gripped her hips and lifted her. "Move like that."

Isabelle rode him. His engorged cock inside her rubbed against her G-spot bringing her closer to the apex.

"I want to come, Zack. Oh god. Please help

me." She quickened her movement. Her thighs burn, but she didn't stop. It was too good to stop.

"Oh yeah... Come on, ride my dick. Yes, that's it. Fuck! It's good."

Before she reached her peak Zack wrapped his arm around her waist.

"Stand up, hon. Now, put your hands on the seat of the chair."

Isabelle did what she was told and flattened her hand on the chair. She glanced at the mirror. Zack was looking down at her ass. Without waiting for him to say the word, she spread her legs wide.

"Your beautiful. I could stare at you all day and night and won't tire of doing it."

"So easy for you to say. You're the one staring. I want you inside, Zack, now."

"Tsk, ts. Impatient wench. Raise your butt higher. Ahh...you're weeping." He ran his fingers from the top of her pussy all the way to her anus spreading her juice. He repeated the action until she heard herself whimpered.

"Zack, please. Stop torturing me."

"Okay, Counselor, watch." Zack said.

Isabelle turned to look in the mirror. Zack's long cock slowly went inside her throbbing pussy. Instinctively, she raised her ass even higher giving him a better access. "Yes...Isabelle. Fuck! You feel so good." Zack thrusts inside her repeatedly. His butt muscles contracts each time. After a couple

hard thrusts, Zack slowly pulled out.

"Zack...please..." she begged.

Still looking in the mirror, she watched Zack get on his knees. "I want you to see how much I worshipped your body, Isabelle. How much I worshipped you." And he licked her pussy. With force, he sucked on her clitoris while he finger fucked her. "Come for me, Isabelle. I want to taste your come."

One more pull of his lips on her sweet spot, she finally reached her orgasm. It was so explosive, she screamed. "Yes!" Zack didn't stop until her sensitive clit couldn't take it anymore. Before her orgasm ebbed away, Zack stood up and thrusts his still slick cock inside. He was rough, groaning, and gripping her hips hard.

"You're mine, Isabelle. Mine. Come on, move your ass. Fuck! Yes! Ahh..." And he released his own.

* * * *

It didn't take long before she and Zack settled into a comfortable routine. They'd get up in the morning to skate, come home to eat breakfast, visit the village, come home and have sex, play catch or go sledding in the nearby Sno-King State park. Zack stopped complaining about the cold weather. He began to enjoy trekking in the woods and even

played snowball fights with the kids he dubbed as Forest Rangers.

Zack let her work her case at night while he did his own business. He never disturbed her while she was working, but often times Isabelle caught herself looking at the door hoping Zack would come in.

She loved the intimacy, their closeness, to wake up in the morning and find a warm body close to hers, to have someone to say goodnight to and fight for the last can of Coors beer. Zack never failed to show her how much he enjoyed being with her, in and out of the bedroom. He'd been the perfect lover any woman could ever want. A lover who would leave her as soon as his job was over. There were no strings that bound her with Zack except for the physical intimacy. But thinking about living her life without him hurt more than her three broken engagements. Isabelle knew Zack would leave a hollow cavity in her heart when he was gone and there wasn't anything she could do about it. The devastation their separation would cause her when he packed his clothes would be insurmountable. Not only because she'd miss his company, but also him. The thought about facing her morning without Zack gripped her heart so hard her eyes blurred from tears.

She stood up and closed her laptop. Good god! She wasn't supposed to fall in love with him. And

so fast, too. A week after meeting him, she set aside her allergy to latex excuse because deep down inside, she loved his touch, his nearness. Him.

But she couldn't disregard the fact that no matter what angle she looked, Zack was the wrong man for her. They belonged in totally different worlds. Zack's a city boy, Isabelle a woman raised in the countryside. And worse, Zack wore a badge like her father. Falling for him means to suffer like her mother. But if she ended the affair, she might be able to avoid it from happening. It would probably kill her, but she must. It would be a bit too late but better than later when Zack turned his back and waved goodbye.

