



Guilty pleasures can heat the coldest winter night...

A Red Hot Winter Story

There's never been any question in Rachel Ashberg's mind. Jackson Brooks is the one, and they both know it. The problem? Thanks to his unbreakable rule—never date his twin sister's friends—he's completely off-limits. Even if they can't imagine being with anyone else.

It's been over two years since their last encounter, when they gave in—just once—to their passion. Now, as the Brooks twins' milestone birthday approaches, Rachel and Jackson are about to meet again at a gorgeous mountain resort. Needing something to take the edge off the desire that has never faded, she indulges in a fling with sexy stranger Garreth Halt. He even makes her forget Jackson for a while. Or...maybe not.

When she mentions Jackson's name in passing, Garreth picks up on all the hidden undertones in her voice. And he brings Jackson into their bed, if only in a fantasy they play out together. Funny thing about Garreth's fantasies, though. Even the most improbable, *impossible* ones have a way of becoming reality...

Warning: Enough heat is contained within these pages that you won't even notice the winter cold. You might fall in love with Jackson—the real-life hero, determined to protect his sister from further pain—but it's the handsome stranger, Garreth, who'll take your breath away.

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Winter Fire

Jess Dee

Dedication

With special thanks to Lexxie Couper, for reeling me into this anthology and keeping me here. Oh, and for her invaluable insight into this book. Twisted as it may have been, it was spot on every single time.

To the Down Under Divas: Every writer should have a chance to brainstorm their ménages in a hotel lounge, with a strange man sitting opposite them listening spellbound to every word.

And of course, thank you to Heidi Moore for taking a chance on me. Ayzeh yoffe, boet, it's been lekker. I've had a jol and a half (And seriously? I don't think there's another editor in the whole world I could say that to).

Chapter One

Heat radiated from the stone fireplace, warming the room. The temperature in the cozy, modern hotel lounge was a welcome contrast to the frigid wind outside. Mesmerized, Rachel Ashberg stared into the flames, watching as they danced around the logs, consuming the wood with hungry licks.

She sipped the last of her wine, relishing the tranquility that settled over her. Tomorrow that peace would be stripped away like old paint.

It had been a good idea to drive up to the Blue Mountains from Sydney a day early. The ninety-minute car trip through winding roads and national parkland had given her a chance to decompress a little. Twenty-four hours of rest and relaxation, away from the stress of work and failed relationships, was proving to be a much-needed tonic. Plus, she was building up her energy reserves for the weekend. She was going to need them.

The walk down to Wentworth Falls earlier had helped too. All that crisp, wintry air, lush eucalyptus forest, calming birdsong and getting back to nature had either cleared her mind of any remaining despondency or frozen her brain and heart enough that those issues no longer worried her. So what if things hadn't worked out with Paul? She'd known from the beginning he wasn't the right guy for her, but she'd tried anyway.

Just like she'd tried with James and Ethan and a whole host of other men who hadn't quite cut it. Hell, none of them were the right guy.

How could they be, when she'd already met the right guy—and he was the one man she couldn't be with? Of course, fate dictated he was *also* the man she was about to spend two days and two nights with, in a romantic boutique hotel.

He, his sister and ten of their closest friends.

God, it was going to be hell. Torture to the *nth* degree. How would she ever make it through to Monday?

Rachel shook her head, chastising herself for her negativity.

She would make it through to Monday. Her strength and her resistance had been fortified today, and she'd be fine. The weekend would pass without her once pining for Jackson Brooks. Without accidentally brushing up against him. Without sneaking outside in the blistering cold to steal secret kisses as they once had.

Rachel fidgeted with the cover of her book, considered opening it, but in the end just wasn't in the mood for reading.

"Mind if I join you?"

The question registered, but Rachel didn't respond. Since she was here alone, whoever had spoken must have addressed someone else. Pity. The voice held appeal. It was a deep rumble, smooth as old scotch. And accented. American?

She smiled to herself. Her relationship skills may be shot to hell, but her body still worked just fine. It didn't matter that yet another relationship had failed as a result of her feelings for Jackson. Her sex drive obviously hadn't suffered for it.

Proof in point? A few words from an unseen man with a sexy accent, and her pussy stirred. After all, sex was a wonderful way to temporarily forget her woes and heart-ache.

The evocative voice spoke again. "Okay, I won't join you, but could I at least share the fire?"

Rachel blinked. Share the fire? Maybe the unseen man with the sexy-as-sin accent *was* talking to her after all. She turned in the direction of the voice and had to stifle a gasp. An absolutely gorgeous man gazed down at her, awaiting her answer.

Not staring at him was an impossibility. He was movie-star beautiful, with chiseled facial features and eyes the color of a crystal-clear emerald. His lips, full and lush, made Rachel want to sample them with her own. They made her want to sink her fingers in the silken brown locks of his stylishly cut hair, pull his face close to hers and kiss the living daylights out of him.

He had to be a model. No other profession suited a man of such defined beauty.

Her spine tingled.

Oh yeah. Definitely nothing wrong with her sex drive.

"Would you let me sit down if I swore not to say another word and spent the entire time looking anywhere but in your direction?" he asked with a charming smile.

She broke into a smile of her own, belatedly realizing she hadn't answered. She'd been too busy ogling him. Rachel held out her hand in invitation. "Of course you can share the fire."

He flashed her a huge grin and settled his towering frame into the chair beside hers with a relieved sigh. "For a moment I thought you might blow me off before I even found out your name."

She raised an eyebrow. So he'd come to talk to her, and not to be close to the fire? Okay. She could live with that. "And for a moment I thought you'd just sit here and not say another word," she said with a straight face.

He smiled impishly. "I lied."

Oh, Lord, what a smile. "Ah, so you do intend to speak then?"

"Hell, yeah. A stunning woman sitting in front of a fire, all alone? Damn straight I'm gonna speak. I'm gonna say whatever I can to get her attention."

Sexy devil. She tilted her head to the side. “Are you flirting with me?”

He frowned. “That depends.”

“On what?”

“On whether there’s a Mr. Beautiful who might get upset.”

“And if there’s not?”

He met her gaze and grinned. “Then I’m flirting.”

She laughed at his audacity, even as her breath quickened. “How about those plans to look anywhere but in my direction?”

He nodded gravely. “Yeah. I kinda lied about those too.”

She suppressed a smile.

“So is there?” he prompted.

“Is there what?” His eyes were so exquisite she got lost staring into them.

“A Mr. Beautiful?”

She shook her head. “No.” Well, there was, but as much as she might wish it were different, Jackson wasn’t her Mr. Beautiful, and aside from that one illicit afternoon, he never would be. Didn’t change the fact that her heart belonged to him and always would.

“Lucky for me then.” He held out his hand. “I’m Garreth Halt.”

“Rachel.” She deliberately left out her last name, enjoying the anonymity of chatting with a stranger who knew nothing about her. When she placed her palm against his and his fingers curled around hers, shivers rocked her hand. Dear God, could she please drag him to her room and have her way with him?

Er, probably better to stick around and make small talk. She’d known him all of five minutes. Jumping him now would hardly be appropriate. Or maybe it would be? Maybe if she jumped Garreth she wouldn’t have to think about Jackson.

She chose the small-talk option. “You visiting from the States, Garreth?”

He shook his head. “I’m Canadian. Heading back to Toronto in a couple of weeks.”

See? She could do the light chatter thing and not feel compelled to haul him off to her chalet. “Enjoying Australia so far?”

His eyes glinted. “Well enough. Although I’m not a tourist. I’ve been living here for the last two years.”

“In Leura?” she asked, referring to the closest village to the hotel.

He shook his head. “Nope. Brisbane. This is my first trip to the Blue Mountains.”

“Brisbane, huh? I lived there almost my whole life.”

“It’s a small world,” Garreth said thoughtfully. “Where do you live now?”

“Sydney. Been there over two years. It’s good to escape from the city for a while though. Isn’t it beautiful here?”

He grinned at her. "Let's just say the mountains became a whole lot more interesting in the last few minutes..."

She laughed out loud. "You really are flirting, aren't you?" And was she ever responding. A tingling awareness flowed through her, an open recognition of the energy that crackled between them.

"Is it working?" he drawled earnestly.

She pretended to think about her answer. No need for him to know just yet that her belly was already quivering in anticipation. "I'm not sure. Maybe you should try a little harder."

"You know, we could skip the flirting part altogether and head straight into heated kisses beside a roaring fire."

Damned if her heart didn't miss a beat. "We could." But she couldn't be that easy. Could she? She and Paul had only split up six weeks ago. "Or I could read my book and pretend you're not really here."

"You could." He nodded. "But heated kisses beside a roaring fire would be a lot more entertaining for both of us."

Entertaining? Hell, forget the fireplace, the two of them would probably ignite flames of their own together. "For all the other hotel guests too. I bet they'd get a kick out of watching."

Humor sparkled in his eyes, and something else. Desire? Hunger? Or maybe raw lust?

Nah, the raw lust was radiating from her, not him.

He lowered his voice. "If it's privacy you're wanting, there's a fireplace in my chalet."

Heated kisses beside a roaring fire in the privacy of his hotel room? With a Canadian she'd never see again? A man she could spend her passion with and move on. Damn, there was very little that appealed more.

Okay, so maybe there was something that appealed more. Jackson.

Yeah, didn't matter how much Jackson appealed, nothing else could ever happen between them. Not without causing Jackson's sister untold heartache.

"If I'd wanted privacy, I'd never have invited you to sit here," she pointed out logically.

"Tell me you're not regretting the invitation?"

She nibbled on her lower lip. "Well, you do talk a lot..."

He shot her a purely wicked look. "Not when I'm in the middle of a heated kiss."

"You talk a lot about kissing." She didn't mind one bit.

He nodded. "I've been thinking about it a lot. Since I first spied you in the lobby earlier."

"You saw me earlier?" How could she not have noticed him?

"While I was checking in. You were on your way out. Dressed for a blizzard I might add."

He'd noticed her attire? "I went for a walk. It was so cold there may as well have been a blizzard brewing."

He shook his head. "You Australians have no idea about cold and blizzards."

She let her gaze slide away from his face and down to his chest and shoulders. “We have no idea? Mate, you’re wearing a T-shirt.” A T-shirt he filled out beautifully. It hugged his broad shoulders and ended halfway down his upper arms, showcasing muscled biceps and golden flesh. “It’s three degrees Celsius out there, the mercury’s plummeting, and you’re wearing a T-shirt.”

“We’re indoors. There’s a fire. It’s warm.”

Was he nuts? “It’s warm here and now. But the sun’s going down. Soon as it sets, the temperature will drop below freezing.”

“Not a prob. I have a sweater for when I go out.”

“A sweater?” One sweater? She had two jackets, an assortment of jumpers, three sweaters and a cardigan—and those were just for a three-day trip.

“It’s enough.”

“You’re crazy.” Gorgeous, ridiculously sexy and crazy.

“You’re cold?”

“I’m always cold in winter.” God, she missed the sun-drenched days of summer.

“You know, in Canada we have a brilliant system for keeping warm.”

“Ducted heating. I know.”

“Actually, I was talking about sex.”

His answer was so unexpected she laughed out loud. “Sex, huh?” Dear Lord, she wanted to keep warm with Garreth, Canadian style. For sure it would take her mind off Jackson’s imminent arrival—and their checkered past. “Nope, sorry. We don’t have sex in Australia.”

He looked aghast. “Not even in the Blue Mountains?”

“Especially not in the Blue Mountains.”

He nodded gravely. “Ah. That’s a damn pity.”

“Don’t let it worry you. You’re going back to Toronto in a couple of weeks. I’m sure you’ll have plenty of sex then—even if it is summer and there won’t be any need to keep warm.”