"Is everything okay?" Zack stood in her doorway watching her. He looked so yummy in his plain white shirt with his holster strapped on his side. The Levi's he wore had seen better days, but the ratty hem and holey knees only added to his appeal. "The crab didn't sit well in your stomach?"

"Funny. Ha ha." Zack stood behind her placing his hands on her shoulders. She squeezed her eyes shut. They were still together and yet, she was already thinking of the days when he wouldn't be in her life anymore. She'd miss him badly.

"So what's up with the gloomy face? Did I

forget to lower the toilet seat again? Wait, it's the green beans right? Promise I'll eat them next time. It's just, I rather eat my beans when they still looked like beans."

"None of the above. I'm just thinking about something else." They have only one more week before the Christmas parade. After that she'd present her case to court. Meaning they have only eight days left to be together. Isabelle placed her hand on her chest. Her heart constricted it was difficult to breath. "Zack, I'm just thinking, I know little about you. Don't know your email address,"

"Upper case Z dot Akerrs with a capital A at lowercase FBI dot org."

"Where exactly in Texas you were born," Isabelle continued.

"Austin." He wrapped his arm around her. The act was so simple, but touched every corner of her whole being.

Isabelle leaned her head back loving the feel of his hands against her skin.

"Your favorite color," she closed her eyes.

"Brown the color of your eyes. I was born December 1, 1976. Height six feet and one inch. I'm allergic to cashew nuts and strawberries. I've been an FBI agent for five years. I love swimming, running, and sex. You know the last one already. What else do you want to know? If I killed someone? Yes. I shot a man who killed two little

girls because their dad failed to pay him dope money. I'm not proud of it and felt bad for his family."

"What exactly do you do?"

"Apprehend violent criminals."

"Sounds too dangerous. I don't understand why you would do this job."

"You wouldn't unless your heart dictates it. Think about the trees, your owls and eagles you love. You will protect them no matter what. Why. Because your heart beats for them. It's the passion, dedication, and you can throw principle in there, if you want. But when it comes down to it, it was always the heart that makes us do things that we love to do."

Her uncle told her that Zack loved his job. He swore to serve and protect and would most likely wear his badge for as long as he could because his heart beat for it. Isabelle felt her world collapse on her. She really must find the strength to end their relationship.

Chapter Eight

Zack's been watching Isabelle. All morning, her mood was so crappy. One minute she was happy and then grumpy or weepy and irritable the next. After their remarkable love making yesterday, she became distant. He caught her staring at him when she thought he wasn't seeing her.

He could feel the tension in her body. Something was bothering her and it wasn't just her illegal logging case. For some reason, Captain Sander's warnings came to his mind. Could it be that Isabelle was done dancing with him and now considering leaving him on the dance floor alone? The thought bothered him. Losing Isabelle was unimaginable. Weeks ago, his heart and mind were focused on his job. Not anymore. His heart beat for one person—Isabelle. Last night, he realized he would give up anything including his badge if it would mean having her. He loved her that much.

That day in the woods, on their way to Erik's house, he felt something then. Now he knew what it was. Love. He'd been in love with her since that foggy morning when he bumped into her and he didn't even know it. Isabelle. His love. His home.

He put his hand in his pocket to feel the cool gold band. Thanks to Marie, she helped her picked the simple band from her jewelry brochure. Marie and Captain Sanders had warned him about Isabelle's vow, but it wasn't enough to sway him from proposing. Of course, he wouldn't know how he'd react if she said no, but he'd give his best shot.

He scanned the frozen lake. The fog, like any other morning, was low. They'd met when the fog was swirling at their feet, it was only right to propose to her with the fog present.

"The parade is next week. I think you'd be ready by then." Isabelle said with a faraway look on her face. She even looked like she was ready to cry. "But go ahead and practice. I'll watch you."

He didn't like the way she was acting. Not one bit. "What's going on, Isabelle? Woke up on the wrong side of the bed?"

"No. Please, just practice. You don't need me anymore. It's time you go solo."

"Are you talking about me skating or something else?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do."

"Zack, I am not in the mood to argue. If you don't want to practice, fine. Let's go home."

"Do you really think the reason why I get up so early is to practice my skating skills to avoid embarrassing myself in front of your townspeople?" Her cold shoulders were seriously pissing him off. "Do you think I care about what they think?"

"No, I think you get up early in the morning with me so you could watch me and make sure nothing untoward happens. Because if I get hurt, your badge is on the line and maybe your gun, too."

"Are you serious? Who the fuck gives a shit about my badge? I surely don't."

"Okay, I see. You don't want to skate. Let's go home then. I have work to do."

God damn it! She was leaving him on the dance floor. Was it because of his line of work or Andy. Maybe both. "Why are you acting like this? Is it Andy? He's been sniffing you around like some fucking monkey in heat."

"Leave Andy out of this. And, Zack, watch your language. You're not in Florida, yet. So hold the cursing until you get back home."

What the fu... "So, you're giving me this cold treatment because you're tired of my company, is that it. You can hardly wait until I'm gone so you

can get back with Andy."

"Stop it. Andy has nothing to do with...me or you."

"Oh, please enlighten me. I'm all ears."

"I just think we've gone too far. I want the personal part of our relationship to end, now."

He'd expected this. Still, her words were worse than a hard blow on his gut. Worse than the butt of the gun that split the skin above his eyebrows. "I thought you were having fun with *us*?"

"I was. Not anymore." Isabelle looked at him straight in the eye. "Let's end this now. I don't want to be your temporary girlfriend anymore."

"Give me one good reason why we shouldn't make our relationship permanent."

"What for?"

"Give me an effing reason."

"Zack..."

"Why?"

"Because...I..."

"Because you love me, but didn't want to because you promised yourself you will not marry a man in uniform." Zack stood in front of her. "Isabelle, if I tell you that I love you, too, would that change your mind about us?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks. He wiped them with the pad of his gloved thumb. "Zack, mom loved Dad so much she suffered through the whole time Dad was in service. When Dad died,

her heart couldn't bear the pain. I am a lot like her. I'll die too if something happens to you. If you're out of my life—"

"Say you love me."

"I love you, but—"

Zack pulled her into his arms. "No, but. I love you, my eco-warrior. God knows how much I crave for you when I wake up in the morning until late at night. I want you in my bed, under my sheets, with your head on my pillow. I want you in my arms before the sun goes down and rises from the east. I love you and I want to be with you."

"Being with me means you have to stay here. You hate this place. It's too cold and dreary. Unlike in Florida."

"Honey, this place, the trees, people, your aunt and uncle, and you, changed my life completely. The neighborhood I know is the streets of Florida where transients, prostitutes, drug dealers are everywhere. Hate and fear, dying and trying to survive was the constant thing that surrounded me for years. Now, with you, everything changed. I get to skate, play catch. I even went sledding. I hated this place in the beginning, but you helped me enjoy this town. With you, I'm not cold. Even if the sun's not shining, your smile is enough to keep me warm. I love you, Isabelle."

"Zack, you haven't seen this place during

heavy snowstorm. You wouldn't like it. Maybe now, you're enjoying this place but eventually you'll regret being here. You'll want to get out. Besides, if you stay here, what would you do?"

"I'll ride the desk. Or I can request for a transfer in Oregon. We do have offices around the country."

"Zack. You love what you do, to protect, to hunt, to stop criminals. Not to be ensconced in a cubicle answering phones or typing a report. I won't be a part of your miserable life someday if you choose to stay here."

He kissed her lips. "Someday is too far away. Let's talk about today, about you and me. Why don't we – damn!"

"What? What are you looking at?"

A glint of a gun barrel. The sunshine that penetrated the fog shone on the gun. Instinctively, he pushed Isabelle down. Her scream echoed the same time a shot rang.

Damn it. Zack exhaled real slowly. He knew this would happen. He looked around. The manger was a few feet away from them. He and Isabelle were sitting ducks. Calmly, he told her to crawl toward the manger.