“Maybe, but I was hoping to have sex with you, here in the Blue Mountains.”

Again she laughed, enjoying his witty repartee. Enjoying it almost as much as she enjoyed the tantalizing sparks that flickered between them. “Would you settle for a drink by the fireplace?”

He considered her question. “Depends which fireplace.”

“This one, right here.”

“How about the one in my room?”

She shook her head. “Nah. Too risky. I might have to fend off your heated kisses.” Yeah, right. If anything, he’d be the one fending her off. The longer they chatted, the more appetizing his lips became.

He grinned devilishly. “No might about it. Another red wine?” He motioned to her empty glass before signaling to a waiter.

She nodded and he ordered wine for her and a scotch for himself. "So, Rachel," he said as soon as the waiter had left, "what is it you do when you're not seducing men into kissing you beside roaring fires?"

For a couple of seconds she hesitated to tell him. If he knew about her job, she'd lose some of her anonymity. And if she were to entertain ideas about kissing Garreth beside the fire, she knew she'd have to maintain that sense of them being strangers. A fling appealed no end. A brief affair with a stranger to take the edge off before Jackson arrived. A little something to distract her from her obsessions about the man she could never have.

A one-night stand.

Garreth was the perfect stranger. Gorgeous, charming and sexy to boot. He'd be a perfect distraction. Exactly what she needed.

But then she forged ahead. She'd never see Garreth again after tonight. He lived on another continent. What could it hurt to tell him a few things about herself?

Answering his question in the same light he'd asked it, Rachel revealed a little of herself. "I seduce gold into forming intricate pieces of jewellery."

His eyebrow shot up. "You're a jewellery designer?"

"You look surprised."

For a good few seconds he didn't answer. "I am," he said finally. "See, I thought you might be a model."

She laughed out loud. "I thought *you* were the model."

"Me?" He gave a boisterous snort then eyed her speculatively. "I'm a journalist."

"Newspaper?"

"Uh huh."

Damn. Seemed she had a thing for journos from Brisbane. "I have a friend who's a journalist." Her heart twisted beneath her ribs. "He'll be here tomorrow." Ridiculous. Here she was chatting to a gorgeous guy, and she'd found a way to introduce Jackson into the conversation. Ridiculous and pathetic.

He peered at her curiously, as if trying to establish the depth of her and Jackson's "friendship". "You're meeting him here?"

Hah. He should only know. Meeting Jackson and doing her best to avoid him at the same time. "Uh huh. It's his thirtieth. He and his twin sister are celebrating in style." She gestured to the hotel lobby with her arm. "A weekend in a boutique hotel in the Blue Mountains."

"Nice birthday celebration. You friendly with the sister also?"

"BFFs," Rachel told him with a smile. She and Jenna had been friends since their last year in school. Now that they lived in different cities, Rachel missed her like the devil.

In truth, Rachel was in the mountains to celebrate Jenna's birthday, not Jackson's. She and Jackson had no business celebrating together. They had no business being together in any way. They'd tried that once and the guilt had left them both unsettled and ashamed.

The waiter returned with their drinks, and Rachel sipped hers slowly as they spoke.

"So what, you came up a day early? Before the celebrations begin?"

She nodded. "I needed a break."

"From the stressful world of jewellery design?"

Was he mocking her?

Nope. Teasing, not mocking. "Among other things."

The light from the flames hit the tawny liquid in his glass. It glinted, just like the russet strands in his hair. The man was beautiful enough to make her chest ache.

"May I?" He reached over and lifted her arm, holding it up so he could see the bracelet that hung around her wrist. His touch burned her skin, licking at her flesh like the flames on the logs.

"Did you design this?" he asked.

"Uh huh." It was one of her favorite pieces. An intricately woven gold chain with tiny diamonds embedded along its length.

"Impressive." He gave an appreciative nod. "I've never seen gold quite that color before."

Rachel smiled, enjoying the feel of her arm in his hand. How would her breasts feel in that same hand? "Copper gives it the pink tinge."

He looked up, clearly surprised. "You mix gold with copper?"

"Uh huh. Mixing gold with different metals creates the different shades of gold."

"You're an alchemist," Garreth murmured.

"Hardly." Rachel chuckled. "I don't make gold. I simply alter its color a little."

Garreth flashed her a seductive grin. "Same difference."

The wine settled in her belly in a pleasant puddle. Her limbs relaxed and her muscles loosened. She didn't try to pull her arm away. She was more than content with it in Garreth's hand. He had long, slim fingers. Fingers she could easily imagine trailing up her arms and over her shoulders, leaving goose bumps in their wake.

"So, what else did you need a break from?" he asked.

Ah. Back to that conversation. "Life in general. Nothing specific." No need to mention her spectacular failure at building romantic relationships, or the little issue of spending the last twelve years in love with a man she could never have—no matter how much they might want to be together.

He raised an eyebrow. "Not even a man? A certain journalist friend perhaps?"

She gaped at him. How on earth had he singled out Jackson so quickly?

"You blushed earlier," he said.

“When?” Her free hand flew to her cheek. Was she still blushing? Flushed at the thought of Jackson?

“When you mentioned your friend. Your cheeks turned pink. Just like your bracelet. A most alluring color on you I might add.” His gaze settled on her face. “It’s a damn pity.”

“What is?”

He smiled at her ruefully. “That there *is* a Mr. Beautiful out there.”

Rachel’s jaw dropped. Good grief. Just how much had he determined about her feelings for Jackson. She couldn’t be that open a book, could she? She licked her very dry lips. “Jackson’s a friend. Nothing more.” They could never be anything more, and they both knew it. No matter what they felt for each other, they’d had to shove it aside and pretend it didn’t exist.

History had taught the Brooks siblings that terrible things could happen if they dated each other’s friends. And Rachel was Jenna’s best friend.

“I had to ask,” Garreth said, and then smiled his devilish smile. “I had to check out the competition.”

Rachel arched an eyebrow.

“If I have any hope of getting you into my bed tonight,” he explained, “I have to know exactly what I’m dealing with.”

“You’re hoping to get me into bed tonight?”

“Kissing beside a fire is nice. Making love in a king-size bed is sensational.” The smile was gone. His eyes burned with the intensity of his words.

She tilted her head. “So if I climbed into that king-size bed with you, there wouldn’t be any kissing?” She gave him a pouty frown. “Pity. I’ve been fantasizing about those heated kisses beside the fireplace.”

“And I’ve been fantasizing about making love to you in the king-size bed in my chalet.”

“Hmm.” She tapped her finger on her lips, pondering the quandary. “Seems we’ve reached an impasse. I want one thing, you want another.”

“Seems we have,” he agreed.

“What to do, what to do?” she wondered out loud.

“You big on compromise?” he asked.

“Depends on the terms of the compromise,” she answered.

His green eyes sparkled. “What if the king-size bed were beside the fireplace?”

Chapter Two

It wasn't.

His bed was on the other side of the luxurious chalet. Flames leapt behind an iron grid in the fireplace, which sat against the opposite wall of the large room, facing a double couch. The giant, wooden sleigh bed, covered with snow-white linens, overlooked a wall of windows. The sunset outside cast a pinkish-orange glow over the trees and mountains.

The chalet was identical to hers, only a mirror image.

"You have a choice," he said as he kicked the door closed behind them. "I can spread a blanket on the floor beside the fire, and we can do this the slow romantic way." His eyes gleamed with desire, with a fire hotter than the one across the room.

Her heart picked up speed. "Or?"

He kicked off his shoes. "Or I can toss you on the bed and fuck you until we both pass out."

She slung her jacket over the couch. As if there was a choice. Sensual, dreamy and romantic, or hot, hard and ruthless. "Option two." Dreamy and romantic were stored away for Jackson.

His lips twitched. "I had you picked for the heated-kisses option."

"And I had you picked as a model. Apparently we were both wrong. Now you gonna keep talking, or you gonna fuck me until we both pass out?" Oh, yeah, when she met Jackson tomorrow, the last thing on her mind would be jumping him. She intended to fully satisfy herself on the delicious man before her.

His T-shirt was off before she finished the question. "Option two." His smile scorched her all the way through to her bones.

She stared at him, dumbstruck. With his shirt on he was beautiful. Without it, he was panty-wetting, tongue-drooling gorgeous. Sex on legs.

Her hands shook as she unbuttoned her cardigan and let it drop to the floor.

"Bed?" he rumbled.

"Lead the way," she concurred and pulled her shirt over her shoulders.

Garreth fiddled with his button and seconds later his jeans gaped open. Rachel forgot to breathe.

He tugged at her thermal silk undershirt. "Any more layers I should know about?"

"Just two."

He shook his head. "No blizzards in Australia."

"I told you, I hate the cold." She lifted her arms and let him dispose of the silk.

His thumbs grazed over her covered nipples, making her tremble. They beaded instantly.

“Too many clothes,” he grumbled, and the cami she wore disappeared.

He gazed hungrily at her bra-clad breasts. “God, you’re beautiful.”

“Look closer,” she urged, and reached back to dispose of the black satin-and-lace bra. Her breasts sprung free, feeling heavier than usual under the close scrutiny of those emerald green eyes.

“Jesus, fuck,” he swore hoarsely, and then she was in his arms, pressed against the glorious wall of his muscular chest.

His full, lush lips took hers in a blistering kiss. A kiss so wicked it shook her very foundations. It burned off the cold, replacing it with a fierce heat that seared her from her mouth right through to her feminine core.

He tasted of scotch and man and sex—every bit as scrumptious as she’d anticipated.

Better.

She tunneled her fingers through his hair, holding his head close, molding her lips to his, pushing her body against his.

Ah, that erection. It felt good against her belly. A solid mass pressing into her softer flesh. She wanted it in her hand. In her mouth. Fuck, who was she kidding? She wanted it buried in her pussy. And in her ass. Hell, she just wanted it inside her.

She slipped her hand inside his open jeans and cupped it over his cock.

He moaned into her mouth, rocking against her hand.

Or maybe that was her moaning. He was thicker than she expected. And harder. She struggled to find breath. If he felt so good in her palm, covered by his boxers, how would he feel driving into her pussy?

Garreth broke the kiss to kick off his jeans and boxers. Toned, muscular legs were revealed inch by endless inch. His freed cock jumped up, slapping against his stomach.

“Yours too,” he said as his boxers hit the floor. “Take ’em off.”

She shook her head. “Can’t. Sorry. My hands are full.”

“Yeah? Of what?”

“You.” She wrapped one hand around his shaft, closing it around the silken steel of his erection. The other she used to cup his balls.

He threw his head back with a hiss, and she experimentally slid her hand up and down, testing his girth and his length. Both were impressive, yet neither overwhelming. He’d be a good fit inside her.

“Ah, Christ,” he groaned. “Just like that.”

For a long moment he stood stock still, letting her explore, feel, play. And then his patience snapped. He picked her up and tossed her on the bed.

“Carry on like that, Rachel, and it’ll be game over before we even begin.”

“What, no staying power?” she ragged as he tugged at her zipper and pulled her jeans over her hips.

“What the devil...?” He stared, dumbstruck, at the lower half of her body.

He’d found her leggings. “They’re my thermals,” she explained with a grin.

He shook his head. “You wouldn’t last a second in a Canadian winter.”

“Then we’re even ‘cause you hardly lasted a second in my hand.”

His eyes gleamed as he pulled off her boots and her knee-length, woolen socks. “Is that a challenge?”

God, who would have thought disposing of sixteen layers of clothing could be sexy? Yet, with each item he removed, Rachel squirmed more and more on the bed. “You up to a challenge?”

“Woman, I’ve been up since I saw you in the lobby this afternoon.”

She eyed his impressive erection. “Hope it feels as good up as it looks.”

Her thermals vanished, leaving her lying in nothing but panties. “It’ll feel better buried inside you.”

She shuddered in anticipation. “Now about that challenge...”

He dipped his hands under the elastic of her panties and slowly rolled them over her hips and down her legs. “You think I can’t last longer than a second?”

“See, that’s the thing...” It was getting harder and harder to talk and tease. Her nudity left her exposed to his gaze, and his gaze left her smoldering. “...I’d at least like you to try.”

He gave her a quirky grin. “I’ll see what I can do.”

She grinned right back, thoroughly enjoying herself. Garreth was fun. He made her smile. When she’d made love to Jackson, neither of them had smiled. The ride had been too intense, too emotional and too shadowed with guilt to be fun.

Garreth covered her body with his and kissed her. His lips were so seductive, his tongue so alluring, so sensual, desire trickled through her belly like syrup. There was something sinfully erotic about making love to a stranger. No strings, no history, no emotional complexities. No secrets, no failings. And possibly the most important aspect of all: no future.

They were just two people intent on pleasuring and satisfying each other here and now.

Garreth tucked his leg between her thighs, using it to grind against her pussy. How he unerringly knew to position his thigh just so, so her clit benefitted from the full attention of his movements, she had no idea. She simply spread her legs and gave his thigh free access.

He dipped his head to draw a nipple into his mouth. As his lips closed around the supersensitive flesh, cream spilled from her pussy, coating his skin.

She raked her nails over his back. If this continued much longer, she’d come. On his leg, with her nipple in his mouth.

“Garreth,” she whispered.

“Mm hmm,” he mumbled around a mouthful of her breast.

“I thought you were going to fuck me ‘til I passed out.”

He released her nipple to cup a breast in each hand, pushed them together and ran his tongue from one nipple to other. "And I thought you wanted me to last more than a second."

She instinctively arched her back, pushing her chest higher, pleading silently for more. She also ground down against his thigh, seeking relief from the pressure building in her clit. "I want both. *Now*."

Lord, it was good to live in the *now*. To not worry about the future or the past.

He chuckled. "A lady who knows what she wants. I like that."

"And I'd like it if you'd replace your leg with your dick, and fuck me like you promised."

"Getting impatient?" He licked her nipples again, moving his leg torturously against her pussy.

"Getting hornier by the second," she sighed. "Carry on like that and I'm going to come on your leg."

He stilled completely, then sat up. "Not my leg. My hand."

"Huh?"

He swept a finger over her clit and when she shuddered, did it again. He pushed her legs wide open to swirl his finger around and around, slipping it deep between her folds.

The breath left her lungs with a shudder.

"I want to watch you come. I want to see every tremor, every spasm that hits your pussy as I touch you."

"O-okay," she answered, because there was very little else she could think of to say in this position.

He trailed his finger lower, exploring between her butt cheeks, making her ass clench in helpless anticipation.

A groan escaped him, and he closed his eyes, grabbing his cock with his free hand and squeezing hard. His other hand continued to seduce her ass and pussy. He dipped his finger back inside her channel.

A fierce wave of pleasure began to crest over her. "Open your eyes," she demanded.

"Why?"

"Because if you want to see me come, you better look now."

His eyes opened as the first spasm hit, rocking through her body.

Garreth drove his finger in and out, and rubbed circles around her clit as waves of bliss washed over her. His gaze held firm, watching her pussy convulse, exactly as he'd promised.

The simple eroticism of the act, of his scrutiny, increased the intensity of the spasms, stretching the orgasm out. Garreth's death grip around his cock must have slackened marginally, because as she came he pumped his shaft, timing his movements to coincide with hers. As her muscles clamped around his finger, he stroked down, and as they relaxed he pulled up again.

Her breath was gone. Ripped away by the force of her orgasm. Rachel collapsed against the bed covers, panting as the last waves of pleasure ebbed away.

"Don't move an inch," Garreth whispered and the mattress shifted.

His footsteps echoed over the wooden floor. A door creaked, and something scraped, like the hinges of a drawer being pulled opened. *He must be looking for a condom.*

His absence gave Rachel a minute to breathe, to think. And her thoughts instantly wandered to Jackson.

Making love to Jackson had been so different from sex with Garreth. With Garreth it was hot, hard and fun. No complications of any kind.

With Jackson their pleasure might have been compounded exponentially by their love for each other, but the strings and the history had left them both feeling wretched afterwards.

Damn it. She needed to shove Jackson from her thoughts. He had no place in her head. She was here with Garreth to cleanse her mind of her past. To take away the edge she always felt around Jackson. She was here, now, intent on having as much sex and as much fun as possible—because tomorrow when Jackson arrived, sex had to be the last thing she craved. Especially when she was in close proximity to the man she loved.

She pushed herself up on her elbows and watched as Garreth walked out of the en-suite bathroom, his cock standing proud, erect and fully sheathed. Christ, the man was indeed sex on a stick. She gave him her full attention, deliberately pushing Jackson to the far reaches of her mind.

Garreth placed one hand on her hip and pushed her gently. “Roll over, onto your stomach.”

She didn’t need to be asked twice.

“Spread your legs for me, sweet thing.”

Moisture pooled in her pussy as she shifted slightly on the doona, spreading her thighs wide. “Sweet thing?” Movement behind her told her he’d climbed onto the bed and knelt between her legs.

“Mmm. You taste sweet enough to eat.” He licked her at the point where her butt cheek met her thigh, surprising the heck out of her. She’d expected his hips to be there, not his face.

Not that she was complaining. Oh, quite contraire. “Bon appetite,” she offered with a delighted sigh. Shivers raced up her spine.

Something grazed her pussy. His thumbs?

No. His tongue.

The realization made the liquid that gathered between her legs spill from her lips, and he licked at it with a low growl. Her breath caught in her throat. Exquisite tingles raced through her groin.

“The thing about this position,” he said in a hoarse voice, “is that it lets your imagination run wild.”

Rachel tried to respond, but honestly, she was too horny to speak. Her imagination was already going wild, showing her snippets of all the things his tongue could do to her in this position.

“You can’t see me behind you,” Garreth said. He swept his hot, wet tongue over her pussy lips, making her sigh with bliss. “You can’t see what I’m doing. So it’s easy to close your eyes and imagine I’m anyone you want me to be.”

Her eyes were already closed, and all she saw was the devilish stranger who'd insisted on sharing her fire. It excited her no end.

"I could be me, a man you've never met before." He punctuated his sentence with a devilish swirl of his tongue. "Or I could be someone else altogether. The man of your dreams, perhaps? Mr. Beautiful."

Ah, which one did she want more? A handsome stranger or a man she'd loved her entire adult life? Depended on which dreams she wanted fulfilled now. A night of anonymous sex, or a lifetime of wretched, impossible love.

Garreth parted her butt cheeks and licked her from her pussy all the way up the cleft between her cheeks and back down again, making her shiver uncontrollably. Holy hell, he had a talented tongue.

"I could even be your journalist friend," he said, then added in a soft whisper. "Jackson."

Jackson?

He'd said Jackson's name?

Holy crap. He had.

The man was no fool. No matter how much she might have denied her feelings in the hotel lounge, he'd seen straight through her. And now he'd brought Jackson up in the middle of their sex play.

Damn it, she didn't want Jackson interfering in their love making. She wanted him as far away from her thoughts as possible.

Too late. Goosebumps erupted over her flesh and her pussy fluttered. Jackson was in her head again.

"Mmmm." Garreth gave a satisfied groan and licked her from her clit to her ass again and again. "You like that idea, don't you?"

No, she hated the idea.

Shit, not true. She loved it. Imagining Jackson knelt behind her was not only easy, it was second nature.

She whimpered, too embarrassed to answer truthfully. She didn't need to. Her body told Garreth everything he needed to know as she squirmed on the bed, desire whipping through her in a dizzying coil.

"I like the idea too," he murmured before dipping back in and treating her pussy to a stupendous licking.

Good God, he was aroused at the mention of Jackson's name? White noise roared in her ears, and her eyes closed of their own accord. An image of Jackson burned her eyelids. Jackson kissing her, Jackson licking her, Jackson making love to her.

Not Jackson. Garreth. Garreth was behind her. She didn't want Jackson here.

With her eyes closed, it was all too easy to envisage Jackson as the one who now tugged on her hips, pulling her up into a crouching position and lifting her ass higher in the air.

It wasn't as if the fantasy was a new one. How many nights had she dreamed about just this? Fantasized about Jackson taking her—even though they both knew it couldn't happen a second time?

Rachel thought she might never breathe again. Her chest heaved uselessly, unable to obtain the oxygen it sought as Jackson's—*no, Garreth's*—wet tongue delighted her with its expertise. Sensation spiraled through her as he swirled it around her folds.

God, Jackson.

Garreth.

The sensation was utterly exquisite. Tender and tempestuous all at the same time. Rachel was on fire, burning with desire. She could explode just like this, with his tongue in her pussy. Jackson's tongue. Or Garreth's. Either one.

Garreth licked his way up the crease of her butt and found the tight bud hidden there. Rachel nearly hit the roof as he feathered his tongue over it. Around it. Tantalizing, teasing.

And then not teasing. He pressed his tongue inside her, pushing in maybe a centimeter.

She exploded around him, the unexpected orgasm blindsiding her.

Low groans echoed from Garreth as she came, telling her the pleasure was just as arousing for him. Within seconds of the orgasm, he got to his knees and lined himself up between her legs. The sensation of his cockhead rubbing at her highly sensitized and slippery folds had her gasping. Rabid hunger ripped through her once again.

Again? She'd just come. She couldn't possibly take anymore.

"Know what else you can imagine in this position?" he asked, his voice a low rasp across her spine. He didn't wait for her response. "That there are *two* of us behind you. One taking care of your pussy. Me." He pushed his cock inside her an inch, just enough to tease and not nearly enough to satisfy. "And one tending to your ass." Something cool and slippery slid up the crease of her butt cheeks and touched her anus. A finger, probably covered with lube. "Jackson."

Her eyes popped open. He'd brought up Jackson. *Again*. Holy crap. Was Garreth here in her head? Sharing her fantasies?

He pushed his cock inside her another inch. At the same time, the finger that had been massaging her hole slid inside unobstructed, straight past the tight ring of muscle. "You okay with that?"

No, she wasn't okay with it. She didn't want Jackson here.

But then why was her body shivering with delight? And why did she ache all over, desperate to come with Garreth *and* Jackson inside her? "I'm okay with that." Her words rasped through her throat.

Garreth thrust once, hard, and embedded himself deep inside her with a low moan.

Dear God, he felt good. Thick and long, he reached all the right places. Rachel moved on instinct, rocking her hips, swaying forward and pulling off his cock a few inches, before pressing back and engulfing him once again.

"Oh, yeah. Just like that," Garreth growled.

The finger in her ass slid deeper, and deeper still, until her pussy was filled with Garreth's cock, and her ass with Jackson's finger.

Jackson.

One of Garreth's hands clasped her hip, and he pulled his cock back before plunging inside her again. Rachel threw her head back with a cry. The sensation of his cock sliding in her pussy while a finger filled her ass was...unbelievable.

He did it again. Only this time, when he plunged back in, the finger was withdrawn.

Jackson and Garreth developed a rhythm, one filling her, while the other withdrew, then vice versa. Each stroke felt better than the last. Exquisite tingles filling first her pussy then her ass, until she could no longer determine where the tingles began and ended. They simply overwhelmed her.

God, yes, she knew it was only Garreth with her. Jackson wasn't here. He would never be here. But the imagination was a powerful tool, and with her eyes closed and sensation building within, it was easy to pretend.