"Zack, was that a gun shot?"

"Yes. Crawl, Isabelle. Now." He wanted to shoot the bastard, but he'd only give away their exact location. The thick fog was the only thing

keeping them hidden from the shooter. With his body blocking Isabelle, they crawled toward the manger.

Patience. A key to winning a battle was patience.

* * * *

The manger was close, but it seemed a mile away. Zack was beside her. His gun drawn. Why didn't she believe him? Now she put both of their lives in danger. If she didn't insisted they get up and skate every morning... Oh, god! The shooter must have learned their pattern.

Finally, they reached the manger. Zack told her to lean against the pile of hay. It was high enough so their heads were covered as well. But, the hay was not great protection. The shooters could come in any direction. What if there was more than one shooter and they all came in all directions? They would get killed. Zack would die.

She heard Zack groan. He was leaning against the hay, perspiration beaded on his forehead. He groaned again when he tried to remove his heavy coat. And then she saw it. Blood stained the side of his white turtleneck shirt.

"Zack! Oh my god! You got shot. Oh my god, god, god. You're bleeding." She bit the tips of her gloves and pulled them off. Quickly she pressed

them on his side.

"Ahh! Damn it woman. That hurts."

"I'm sorry!" Tears ran down her cheeks. She wiped the sweat that rolled down his temple. "God! You're bleeding so bad."

"I'm okay, hon. I'll survive. Don't worry."

"You better survive. Zack, don't die on me because I'll hate you forever." More tears blurred her vision. She wiped them off angrily.

"I won't die on you. I have more kisses to claim remember."

"What should I do?" Isabelle felt horrible. Zack was hurt because of her.

"Nothing. Just stay here and listen. I need to call in for a backup. Watch the fog. Scream if you see anything moving. Here, take this"

Isabelle looked at the smaller gun in his hand. She'd held a gun before. Her father showed her how to shoot and gave her her own. He even had gotten her a license to carry. But when he passed away, she didn't renew her license and put the gun away.

She took the gun from Zack and held onto it tight. "I hope I don't have to use this."

"Let's hope so. But Isabelle, don't hesitate to shoot. Aim at the one with his gun aimed at you. Got it?" he leaned down and kissed her square on the mouth.

Aim at the person holding a gun that is aimed at me.

What about him?

"Isabelle, did you hear what I just said?"

"Yes. Aim at the one with a gun pointing at me."

Isabelle watched for any movement while she listened to Zack talk to the 911 operator. She wiped the tears off her face.

Because of her, Zack could bleed to death and die. Because of her, he put his life in danger. Because of her...Enough! Zack needed her. She must be strong for him. If they made it out of this situation alive she'd give him hell for blocking the bullet for her. But now, she must stay brave and alert.

Zack stiffened beside her. She knew he heard the footsteps, too. She could tell whoever was coming wasn't wearing skates. The quietness of the morning helped them hear the slipping and sliding of shoes on ice.

Isabelle's heart was pounding so hard she could hear the beat in her ears. Zack shifted and pointed his gun to his left. A dark form emerged from the fog like a ghost. With a space of two blinks, Zack fired. A sickening thud of a body landing on hard ice followed the echoing sound of gunfire. Zack quickly got up and skated toward the man sprawled on ice. Isabelle could see the man's hand move and try to lift his gun. Zack pointed the gun down and fired the second time.

Paralyzing fear, shock and emotions she couldn't define at the moment enveloped her whole body. She'd never seen a man get shot before, but she was glad it wasn't Zack lying on the cold ice.

A skidding sound so soft she barely heard came from her right. She looked at Zack. He was leaning down with his back toward her. She opened her mouth to warn him, but no sound came out. Breathing suddenly became difficult. Isabelle started hyperventilating. A figure of a man materialized through the fog. He was looking at her but his gun was trained at Zack. And then he grinned at her. It was a challenge.

No. no. She shook her head. Anger, hate and fear of losing the man she loved gave her the strength to raise her hand. She aimed and pulled the trigger. The man grunted and dropped on the ice. She didn't lower her gun even when Zack rushed to her side.