All too easy. And made even easier when Garreth changed the rhythm. Jackson pumped in time with Garreth's movements, filling her ass as Garreth filled her pussy, and withdrawing as Garreth drew back.

She could spend an eternity like this. With Garreth and Jackson behind her. Garreth in her pussy, Jackson in her ass. Pleasure rolled through her, utterly delicious.

"Christ, sweet thing," Garreth moaned. "I want your ass. Wanna come there."

The finger felt good there, but the thought of a cock, a real long, thick cock in her back passage had Rachel's knees quivering.

Garreth withdrew from her, as did Jackson. The loss was overwhelming. Too much. She couldn't bear it. Acting purely on instinct, she burrowed her fingers into her pussy.

Jackson.

A deep rasping groan sounded behind her. "Jesus, that is so fucking hot. Leave your hand there. Don't take it away. Fuck your pussy while I fuck your ass."

"Garreth."

She pumped her finger into her channel, in, out, added a second finger, pumped faster.

"Oh, yeah." His breath was uneven, his words jerky. "Your fingers could be his cock," Garreth whispered. "Jackson can fuck your pussy while I take your ass."

Oh, sweet, heaven. Had he just suggested...?

Yes, he had, and the very comment sent her hurtling into another orgasm, one so intense it brought tears to her eyes.

God, when had she ever been this aroused, this desperate? When had she ever fantasized about two men at the same time?

He gave her all of five seconds to recover before something cold and wet dripped onto her ass. More lube. She clenched her cheeks as Garreth used the tip of his condom-covered cock to massage it in.

He thrust once, a quick, short thrust, and penetrated her an inch.

Rachel froze. "More," she demanded.

Garreth pushed forward, penetrating her farther. Sweat beaded on her forehead. Damn. That stung. Burned.

"Rub your clit, sweet thing," Garreth urged, and she did, removing her fingers to play with herself.

Ahhh, better.

Garreth slid in deeper, stretching her back passage, hurting her, delighting her. Pleasure mingled with pain as he pulled out, easing the tension, then pushed back in.

Damn, how good did that feel?

Jackson slammed his cock back into her pussy.

Garreth seated himself to the root in her ass with a lusty moan.

She couldn't keep still, couldn't not move. She wanted Garreth driving into her, fucking her for all he was worth. Wanted Jackson pleasuring her pussy as Garreth took her ass.

She swung her hips forward, almost displacing Garreth's cock, then drove back, engulfing him completely.

That was all it took. Garreth's hands found her hips, and using them to steady himself, he began to fuck her in earnest. Long, slow, drugging strokes, followed by short, quick, carnal ones, then back to the drugging ones.

Time lost meaning. All that existed was her and Garreth and Jackson. The three of them. Or the two of them at any rate. Every inch of her skin was covered in goose bumps. Pleasure soaked deep into her bones.

She couldn't hold back the ecstasy. It swept through her, over her, unbridled bliss exploding inside. Her climax hit with force, starting in her pussy and spreading in shockwaves through to her ass.

She clamped her muscles around Garreth's cock, squeezing him, clenching around him.

He let out a roar, thrust hard through her wild orgasm, and froze. Seconds later he too erupted, his cock pulsing in her ass, emptying itself as it beat rhythmically inside her.

With Garreth in her ass and Jackson in her head, Rachel continued to come, one wild undulation following another. Her orgasm was explosive. Fierce. All-consuming.

When the force of her release finally subsided, she was left wasted. Utterly exhausted. She dropped onto the doona, spent, and Garreth followed, collapsing on her back in a massive heap of heated male bulk.

Jackson was nowhere in sight.

Chapter Three

Rachel leaned on the railing at Echo Point and stared sightlessly at the Three Sisters. The natural rock pillars stood majestically before her, demanding her attention. She knew she should give them their due and concentrate on the incredible beauty of the panoramic mountain formations before her, but thanks to Garreth and their evening last night, her mind was too full to focus on anything besides Jackson.

She shoved her hands into the pockets of her jacket and tried not to shiver from the cold.

Just a few more hours and Jackson would arrive. Two and a half years had passed since she'd last seen him. By mutual consensus they'd decided the path of no contact whatsoever would probably be the wiser one.

God, she missed him. Every day she thought about him, wondered about him. Imagined his kisses, imagined making love to him. And every day she quietly told herself that her living in Sydney was the best thing for them. They couldn't be together, so why torture themselves?

Problem was, since Garreth had made Jackson a part of their sexual play last night, Rachel was no longer thinking about him every now and again. She was pretty much obsessing about him all the time. Counting down the minutes 'til she saw him. Or she would be if she had an ETA.

"You're looking pensive," a familiar Canadian accent drawled in her ear.

A flash of heat ripped through her belly at the unexpected voice. She turned to him with a smile. "Garreth." Once again, she was struck by his beauty.

"Fancy meeting you here," he said.

She laughed. As if visiting the Three Sisters wasn't the number one tourist attraction in the Blue Mountains. "I thought you'd have left the mountains by now."

He shook his head. "Nope. I'm here for the rest of the weekend. Just like you."

Rachel did a double take. For some reason she'd been under the misguided impression he was checking out of the hotel this morning. "Oh...uh..."

He frowned. "I hope that's surprise on your face and not horror."

She laughed. "Definitely not horror." A hot tug on her pussy verified her response. Oh, yeah. No horror anywhere in sight.

"Relieved to hear that. You know, I almost didn't recognize you," he said.

She stared up at him. "What? You forget what I looked like already?"

He tsked. “Woman, an image of you, naked and coming, is forever seared in my brain.” His voice was low and a little hoarse. His emerald eyes sparkled with desire, which in turn triggered her own lustful hunger.

She licked her lips.

“It’s the toque,” he explained.

Huh? “The what?”

He touched her head. “Your hat.”

“My beanie?” For a minute there she wondered if he’d been speaking English. “What about it?”

He moved his hands to her neck. “Between it and your scarf, they hide your hair.” He wrapped his hands around each end of the scarf and tugged on it, pulling her closer.

She closed the distance between them voluntarily, so they stood pressed together. If she didn’t have on another sixteen odd layers of clothes, they would have been touching. “It’s cold. I need to keep warm.” At least he wore a sweater today.

“It’s cold, for Australia, I suppose,” he acknowledged. “But as I told you last night, we Canadians have a good way of keeping warm.”

Rachel’s knees went weak. Last night. Hell, last night had been up there with the best sex she’d ever had. She whimpered softly as desire, fierce and heated, shot through her. Garreth had left her sated and satiated in ways she’d never dreamed. He’d also left her with a burning need for Jackson. A need hotter than it had ever burned before.

Yesterday she’d thought about Jackson on an emotional level, blocking out the attraction they’d once shared. Today all she seemed able to concentrate on was sex. Sex with Jackson. Sex with Garreth too. Sex with both of them.

By the time Garreth had finished with her last night, her head and heart had been so full of Jackson, she suspected if she’d fallen asleep in Garreth’s bed, she’d have woken up expecting to see Jackson. As it was, she’d dreamed about Jackson the whole damn night. Dreams even more erotic than usual.

Garreth looked at her now with troubled eyes. “You’ve got that pensive expression on your face again. Wanna talk about what’s bothering you?”

“You read me too easily for comfort.” It was uncanny how he’d picked up on her feelings for Jackson.

“I don’t need a degree in psychology to see something’s on your mind.” He rubbed his thumb over her cheek tenderly. “It’s Jackson, isn’t it?”

She gaped at him. Damn it, psychology degree or not, he was far too astute for his own good. “How do you know?”

“It’s the sighs you keep emitting. They’re a dead giveaway.”

She slapped her head. “Oh, God, I’m so pathetic.”

“Pathetic? Hardly.” He snorted in derision. “Sexy, beautiful and about the most fuckable woman I’ve ever met? Definitely.”

Was he crazy? “Garreth, I’m standing here, sighing about another man, and you still think I’m fuckable?”

“I don’t think. I know. Last night you were supremely fuckable. Today? Even more so. I would dearly love to get you back to my room so I can get rid of that jacket, and the four hundred sweaters you have on beneath it, and have my wicked way with you.”

Goosebumps skittered up her spine. “Even knowing there’s another man on my mind?”

He brushed a tender hand over her cheek. “I’m leaving Australia in two weeks,” he said. “Never coming back. Does it bother me that the woman I want to spend a dirty weekend with has someone else on her mind? No, sweet thing. Not in the least. Now tell me about him.”

She hesitated.

“Will it help if I tell you there’s a woman on my mind too?” he asked, as though sensing her reluctance to talk honestly.

She raised an eyebrow.

He gave her a sad smile. “I’m not feeding you a line to make you feel better. I just want you to know you can talk to me.”

“Tell me about her.” If he could talk about his woman, perhaps she could tell him about Jackson.

He shrugged. “There’s not much to tell. She’s the one. I fell for her the first time I laid eyes on her.”

“And yet you’re not together?”

He shook his head. “She says she loves me too, but won’t act on it. She apparently has her reasons.”

“Is she mad?” Rachel asked before she could stop herself. “You have to be the catch of the century.”

He brushed her cheek again, and a shivery tingle shot through her face and neck. “I’d like to think so.” He smiled, but there was a melancholy in his eyes that belied his gentle humor.

“I’m sorry,” Rachel told him. “If I wasn’t already in love with another man, I’d fall for you like a ton of bricks.”

“You’re just trying to making me feel better.”

“Is it working?”

He looked thoughtful. “It would work better if we were both naked and you said it around a mouthful of my cock.”

She laughed. Oh, God. There went her pussy, gushing like a waterfall all over again. “Garreth?”

“Uh huh?”

“You wanna head back to the hotel so we can both be naked?”

He leaned in real close. “Damn, woman. I would love it.” He meshed his mouth to hers, jerking her body to life in a mad rush, then pulled away, leaving her crazily aroused. “But until you spill your heart, I ain’t leaving this place.”

She gaped at him. “You’d leave me like this? Teetering on the brink of no return? Wet and wanting? You’d actually refuse to fuck me, just so I’ll talk about *him*?”

“You mean Jackson.”

She froze. “Wh-why do you keep bringing him up?” Her heart banged against her ribs.

“You brought him up first, sweet thing. Last night in front of the fire. And when I said his name in my room... Let’s just say your reaction told me everything I needed to know.”

“God, I’m sorry,” Rachel said, suddenly mortified. “I didn’t mean to react like that. Didn’t mean to get so...turned on.” Heat burned her cheeks and for the first time since she’d been outside she didn’t feel the cold. If anything, she was way too warm. She must be blushing crimson.

He shook his head with disbelief and hauled her into his arms, pressing her close against his body. His erection was clearly evident, even through the numerous layers of their clothing. “You’re apologizing? For acknowledging your real feelings? Don’t. You think your reaction didn’t get me so fucking hot I almost came on the spot?”

She gaped up at him.

“Know the only thing that would have turned me on more?” he asked, his voice a whisper, a way of ensuring his words didn’t carry through the crowds, or worse, echo through Echo Point. “If he’d been in that bed with us. Making love to you at the same time as me.”

She swallowed. He liked that idea? Seriously? “I... I thought you were just weaving a fantasy for me last night.”

He shook his head, his eyes blazing with green heat. “Not just for you, sweet thing. For me too. I would love to take your ass while your guy—Jackson—takes your pussy.”

Her knees trembled.

He pulled her close, as though instinctively realizing she needed the support. “Do you love him?” he asked in her ear.

God, what was the point of denying it now? “I do.” She always had, and she always would.

“Does he love you?”