Isabelle looked at him. His eyes registered fright, awe and pride.

"Isabelle, Isabelle, love. I thought...Thank god! Are you okay?"

"Yes. Are there more of them?" her voice finally came back. A bit shaky but came out forcefully.

"Don't know. Help's coming."

"Zack, I shot a man."

"I know. You did great, Isabelle."

The police arrived and quickly surrounded the area. Isabelle watched what was happening around her. It looked like a scene on television except there **was** real blood, real guns pointed at the men lying, bleeding on the ice. One officer waved for a Medic and pointed at the man she had shot. The man needed medical attention, which meant he was still alive.

Zack was immediately taken to an ambulance. She wanted to go to him, but she was stopped by a paramedic and taken to a medic van where she was treated for scrapes and bruises.

Her uncle came to her with tears in his eyes. Last time she'd seen him cry was when her parents died. After reassuring him that she was okay. She asked him to take her to Zack.

* * * *

Time ticked by. Since Zack came into her life, this was the first time they've been separated more than half an hour. At the lake, she was assured by the medics Zack would be okay and that his wound was not life-threatening before they whisked him away. Still, the blood, there was so much blood on him it was hard to believe his bullet wound was just a nick.

She stood by the window and looked outside. The sun was already high and the sky was blue.

The fog had finally lifted. Zack would be happy to see how clear it was outside.

Her uncle joined her. He didn't say anything. Together, they waited for the news to come. For the first time in many years, Isabelle prayed. She stopped praying when her pleas to spare her parents lives weren't answered. Now, she was praying again. Quietly, she cried.

After what seemed to be forever, the doctor came out. "Agent Akerrs is awake," he said.

"Go to him, Isabelle. Say hi to him for us."

Isabelle gave her uncle a hug. Zack was okay. And she couldn't wait to see him.

Chapter Nine

The whole frozen lake was ablaze with lights. Music was nonstop and the food supply was endless. Laughter and chattering were coming from every direction. Zack and Isabelle stood on the sidewalk beside the Christmas tree bright with colorful lights. As soon as the choir finished singing, it would be their turn on the ice.

Isabelle, wearing a long white robe with a white veil partly covering her hair looked so happy and excited. Her stomach was huge from the pillow strapped underneath her robe.

Zack grinned to himself. Her fake huge belly served as a preview of how she would look when heavy with his baby. His baby. He wrapped his arm around her and kissed her temple. "Hon, you look ready to pop your baby. When are we going to start this parade? I want to go home. I'm ready to pop you one right now."

Isabelle laughed and fixed his fake beard. "Sweetheart, be patient. It's going to be quick. All

we have to do is skate around the lake until we reach the manger and then that's it. How's your side."

"My side is fine. It's my di—" Isabelle clamped her hand on his mouth.

"Zack, behave."

He couldn't wait. The gold ring was burning a hole in his pocket. He was supposed to propose to Isabelle the morning of the shootout, but didn't get a chance to do it. Now, he would do it in front of the whole community. Captain Sanders had already given him his blessing.

With Isabelle's case off her hands and turned over to the higher court, she didn't have to deal with Hertz and the mayor all by herself. The surviving bastard who tried to kill them confessed about the mayor's involvement in hiring them to kill Isabelle, sealing the mayor's fate of a long-term in jail. Isabelle would be safe until she started poking hives again. And if she did, he'd be there every step of the way, protecting her.

The crowd clapped. Loretta thanked the choir and announced the beginning of the parade. The rest of the party involved started forming a line behind them.

"Are you ready, Joseph?" Isabelle asked smiling the way she had smiled to him when she offered her three Christmas kisses weeks ago.

Zack took Isabelle's hand and kissed each of her

fingers before giving her a long satisfying kiss eliciting chuckles and giggles from those who witness his affection. "Been ready over an hour, Mary."

The parade started. He skated beside Isabelle. She was waving and laughing. He remembered the way she had laughed at him the first time they'd met. So melodious and pure. That day she promised him three kisses each time they would run into each other, a great promise that sealed their fates. Now it was his turn to promise her something. His heart, love, life and soul.

Another five yards and they'd be in the manger. It was hard to believe only a week ago this place was a scene of death. The make shift manger looked different now. Hay **was** scattered on the ice and there was a wooden crib sitting in the middle. Zack's anticipation turned into anxiety when they came closer to the makeshift manger.

When they reached it, a man dressed in a brown robe and wearing sandals with matching thick dark brown socks greeted them. He let them in the manger. Isabelle sat down and discreetly removed the pillow from the opening on the side of her robe. She then reached behind the crib and produced a little baby. Oohs, ahhs and giggles came from the crowd.

Three teenagers wearing pristine white robes sounded their trumpets. A bright star hooked on a

long pole illuminated the manger. It was the sign that Jesus was born. A scene about the three kings looking for a direction took place taking the crowds eyes off them. He took the chance and leaned forward to kiss Isabelle. Those who saw what he did laughed. Isabelle shook her head laughing.

The three kings finally arrived in the manger. They stood in front of them and passed their gifts. When they left the choir started singing again. People cheered and clapped. Isabelle stood up and smiled up at him. "Great job, Joseph."

"Nice trick on the delivery."

"I wish it would be that easy when the real baby comes."

Zack's heart swelled. When he came to Oregon, his heart was set to protecting her as part of his job. That changed. Now, he wanted to extend his duty to her as a husband and future mother of his children. He was so fortunate to be standing beside the woman he loved to the depth of his soul. Isabelle was his sunshine, heat and heart. Unable to stop himself, he cupped her face and kissed her again, in front of her friends and the whole town. Roaring cheers and rah-rah echoed. But he wasn't done. He went down on his knees.

The crowd quickly quieted.

While on his knees, he reached into his pocket and took out the ring. "Isabelle Barnes, will you

marry me?"

Isabelle's tears glistened as they rolled down her cheeks. "Zack, you know I will. Yes I will marry you."

The crowd came to life again, cheering so loud Zack couldn't even hear himself talk. He took Isabelle in his arms. "I love you."

Chapter Ten

Zack woke up with someone or something licking his face. He opened his eyes and found a fuzzy little dog wearing a red ribbon around its neck. Doggy breath fanned his cheeks. "Hey, pup," he rubbed his scruff.

"Hey, sleepy head. I had to send puppy here to wake you up." Isabelle kissed him before picking up the puppy off his chest. She sat on the bed beside him.

"Beautiful."

"He is."

Zack leaned to kiss her neck. "Yeah, the puppy is, too, but I'm talking about you."

"Thanks."

He snaked his hand in between her legs and caressed her plump mound.

"Zack, stop it. Aunt and Marie will be here any moment. They're coming to help prepare dinner tonight.

"We have time. And if they come while we're

busy, they'll just have to wait."

"Don't be silly. Anyway, this little handsome guy is your Christmas present. Merry Christmas."

"Wow! This little golden is mine? Thanks. I've never had a dog before. What's his name?"

"I'm just calling him puppy right now. He's yours so you name him."

"I'll think about it. Maybe Erik can help me come up with a name."

"Oh, wait. Someone's here. She's been waiting patiently."

Isabelle left the room and came back holding a cat he recognized right away. "Marley."

"She's a beauty. I just love her button nose. I think she and puppy will get along famously."

"So Pete was here?" He asked his supervisor to watch Marley for him while he was gone.

"Yeah. He and Uncle came by to drop off this cute button and a beautiful rocking chair. You know what, they were talking about us as if they knew we'd end up together. Do you think they planned for us to meet?"

"I think it was the snow, ice, fog and fate that brought us together, hon."

"Oh, Zack. That is so romantic. I think I'm going to cry."

"Brat. Come here."

Isabelle leaned back in the crook of his arm.

"I didn't get you a present."

"Don't need one. I already have you."

Zack put the puppy on the floor. Marley followed. "Go somewhere you two. Come back in a couple hours."

"A couple hours?"

"What, you think two hours isn't enough?"