“He did.” But after more than two years, who knew? Out of choice they hadn’t spoken in all that time.

“You break up?”

“No. We were never together.” Damn it. There came the cold again, sneaking through her jacket, creeping into her bones.

“Why not?”

She sighed and buried her face in his shoulder, absorbing his warmth. “His sister.”

“Your BFF?”

He didn’t miss a trick. “Uh huh.”

“What does she have to do with it?”

“Jenna has rules.”

“About her brother?”

“About them being twins.”

“What kind of rules?”

“Their friends are off-limits to each other.”

“You mean you can’t be Jackson’s friend?”

“Oh, I can be his friend. Just not his lover.”

“Excuse me?” He sounded shocked. “Jenna decides who her brother can or can’t sleep with?”

She tried to pull away from him, but he kept his arms around her, holding her tight. “No. Not at all. Jenna’s just forbidden Jackson from having relationships with her friends.”

He rubbed her back, and she felt oddly comforted. “Why?”

“Experience.”

“Jackson’s had a lot of relationships with her friends?”

She sighed. The story was complicated. Too complicated to tell Garreth the full version. “He had his share. Problem was, when Jackson was through with them, they no longer showed interest in being friends with Jenna.”

“Sounds like school issues, not adult ones.”

“They were school issues,” Rachel agreed. “But even school issues have a way of spiraling out of control.” They had a way of destroying people’s lives. And one such issue had brought Jenna—and Jackson—close to the brink.

“Did something happen?”

“You could say.”

“Tell me.”

Rachel shook her head. “It’s not my place.” Jenna’s life had changed forever. As had Jackson’s. Their experience had given both her and Jackson sound reason to never date each others’ friends again. Reasons Rachel understood, even though it killed her not to come out and confess to Jenna how she really felt about her brother. “Suffice it to say by the time Jenna and I became friends, she’d placed a strict, off-limits sign on her friends as far as Jackson was concerned. And a strict, off-limits sign on Jackson as far as her friends were concerned.”

“How about Jenna? Can she date Jackson’s friends?”

Rachel snorted. Her friend did not have double standards.

“I’ll take that as a no,” Garreth surmised.

“Both of them were badly hurt. They came to a mutual understanding.”

Garreth was silent for a while, as though absorbing what she’d told him. When he spoke he pulled away slightly so he could look into her eyes. “You’ve been in love with him how long now?”

“Twelve years.”

“Twelve years? And you’ve never slept with him, in all that time?”

Rachel didn’t answer.

“So you have slept with him,” Garreth surmised from her silence.

“Just once,” she admitted.

“And?”

Her stomach turned to mush just remembering. “And it was the best and worst time of my life.”

“The best?”

“You ever made love to someone you’ve loved and desired since you were seventeen?” As awkward a conversation as this was to have with a man she’d just slept with, it felt good to speak about it. To get it out in the open.

“Can’t say I have.” He shook his head.

“It’s almost worth the wait. The sex is that good.” It had been the most incredible hour of her life. A culmination of almost ten years of loving Jackson, of him loving her. The desire that burned between them was so hot, so thick, the room itself had practically glowed.

“And the worst?”

“Guilt is a terrible thing. The entire time I was with him, I felt like I was betraying Jenna.”

“By being with the man you love?”

“We did it in secret. Took advantage of her absence. We betrayed her trust. Both of us.” The guilt had been so bad Rachel had come to the conclusion she needed to resist seeing Jackson again. The best way? Leave Brisbane. Within a month she’d moved with her brother to Sydney to open their jewellery store, Ash Diamonds.

He frowned. “Ever thought of telling Jenna how you feel?”

“I’d never do that to her.” Jenna still had nightmares. Over twelve years later, Rachel refused to give her reason to have more.

“She must be a good friend.”

“The best.” A girl could not ask for a more loyal, better friend. They were closer than friends. More like sisters. Rachel hated living in a different city from her. Hated keeping such a huge truth from her. “Why are we discussing Jenna and Jackson anyway?” she asked.

“Because you needed to discuss it. Needed to get it off your chest.”

She gave him a sad smile. “I bet now that you know the full story you’re not so keen to get back into bed with me. With me or Jackson.”

He snorted. "You're kidding right?"

She sighed. "I never kid about Jackson. It hurts too much."

"Ah, sweet thing. I want to climb into bed with both of you now more than before. I'd show Jackson what he's missing out on. Show him you're a woman to be treasured, not denied."

"We denied each other," she told him. "We had no choice."

"Circumstances may have kept you apart, but he still denied you. I'd simply remind him all over again just how damn desirable you are."

She smiled up into his eyes. "You're good for me, Garreth Halt. A balm to my soul."

He smiled back at her, a smile that warmed her all the way through to her toes.

Then he pulled up his sleeve and checked the time. An unreadable expression crept across his face before he grinned at her. "I can be a balm to your entire body. Come to the hotel with me. Let me show you and Jackson what he's missing out on."

Chapter Four

Garreth spent all of three minutes freeing them of their clothes, teasing her mercilessly as he stripped layer upon layer from her body. With each inch of flesh he revealed, Rachel became more and more aroused.

She cupped his balls in her right hand and palmed his shaft with her left as he moaned raggedly. God, so hard, so smooth. Like silk and steel. But warm. She couldn't wait to taste him, couldn't wait to consume him whole, every delicious inch of him.

A knock on the door interfered with her intentions.

"Shit," Garreth complained, his voice rough as sandpaper.

"Ignore it," Rachel urged and dropped to her knees.

His cock jumped in her hands, and she licked his slit.

He growled low in his throat. "It might be housekeeping, and they have a key."

Frustration shimmied through her, and she stood back up.

"I'll get rid of them," he promised.

"Hurry," Rachel urged.

Garreth donned his jeans and went to open the door as Rachel ducked into the bathroom. It was easier to step out of the room than pull on her clothes.

Shit. Talk about an inconvenient interruption. She was primed and ready for another epic session in bed. She wanted to wrap her lips around his dick. Wanted his tongue on her clit, his cock in her pussy. Wanted images of Jackson floating through her mind as Garreth made love to her body. Damn it, she wanted to come.

Deep voices sounded on the other side of the door. Housekeeping?

Rachel spied one of Garreth's T-shirts hanging on a towel hook. Perfect. She slipped it on, taking the time to inhale the masculine scent that clung to it. The shirt smelled of his aftershave, spicy and sexy. It was enormous, reaching way past her knees. She spared herself a glance in the mirror. Color touched her cheeks and her mouth looked swollen and pouty, compliments of Garreth's incredible kisses. Her hair was a tousled mess. It fell in dark, wild curls around her face. Her eyes were a good shade darker blue than usual.

All in all, she looked like a woman disturbed in the heat of passion. Which she was. A woman more than ready to pick up where they'd left off.

She opened the door, stepped into the room and almost fainted from shock.

Standing beside Garreth, watching her exit the bathroom, was a beautiful, blond-haired man. A man whose face she pictured every night before going to sleep and every morning upon waking.

His jaw dropped. "Rachel?"

"Jackson?" Had he come looking for her? "Wh-what are you doing here?"

He stared at her with wide, baffled eyes. "What are *you* doing here?"

"She's with me," Garreth said quietly. He folded his arms across his massive, shirtless chest.

Jackson swung around to glare at the other man. "What the fuck, Gazza?"

Gazza? Her eyes popped. Gazza?

There was only one reason Jackson would call Garreth Gazza, and the comprehension almost knocked Rachel sideways. "Y-you two know each other?"

Jackson nodded slowly. "He's my housemate."

It was Rachel's turn to gape at Garreth. She rubbed her ear, certain she'd misheard. "I'm sorry. What?"

Garreth looked her dead in the eye as he nodded. "We share a house."

She closed her eyes and prayed to God she didn't pass out. "You share a house, in Brisbane, with a journalist named Jackson, who just happens to have a twin sister, Jenna?" Her heart pounded so hard she couldn't catch her breath.

"I do," Garreth answered.

"That's why you're in the mountains? For their birthday?"

Garreth nodded.

Rachel knew her jaw hung open, but she couldn't seem to shut her mouth.

"You knew Rachel was here for the same reason and you never told her?" Jackson asked, sounding as stunned as Rachel felt.

She should open her eyes, should look at them both, but she couldn't. She didn't have the strength or the courage.

"I would have," Garreth said with quiet conviction. "You arrived before I could."

"You knew?" Rachel asked on an airless gasp. "You knew all along?" He'd encouraged her to fantasize about Jackson. Made her tell him all about them, about how much she loved him and why they couldn't be together. And all along he'd known exactly who Jackson was. Had he known who she was? Had Jackson ever told him about her?

"I put two and two together when you told me you were a jewellery designer," Garreth said.

Which would explain why he'd looked so surprised at the time.

Rachel put her hand on her chest, struggling to breathe. She felt utterly betrayed. Deceived. Garreth had known Jackson all along, had even known who she was, and he hadn't bothered to mention the connection.

"You slept with her?" It was Jackson's voice demanding an answer. "You fucked Rachel?" Fury and disbelief echoed through his words.

"We made love." Garreth said calmly.

Rachel began to tremble. First her hands started to shake, then her legs, and soon her entire body shuddered. Her teeth knocked together as though she were freezing.

She had to get out of here. Had to get to her room and escape the madness. Jackson's housemate had seduced her. She'd voluntarily slept with him and never been the wiser.

Clothes. She needed to dress. Needed to leave. Now.

She opened her eyes and dropped to her knees, scrambling around the floor, grabbing her jeans, shirt and boots. They'd do. So long as she had on some clothes she could always come back later for the rest.

"Rachel—" Before Jackson could finish his sentence she escaped to the bathroom again.

Pulling her pants on was virtually impossible. Her hands shook too violently, and she couldn't balance on one leg. But she did it somehow, perched on the edge of the spa bath. She even managed to button up her shirt, although it hung crooked and out of synch. She didn't care. She'd sort it out back in her room.

What on earth had Garreth been thinking? How could he do this? Had he acted out of malice? Dislike? Did he have something to prove to Jackson—or her?

Instinct told her that wasn't the case. Garreth was a decent man. A good man. No way had he been out to hurt anyone. No way could they have shared such explosive, hot sex if there'd been any negative undercurrents to his words or actions.

Oh, dear God. Realization burst like shattered glass through her heart. He'd included Jackson in their sex play. He'd brought up Jackson's name. He'd even told her he wanted to make love to her at the same time as Jackson. It hadn't been a wild fantasy of his—or one he'd spun for her. He knew Jackson. He *did* want to sleep with her at the same time as Jackson.

So why keep his friendship with Jackson secret? She didn't understand it. And at this moment, she didn't want to try. She just wanted to get the hell out of Dodge.

No way could she stay in his room another minute.

Angry voices sounded on the other side of the wall. Raised voices, one Canadian, one Australian. She couldn't listen. Didn't want to hear what they said. She donned her boots and without acknowledging the men's presence, walked into the room again, grabbed her jacket and bag and dashed for the door.

"Rachel, wait!" Jackson caught her arm before she could get away and twirled her around to stare into her face.

He looked as tortured as she felt. His familiar blue eyes were dark with distress and disappointment. Haunted.

Her stomach plummeted. Two and a half years she'd waited to see him again. Longed for him. And now, this. "Let me go, Jackson. Please."

"We need to talk. Don't go."

She shook her head. "I have to."

"Rachel."

"Jackson." This was sheer hell. Agony. Looking into his eyes, every iota of emotion she'd ever felt for him came flooding back. Nothing had changed. Nothing. She still loved him every bit as much as the day she'd left Brisbane. As much as the afternoon they'd made love. Their forced time apart had done nothing to extinguish her feelings for him.

"Talk to me, Rach, please."