Isabelle raised a brow and lowered her gaze to look at his morning erection.

He made his dick nod.

Isabelle burst out laughing.

"Thanks for the puppy. But you are the best present I've ever gotten in my whole thirty years."

He gave Isabelle a leisurely kiss. God! A few weeks ago he hated being in this town, now he was blissfully happy to be here. For four years, he celebrated Christmas holidays on the street chasing goons, now he'd be celebrating it with Isabelle. The sweet cinnamon scented woman he bumped into. He shifted his position so Isabelle was on the bottom. "What should we try this time?"

"Like last time."

"Like this?" He sucked her nipple. The taste of her skin and the sweet feeling of her pebbled nipple in between the roof of his mouth and tongue pumped hot blood down to dick. Without a sign of inhibition, Isabelle held her breasts higher and offered them to him. With greed, he took each of her wet nipples. The sensation was

overwhelming. Repeatedly, he suckled her luscious breasts.

"Zack I never wanted anyone like this before. Every day I think about us, you...inside me."

"You're one sensual woman. And I love that about you. Are you ready for our morning round?"

"I think so."

"Well, let's find out." In one swift move, he plunged two fingers at the same time inside her warm vagina. The slick passage made his whole body quiver. "You're right. You're ready."

Isabelle groaned as he slowly pulled his fingers out from her. "Zack, please..."

"Honey, you don't need to beg. I'll fuck you until you scream my name and feel boneless." He sat on his knees and hooked his finger on the elastic strap of her panty, then lowered it to slip it off her feet.

With the morning sunshine filtered by the sheer curtain, he could see her firm large breasts, small waist and long legs. She was perfect. He peppered her flat belly with kisses down to the top of her mound, then nuzzled the dark curls and inhaled her musky scent.

"I want to taste you first, sweet." Her hips jerked when his fingers traced her wet labia. "Is that a yes?"

"Yes, Zack," she whispered.

“Good. Spread your legs for me.”

Zack inhaled real deep when he saw her sex glisten. He gripped her ass, enjoying the feel of her soft skin.

He gripped her bottom, blew on her nest and tongued her. Isabelle moaned lustily. Zack shut his eyes tight. He’d never get tired tasting her. He flicked his tongue to tease her clitoris before giving her a flat tongue. Isabelle’s fingers dug in his hair. He knew what she wanted and would give her whatever it was that gave her pleasure. He’d do everything for her.

Zack stopped to look at her. God, he loved her so much.

While one hand was holding her butt cheek, his other hand sought her warm opening. His fingers found her and started pumping.

“Zack! Oh, oh, yes, hmm...yes...” She rode his hand until her juice slickened his fingers. Between laving and sucking, he pleased her. When her walls pulsed around his fingers, he opened his mouth to claim her engorged clitoris and gave it a hard pull.

His hips thrust on their own. The tip of his penis rubbed against the bed sheet. He was close to bursting. Pulling his slick fingers out of her pussy, he wrapped them around his thick cock. He pumped himself a couple times before inserting his fingers back inside Isabelle’s warm cunt. The

blood pounding down his cock was almost unbearable. But he waited until he tasted Isabelle's orgasm. Isabelle moved her hips and let out a silent whimper.

With his whole body shaking from unspent lust, he slithered up inhaling Isabelle's scent. Once again he drove his tongue inside her mouth.

"Isabelle, I can't get enough of you."

"Nor I you."

Holding his dick, he slowly penetrated her. "I love you, Isabelle."

"I love you, too."

The bed creaked from his hard thrusting, but he didn't care. With his gaze on Isabelle, he quickened his movement. Finally, Zack released his orgasm. Spent, he cuddled beside Isabelle. "Darling, you asked me before about where is my home."

"Yes. You said here and there."

"Not anymore. With you, I am home."

About the Author

Tierney O'Malley graduated from PATTS College of Aeronautics and worked for an airline company. She also worked for a non-governmental organization dedicated to the conservation of natural resources. She resides in the Pacific Northwest with her husband, their two daughters and a golden retriever.