"Talk to him," Garreth said from across the room.

She looked over Jackson's shoulder at him. He stared back, his gaze intense and focused. And warm. So warm. Again her gut told her there'd been no malice in his intent.

Just looking at him reminded her what she was doing in his room. Whatever had attracted her to him in the first place still held a magnetic pull over her.

Confusion turned her brain to sludge. Without saying another word she pulled away from Jackson and disappeared from the room, running as fast as her legs would carry.

Jackson turned to Garreth, rage blooming in his chest. He was going to fucking kill the man. "Just what the hell were you thinking?" he demanded.

Garreth leaned against the back of the couch, his arms still folded over his chest. "I'm thinking you're an idiot."

"What the fuck? You slept with her. *You* slept with *Rachel* and you think I'm the idiot?"

"You're not just an idiot, Jack. You're a dumb fuck."

Jackson took a deep breath and counted to ten. Instinct told him to hurt the man. To inflict deep, endless pain. Common sense told him Garreth had good rationalization for his actions. "Explain."

"You let her get away."

Gazza's perfect calm pissed Jackson off even further. "And that's reason enough to fuck her yourself?"

"You're a moron for letting someone that perfect slip through your fingers."

Was he fucking crazy? Rachel was the one woman he wanted to hold on tight to. Wanted to never let go. He hadn't let her slip through his fingers, he'd been forced to release her.

He clenched one hand into a fist and pointed at his friend with the other. “You, more than anyone, know what Rachel means to me. You know I had to walk away. So don’t fucking tell me I let her slip through my fingers. And don’t even try to use that as an excuse for screwing her.”

“I make no excuses for screwing her. She’s a damned beautiful woman. The second I laid eyes on her—before I knew who she was—I wanted to sleep with her.”

“And discovering she’s the woman I love didn’t stop you in your quest?”

“No. It inspired me.”

Jackson stared at him in disgust. “You’re a sick fuck.”

Garreth raised an eyebrow. “I am? Funny, I don’t remember you thinking that when you slept with Sarah.”

A muscle twitched in Jackson’s cheek. Sarah. One of Garreth’s girlfriends. “You invited me to sleep with her. Both of you did.”

“And Rebecca?”

Jackson’s girlfriend. Not even a girlfriend. A woman he’d dated a few times. A woman he’d slept with. He and Garreth. At the same time. “She wanted it.”

“We all wanted it. Just like we all wanted it when it was Deanne. And then Shirley.”

“You gonna list every woman we ever slept with together?” There’d been several over the last year. Sarah had been the first. The experience had been an eye opener for Jackson, but it had been so damn good, he’d looked forward to the next time, and then the next.

In fact, he and Garreth had kind of gotten into a pattern. They’d begun dating women who showed interest in both of them. Women who were more than happy to accept them both into their bed.

Ménage sex was a turn on Jackson had never expected. After Rachel had left he’d been hell bound and determined to get over her. He’d tried so damn hard to find another woman, someone he could have a deep and meaningful relationship with. He’d never succeeded. Rachel was the only woman he wanted.

The one thing he had found was a bone-deep satisfaction in sharing women with Gazza. The sex was always mind blowing, and it kept his mind off Rachel. It also kept him from ever having to commit to another woman.

“I’m just making a point,” Garreth told him.

“Point taken.” He’d slept with Gazza’s women, Gazza had slept with his. Neither had minded before. “But Rachel’s different.”

“Why? Because you love her?”

“Yes, God damn it. You have no business being with her.”

“Ah. So now you’re placing restrictions on who I can and can’t sleep with?”

“There are rules, asshole. Unspoken rules. You don’t fuck your best mate’s girl.”

“Just like you don’t fuck your sister’s best mate?”

Garreth's words hung in the air between them.

"Your rules are screwing up your life, Jack. You don't wanna mess around with Jenna's friends, fine. I get it. You're being a good brother. But when you let the best thing that ever happened to you get away, you're being an asshole."

"Letting her get away doesn't give you permission to sleep with her."

"She wanted it. As much as I did."

Jackson snapped his head back as though Garreth had punched him. Fuck. Who'd have thought a couple of words could hurt so bad? "Nice, mate. Why not stick a knife in the other side too?"

"I'm not trying to fuck you over. I like Rachel. You love her. I thought, with her approval, the two of us could show Rachel how we feel."

"Over my dead body." The answer shot out of his mouth before he could think.

Garreth looked at him with a deep frown. "You don't want to share?"

"You don't fucking get it, do you?" Jackson grit his teeth. "Rachel isn't like the women we've shared. She isn't someone I can fuck and forget. She's the one, mate. She's in my head." He thumped his chest. "In my heart."

"Yeah, but she's not in your life. That's a choice you've made. So what, you can't have her, no one can? Is that your game?"

"You think I wanted to walk away from her?"

"I think if I were in your shoes you couldn't have dragged me away from her."

Jackson glared at his house mate, a bad feeling stirring in his stomach. "You falling for her, Garreth? You falling for my woman?"

Garreth didn't answer for a long time. He stared thoughtfully at Jackson. "You make her your woman, and I swear to stay away from her. Until such time, Rachel's fair game."

"Fuck you, Halt."

Garreth smiled at him. "I'm happy to share."

"And I'm happy to slam my fist into your nose."

"Give her the choice, Jack. Let Rachel decide if she wants to sleep with us both."

"You make it sound like a rational choice." Fuck. After two years he'd have thought Garreth understood. Obviously he was wrong.

"It is."

"There is nothing rational about sleeping with her. She's off-limits to me, and from this second on she's off-limits to you too."

"Tell me the idea of holding her between us doesn't appeal. Tell me you don't want to slide inside her sweet pussy while I take her ass."

Jackson saw red. And white. White stars. Jesus, the image made him instantly hard. It also made him so fucking angry he thought he might seriously injure his friend. Garreth talking about Rachel's pussy? His Rachel? Uh uh. That pussy belonged to him. No one else.

Fuck. No, it didn't.

"You thinking about it, Jack?" He lifted a scrap of material off the back of the couch. A bra. A black satin-and-lace bra. Rachel's black satin-and-lace bra.

He glared at Garreth, hating him.

"You are, aren't you? You're wondering how she'd feel wrapped around your cock. You're wondering if she can take us both at the same time." Garreth used the bra to palm his cock over his jeans. "I am. The thought has me ready to blow."

Jackson's balls tightened, pressing close up to his dick.

"Know what I'm picturing now?" Garreth pressed on. "Rachel on her knees, wearing this bra—and nothing else. She's bent over you, sucking your shaft. I'm behind her, fucking her while she blows you. Christ, Jack, she's gorgeous. So beautiful it almost hurts to look at her. You can barely contain your orgasm. She's licking you, sucking your balls. Taking you in all the way to your root."

Jackson's ribs compressed his lungs. He couldn't breathe. Against every instinct, the images Garreth painted clamored through his mind. Fuck, yes, he could picture Rachel doing everything Garreth said. It was so real he could almost feel her mouth on his dick, her warm tongue lapping his balls. Could hear her soft moans as Garreth pumped into her.

It made him despise Garreth. And desire Rachel even more.

"Rachel is off-limits," he ground out.

Garreth shook his head. "I'm not backing off, my friend. If Rachel will have me, I intend to spend the rest of the weekend with her. My gut tells me you should spend that time with us."

The quiet conviction in his voice had Jackson shaking his head in incredulity. "You truly believe that, don't you?"

"I wouldn't push it if I didn't."

"I won't share her."

"So you've said."

"Don't do it, Gazza. Don't fuck her, and don't fuck with our friendship."

"Give me a good reason not to."

"I love her. It's reason enough."

"Then quit living in the past."

"I have no choice. She's my sister's best friend."

"So what?"

"So, I can't do that to Jenna."

“Because of some childish demand she made years ago?”

“Childish?” Jackson glared at him, feeling murderous. “You know fuck all, Halt.”

“I know Jenna got hurt because you messed around with a couple of her friends.”

Thunder roared in Jackson’s ears. “Jenna didn’t just get hurt. She damn near killed herself.”

The color leached from Garreth’s face. “What did you say?”

Jackson forced a deep lungful of air into his chest. “I never told you the full story.”

Speechless, Garreth shook his head.

Jackson stiffened his spine and straightened his shoulders. It was time Garreth knew. Time he understood the real reason Rachel was off-limits to Jenna’s twin. In a twisted way, he understood why Gazza had seduced Rachel. Why he’d thought a threesome might be a good idea between them. Gazza believed it was time to get over the *immature* barriers that had kept Jackson and Rachel apart. Garreth was pushing him to take a stance, to make Rachel his. But Garreth had acted without knowing all the facts.

“I had a fling with one of Jenna’s so-called friends when we were seventeen.” She’d been pretty, she’d been popular, and she’d been interested. She’d also been about as fascinating as an empty can of tuna. After a few dull dates Jackson had told her they wouldn’t work out. “When she realized I didn’t return her interest, it pissed her off. She decided I needed to be taught a lesson. So she told fifty of her closest friends that I couldn’t get it up.”

Garreth opened his mouth, but Jackson pushed on.

“For her. She told them the only girl I could get it up for was my sister.”

Garreth gaped at Jackson.

“The rumor spread. Within a day the entire school had heard it. Only by then it had morphed into Jenna and I having a heated sexual relationship. We were the talk of every teenager at South Brisbane High.” The viscous bitch had destroyed Jenna’s life. Had she kept her bitterness focused on Jackson, he’d have had no trouble laughing it off. But she’d targeted Jenna as well. Accused them both of hideous untruths.

Those untruths had taken root in the school grapevine and grown out of all proportion, destroying Jenna’s and Jackson’s reputations in the process. The talk and the gossip had not died down quickly. Over the weeks it had changed Jenna, turned her from the vivacious, confident sister he’d known, into a hollow shell of her former self.

“Jenna became depressed. I’m not talking sad and miserable. She suffered a full-on clinical depression. And she stopped eating. By the time my parents admitted her to hospital, she weighed barely thirty-five kilos. If she’d gone on like that she’d have starved herself to death.” The memory still dredged up the same sense of uselessness, of helplessness, he’d felt back then. It left him as powerless now as he’d been at seventeen.

“She stayed in the clinic for the rest of the year,” he told Garreth. “Three months passed before either Jenna or her doctors and therapists believed she was ready to be discharged.”

At the beginning of the new year, Jenna and Jackson had transferred to a new school and a new life, leaving the scandal and the rumors far behind them.

“Jenna has every right to make the demands she now does. I couldn’t stop the landslide that followed that bitch’s assassination of her, but I’ll damn well make good and sure nothing bad ever happens to my sister again.”

“I-I never knew,” Garreth whispered in a tortured voice.

“Jenna never wanted you to know. She doesn’t want anyone to know.”

Garreth nodded. He was quiet for a very long time, absorbing everything Jackson told him. “Rachel would never do anything like that,” he said finally. “Even if things don’t work out between you.”

“Of course she wouldn’t,” Jackson agreed. That was a given. Rachel was the one who’d helped Jenna through her trauma. The girl who’d befriended her at their new school, who’d seen through his sister’s pain and somehow accessed the real Jenna again. “But even dating Rachel would freak Jenna out. It would bring back memories she’s put away and moved on from.” He shrugged. “I made a promise to Jenna. I won’t go back on it.” No matter how much he wanted to be with Rachel.

Rachel spent the day in hiding. The shock of discovering Garreth was Jackson’s housemate was too overwhelming to think about. She chose not to. Instead she went in search of Jenna, found her and hauled her off to the chocolate shop in Katoomba.

Sam, Jenna’s boyfriend, opted out, choosing to read in the warmth and comfort of their hotel room rather than witness the choc orgy the women intended on indulging in.

Over creamy, rich, hot chocolate and brownies worth dying for, she and Jenna caught up on each other’s lives. They spoke for hours, like they had when they’d shared a flat in Brisbane.

Rachel told Jenna about the jewellery store. Ash Diamonds had lived up to all of her and her brother’s dreams and expectations, and was now a well-established, renowned business in the heart of Sydney. She told her about Paul and the dismal failure of yet another disastrous relationship. And she told her about life in Sydney in general.

In turn Jenna spoke about Sam and how they’d been together for almost three months. He was fun—but she couldn’t really see any long-term prospects with him. She mentioned how her practice as a dietician was booming, and she caught Jenna up on all the goss from Brisbane, telling her about all their mutual friends. Rachel was more than aware that gossip to Jenna meant sharing only items that were factual and already public knowledge.

Nothing was news to either of them. They'd discussed it many a time on the phone. But going through it all again was an essential part of their friendship. And so much fun, she and Jenna spent most of their time together laughing.

Rachel gave Jenna the birthday gift she'd brought along for her. Diamond earrings, handcrafted specifically for her friend. It was a day early, but Rachel figured with everyone else joining the celebrations this would be the last time they'd have alone. Jenna loved her present on sight, and they were in her ears two minutes later.

There were two subjects Rachel refused to broach.

She would not tell Jenna about Garreth, not just yet anyway. Her own thoughts about him were too scattered to share.

As for Jackson, well, she mentioned she'd seen him briefly and left it at that. Jenna did not seem to notice the way Rachel's spine straightened when she said his name, or the way her heart thundered so loud it almost deafened her. It was surprisingly easy to not say anything about her shock in Garreth's room. But then she'd spent so many years avoiding talk about Jackson with Jenna, not bringing him up now was simply second nature.

That didn't mean it was easy to be with her friend. Just looking at Jenna was reminder enough of the man she loved.

Like Jackson, Jenna had warm blue eyes that lit up with humor and delight as she spoke. Their expressions were so similar, every time Jenna laughed and her eyes crinkled, Rachel could imagine it was Jackson. They'd once had the same colored hair, the honeyed gold that still crowned Jackson's head, but Jenna was now a platinum blonde, thanks to her very expensive hair dresser.

The main difference, aside from their gender, was their size. Rachel could bury herself in Jackson's embrace and feel petite as a flower in his arms, which was quite an accomplishment considering she stood at a good five foot seven. Jenna on the other hand, was tiny. No taller than Rachel's shoulders and thin as a rake.

She knew when they got back to the hotel Jenna would make use of the gym to work off the four gazillion calories they'd consumed. Rachel would hop into a hot bath and read.

It had taken Jenna a long time to come out of her shell after they'd met at school, but sticking with her, persevering at their friendship had been the best decision Rachel could have made. Jenna was a first-class grade-A friend, and today she unwittingly did a fantastic job of helping Rachel escape from the anguish of her thoughts and the unfulfilled desire that still seeped through her body tormenting her with its persistence.

Chapter Five

He shouldn't be here. He shouldn't do this. He should walk away and talk to Rachel later. At dinner. When there'd be at least ten other people to buffer his feelings. To stop him from doing anything rash.

But when Rachel opened the door, dressed in a robe, with her hair piled on top of her head and her cheeks flushed, he knew there was nowhere else he'd rather be.

Without saying a word, she stepped aside, and Jackson walked past her into her room.

She shut the door tight and looked up at him with her enormous midnight-blue eyes. "I didn't know he was your housemate," she spluttered.

"I know."

"I'd never have let anything happen..."

He nodded. He knew that too. It didn't stop the jealousy from flooding his system.

"Do you hate me?" She could hardly look him in the eye. Her gaze was focused on his chest.

"What the—? Rach, I could never hate you."

"I slept with your housemate."

He scraped a hand through his hair. Jealousy tore a red streak through his stomach. "I hate that you slept with him. I don't hate you."

Color raced to her cheeks. "H-he spoke about you. We both did."

"When?"

"While we, uh, you know..."

Huh? "I thought you didn't know he knew me," Jackson said, perplexed.

"I didn't." She frowned. "It's complicated. When he told me he was a journo living in Brissie, I instantly thought of you. I mentioned you were coming up here. Garreth picked up on something in my voice." She blushed and turned around. "Later, when I was in his room, he kind of, well..." Her voice trailed off.

Jackson gritted his teeth. "He kind of what?"

"He, er," She cleared her throat. "He suggested I fantasize about you while making love to him."

Jackson absorbed her words with shock. Gazza had included him in his and Rachel's bedroom play. Even while Jackson had been in Brisbane, Gazza had brought him in on the action.

Rachel dropped her head into her hands. "God, I thought he'd been so insightful, picking up on feelings I'd tried to hide." She shook her head. "He wasn't perceptive at all. He knew the whole story."

“Don’t judge him too harshly,” Jackson said, striving to keep his tone neutral. “He had his reasons.”

“He should have told me.”

“You’re right. He should have. And I suspect he would have. But I arrived early.”

She turned to stare at him. “Y-you’re defending him?”

He shrugged. “I understand him.”

“Well, I don’t. Maybe you could explain.”

Uh uh. Garreth had dug this hole. He’d have to fill it in. “You need to ask him.”

Rachel looked at him for a long time before sighing heavily. “I thought being with him would take the edge off. Would head off the attraction I feel for you.”

Jackson rubbed a hand over his face. Fuck, this was going all wrong. He’d been so resolved about seeing Rach this weekend. So determined not to let their past interfere with his and Jenna’s birthday celebrations. He was going to treat her like an old friend. Like Jenna’s friend. Nothing more.

He was an adult. He could do it. He could hide the longing and the lust that had lived with him since the first time Jenna had brought her new friend home. The lust that had sizzled and burned between them for twelve years, and the longing that drove him insane with frustration. They left him with blue balls every fucking time he saw her.

Instead, he’d been flung head first into a situation that demanded he sit up and take notice. Demanded he see Rachel in a sexual role rather than a platonic one. Demanded he see her as someone’s lover. Gazza’s lover. And Gazza wanted to share her. Wanted to bring him in on their loving.

Fuck it all, he’d insinuated the thought in Jackson’s brain, and now Jackson couldn’t get rid of it. Hard as he tried, every time he closed his eyes he saw himself taking Rachel’s pussy as Gazza took her ass. And every time he saw it, he had an overwhelming urge to rip Garreth apart limb by limb.

“Did it take the edge off?” His voice was far too hoarse when he asked the question.

Rachel took a very long time to answer. “Nothing’s taken the off the edge. Not in twelve long years.”

Not for him either. Standing before Rachel was just as torturous as it had always been. She was just as impossible to resist. But resist he would, for he simply had no choice. Neither of them did.

He set his shoulders in determination. “You know what?”

“What?”

“We’re going about this all wrong.” Focusing on sex and lust and threesomes was not going to give either of them any peace this weekend. They needed to turn their attention to the other side of their relationship. To their friendship. To the mutual trust, the respect and the genuine affection each held for the other. They needed to focus on the non-physical aspect of their connection.

Rachel lifted an eyebrow in question.

“I haven’t seen you in over two years. Can we do what any two normal people would do after all that time, and just say hello?”

She smiled then. A small, tremulous smile, but a smile nevertheless. “Hello, Jackson.”

“Hey, Rach. It’s good to see you again.” He hadn’t meant to hold open his arms, hadn’t meant to invite her to step into them, but somehow his arms were stretched wide on either side of his body, and she was staring at him, indecision written all over her exquisite face.

“Just one hug,” he said. “One plain old hug between two friends. That’s all.”

Her smile vanished for a second, and then it returned, a full-blown I’m-real-happy-to-see-you-again smile, and she stepped into his embrace.

She fit perfectly against his body. She always had. Her soft curves molded into his firmer muscle. His shoulder was just the right height to cradle her head. It was almost as if they’d been made to match. As if they were each one part of a two-piece puzzle.

Even as he buried his face in her hair, breathing in the scent of her shampoo—lemon and citrus—she inhaled deeply, as though breathing him in as well.

“Christ,” he said with a soft groan. “I’ve missed you.”

She clung to him, held tight, like she couldn’t bear to let him go. “I’ve missed you too. So much.”

“I miss our talks.”

She nodded, her hair tickling his chin. “So many times I picked up the phone to call you. To tell you about my day, about something little that happened. But I couldn’t do it.”

“Ah, baby, I understand.” He stroked his hand over her hair, cherishing the silky softness. “You don’t know how many stories I worked on that I wanted to run by you. Wanted to get your take on before I wrote them up.” Rachel had always been his sounding board. Before he’d sit down and put his article to paper, he’d discuss it with her, look at it from every angle, get her thoughts.

Since she’d been in Sydney, his articles had lacked something vital. Her insight.

“I have dozens of photos I’ve taken of my designs. Hundreds. I wanted to email them to you, find out your opinion.” She never had.

Jackson had always been blown away by Rachel’s talent, by her ability to turn lumps of metal into fine jewellery. To choose the perfect stone to set into whatever piece she worked on. She was an artist, every design a masterpiece.

“You know what I missed the most though?” she asked softly.

“What?”

“Just hanging out. Just being with you.”

His arms tightened around her. “Ditto, Rach,” he whispered. “Ditto.”

And then, because his cock was hardening at an alarming rate, and Rachel was pressed against it, her hips hugging his growing erection, he released her—although the effort nearly killed him. “Shit, baby, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for that to happen.”

She gave him a sad smile. “No worries, I understand.”

Oh yeah. She did. If anyone understood, it was her. “I better go. Before I can’t pull away again.” He pressed a tender kiss to her forehead. “I’ll see you at dinner.”

Rachel didn’t answer. She nodded, her eyes filled with every bit of longing and sorrow he felt.

Damn it. She couldn’t avoid him any longer. Now that Jenna had gone to the bathroom, she no longer had a shield. Jackson was chatting to some buddies across the table and Garreth was headed in her direction, looking pretty darned determined. He also looked as sexy as the devil.

Damned if her pussy didn’t twitch just watching his approach, didn’t remind her of what Jackson had interrupted when he’d knocked on Garreth’s door.

Rachel had been aroused this morning. More than ready for some hot and heavy action with Garreth. She was aroused still—despite the trauma of discovering he and Jackson were housemates—and seeing him did nothing to calm her lust. Between the shocking—and unsatisfactory—conclusion to her and Garreth’s morning activities, and seeing Jackson again, Rachel was wound tight as a coil, ready to go off at any second. She was aroused, she was horny and she wanted to be fucked.

She also never wanted to see Garreth again.

Tricky.

He took the seat Jenna had just vacated. “I came to your room earlier, to return your clothes. You weren’t there.”

The muscles in her shoulders knotted. “I was out. If it’s okay with you, I’ll come around in the morning and get them?”

“Of course it’s okay.” He frowned. “I’m sorry. For not telling you from the start that I share a house with Jack.”

She furrowed her brow. “Yeah, about that... Why didn’t you?”

He met her gaze with his beautiful green one. “If I had, would you have come back to my room with me?”

“No.” She’d never have knowingly slept with Jackson’s housemate.

He shrugged, as though to say *point made*.

“You knew I wouldn’t sleep with you, so you kept it secret?”

“I swear, I’d planned on telling you. I was just waiting for the right moment.”

Shit, she wanted to believe the worst about him, but couldn’t. Somehow she knew he was telling the truth. Not that the knowledge lessened her anger any. “So when would the right moment have been?” She lowered her voice, making dead certain no one besides Garreth could hear her. “When I had my lips wrapped around your dick?”

A muscle ticked below his eye. “Actually, yes.”

His response had her jolting backwards in shock. She gaped at him.

"We can't talk here." Garreth held out his hand. "Come and sit with me at the bar. There's no one around. We can speak more freely."

She eyed his hand warily.

He dropped it and stood. "You don't have to touch me. We do have to talk. Come with me?"

Against her better judgment, she nodded and followed him to the bar.

"You were saying?" she prompted once they were both seated facing each other.

"He was with us, Rachel. He was there the whole time, in my room. In my bed. You can't deny it."

She shook her head. "I'm not. You brought him into bed with us."

His eyes turned dark. "You liked that, didn't you? Pretending he was in your pussy while I was in your ass."

She took in a quick mouthful of air. Yes, she'd liked it. Too much. The very memory made her nipples bead and her skin prickle.

"I liked it too." His voice was a whisper, even though no one was around. "I wanted you to know I knew him. But I wanted you to be fully aroused when I told you. I suspected that if I told you in the heat of passion, you'd be more open to hearing the truth."

She gave a cynical laugh. "So you figured you'd wait 'til I blew you to share the truth?"

"It's not that simple. Or that callous. I'd planned out a...more romantic, er, sexier disclosure."

She raised a dubious eyebrow.

"You don't believe me?"

She shook her head.

"Know what I would have done first?" he asked.

"No." Oh, Lord. Did she want to know? The way his voice had dropped, the way he now spoke in those bedroom tones wasn't going to do her libido any good.

"I would have asked you to close your eyes."

Keep your back up and your shoulders straight. Don't be seduced by him again. "Why?"

"Because that's how I'd have wanted you. Naked, on your knees, your mouth around my cock and your eyes closed."

She couldn't help it. She imagined herself in exactly that position, kneeling before him and working over his shaft.

He leaned in close. "Once I knew you were fully into the task at hand—when I could hear your moans and smell your desire—I would have asked you to imagine it was Jackson's cock in your mouth. Not mine."

The breath caught in her throat. She had no doubt whatsoever he would have done exactly that.

“And then I would have described him to you, bit by bit. I would have told you that the man before you was not Canadian, he was Australian. A blond Australian, with blue eyes. And a body that you adored. Thinner than mine, but still well-muscled. That he was staring at you, desire burning in his blue eyes.” He nodded. “I would have painted his picture in your mind so you had no doubt who you were tasting. Licking. And it wouldn’t have been me.”

Sweet Lord, on her knees, sucking Garreth and pretending he was Jackson. Shivers tingled down her arms. “You would have turned yourself into Jackson.” The image was arousing, it drove her wild, but questions still nipped at her. She shook her head, trying to understand him, understand how his mind worked. “Why?”

“Because sweet thing, you love him. And he loves you. Two people who love each other should be together. You and Jackson should be together.”

She stared at him, mystified. “And you and I sleeping together, while you get me to think you’re Jackson, could achieve that...how?”

Garreth smiled then. A small, sexy smile. “There are things about Jack and I you don’t know. Things bigger than the fact that we’re roommates.”

A bad feeling stirred in her stomach. She looked at Garreth aghast. “Oh, God. Please, don’t say you’re bedmates as well.”

He shook his head. “We’re not lovers. But we’ve shared a bed more than once. Making love to the same women—at the same time.”

Her jaw dropped. Thoughts twirled in a crazy jumble in her mind. Jackson and Garreth shared women? Made love to the same woman at the same time? “So what? You honestly did intend for me to sleep with both of you—at the same time?” Christ, he’d told her that. He’d said he wanted to make love to her at the same time as Jackson.

Garreth took her hand and squeezed it. “It’s a lot to take in all at once. I know. I never intended for it to come out this way. I wanted to introduce you to the idea slowly. One step at a time.”

“That’s why you suggested I think of Jackson last night? And told me you wanted Jackson in bed with us this morning?”

He nodded. His eyelids drooped sensually. “I loved watching how talk about him got you all hot and bothered. If a mere fantasy could arouse you—and me—so much, the reality of having Jackson in bed with us could be a million times better.”

The truth dawned on her then, like a light being switched on in her head. “You set it all up. This morning, with me in your room and Jackson knocking on your door. You set the whole thing up.” Rachel stared at him, utterly shocked. “You knew Jackson was already at the hotel, and you knew he’d come looking for you.”

Garreth held his gaze steady, not once looking away from her. “He said he’d come to my room at twelve.”

“And we got there just after eleven.” Jackson had been early. Garreth had never gotten the chance to tell her the truth. “Dear God! You wanted Jackson to find us together, in bed.”

He nodded. “Of course I did.”

“But...w-why?”

“Because Jackson needs to see you as a lover again. He needs to climb back into bed with you. And you need to climb back into bed with him.”

Rachel couldn’t help it. She gaped at him again. “If Jackson and I wanted to make love, we would. We don’t need you to help us into bed.”

“No, you wouldn’t,” Garreth contradicted her. “You do want to make love. Both of you. Yet neither of you is willing to breach the barrier Jenna set up.”

“So you decided to take the bull by the horns, so to speak. Breach the barrier for us.”

“If the only way to get him into your bed is to get you into my bed, so be it.”

She opened her mouth to argue, but he placed a finger over her mouth to shush her. “He loves you, sweet thing. The idea that I slept with you is tearing him in two. If you and I did it again, there is no way in hell Jackson could stay away. He’d come after you.”

She shook her head. “You are one twisted bloke. You think Jackson and I should be together, so you get me into your bed, sleep with me, and then wait for him to follow. And you believe that will work.”

He puckered his brow in concentration, as though mulling her words over. “Yep. That’s pretty much exactly what I believe.” He smiled at her. “You and Jackson need to get into bed together again. You need to show each other your love.”

Hysterical laughter bubbled in her chest. “You know, in your own warped way, I think you only mean well. I honestly do. But even if your plan had worked, even if you had gotten me and Jackson into bed with you, you’re still overlooking one factor.”

“What’s that.”

“Jenna.”

Garreth’s expression changed instantly. His face paled, and his eyes filled with grief. “Jack told me what happened to her. To them.”

He had? Wow. She wondered what Jenna would have to say about that. “Okay, so now you understand the full story, you know that all your good intentions were for nothing. Jackson and I can *never* be together.” And the bitch of it now was that thanks to Garreth, Rachel was craving Jackson’s body more than ever. Lusting over him. Desperate to get back into bed with him.

Him and Garreth.

Garreth's grin was slow in forming, but once it appeared, his sorrow vanished. He was back with her, in the moment. "I'd hardly say a night of freaking fantastic sex was nothing. Besides, knowing what happened to Jenna and why she insists Jackson can't date her friends, doesn't change my thoughts. You may be Jenna's best friend, but you're not the stupid kid who fucked up her life, and it's not fair to assign that responsibility to you. I still think you and Jack belong together." He leaned in close. "And I still want you in bed, between him and me. I would love to fuck you while Jackson makes love to you."

Rachel swallowed. Now that he'd put it out there, she also wanted it. As much as she'd wanted it last night and this morning. Only now the idea aroused her even more, because Jackson was here. He was real. And if Garreth was to be believed, he'd come after them if they slept together again. He'd join them.

He'd join them. In bed. He'd make love to her at the same time as Garreth.

Her belly tumbled at the thought. Goosebumps covered her flesh and her breath vanished.

"You're thinking about it," Garreth whispered.

Shit. How did he know?

"Your cheeks just flushed. And your eyes have turned the same midnight blue they turn when you're about to come."

Rachel licked her lips. Perspiration spotted her forehead. "You read me too damn easily," she grouched.

"You're aroused. Like me." Garreth's voice was hoarse. "All I want right now is to get you back in my room. To strip away your clothes, and your anger, and sink into your depths. I want me *and* Jackson sinking inside you."

Moisture pooled between her legs, teasing her. "It's not going to happen," she negated his words, even as her body begged her to live up to them. "It can't. I won't do that to Jenna."

"This isn't about Jenna. It's about you and me and Jackson."

"Don't make it about me and Jackson. We can never be."

"You can, if you make love to me. He'll come after you."

"No." She shook her head fiercely. "I can't do that to Jenna. I won't."

"This isn't about Jenna. It's about sex. And love."

"And betrayal and guilt. Been there. Done that. I won't do it again."

"Even though you want it? You want me—and Jackson?"

She gulped. She did want them. Both. Garreth for another night of erotic pleasure. Jackson forever. "I..." I what? What could she say? "I..."

"I what?" he prompted.

"I..." She shook her head, at a complete loss. She couldn't answer. Wouldn't, because, God help her, she wanted everything Garreth had predicted to happen. She wanted to fuck Garreth, and she wanted

Jackson to come after her, to make love to her. At the same time. And she wanted Jackson to openly declare his love for her. To stake his claim. To tell her she was his and they never had to be apart again.

She shook her head helplessly. "I, er, I need the bathroom. Please excuse me."

Jesus Christ and holy fuck. Rachel was aroused. Garreth, the stupid fuck, had pulled her away from the table and fed her some crock of shit. Whatever the bastard had told her had worked.

Rachel's cheeks were flushed and her nipples poked at the black stretchy top she wore. She looked as though she were about to jump Garreth right there, at the bar.

But she didn't. Instead she stumbled off her chair and walked away. Headed to...?

Jackson didn't stop to check. Acting on instinct, he got up and followed her.

She rounded a corner, in the direction of the kitchen. And bathrooms. And a door leading out to what had to be the back of the restaurant.

A second before she pushed open the door to the Ladies', he caught her back against his front and without saying a word, steered her towards the door leading outside.

She gasped and twirled her head to see who'd taken her captive. "J-Jackson? What on earth?"

He didn't respond. Couldn't. His blood boiled. Rage ran through his veins. It was one thing that she'd fucked his housemate when she didn't know who he was. It was another thing altogether getting aroused by Garreth, in front of him, when the truth had been laid bare.

The scent of rain hung in the air. Icy air ripped the breath from his lungs. It stung his cheeks and made his eyes water. He didn't care. The second they were outside, he swung Rachel around, pressed her flat against the wall and crushed his mouth to hers.

Holy smoke.

Dear God.

Her lips. Her full, ripe lips. Kissing him back. Pressing against his with the same urgency he felt. They did him in. Stripped away whatever self-control he had left. He swept his tongue inside her mouth, losing himself to her taste.

Twelve years he'd loved her. Twelve years he'd tried to deny himself.

Why? What for?

So she could sleep with his housemate? Fall in love with someone else?

No fucking way. Rachel was his. They'd both known it from the start. They'd both tried to deny it and never succeeded.

And this here was the very reason they'd failed. The passion that flared between them was too real to deny. The love that blazed just refused to be extinguished.

He pressed himself against her, chest to chest, groin to hips, thighs to thighs. His cock, already hard from watching Rachel with Gazza, now ached with repressed desire. He burned for her. Burned for them. Bled for what they should have together—but never could.

Rachel was his. She was born to be with him. He was born to be hers. Distance and time had done nothing to dim that knowledge.

She moaned in his mouth, ground herself against his erection.

Frigid wind sliced over the back of his neck, but holding Rachel in his arms had him so fucking hot he barely felt it.

Something wet touched his lips. Wet and salty.

Tears?

Though it almost killed him, he pulled away from their kiss and rested his forehead against hers, breathing hard. The ache in his groin increased, but he shoved it to the back of his mind. He brushed his thumb against her cheek and found it wet.

“You’re crying.” The knowledge stabbed at his heart.

“We’re resorting to this again?” she asked in a broken voice. “Stealing kisses out back? Where no one can see?”

Christ, this wasn’t what he wanted. It wasn’t what either of them wanted.

With all his heart, Jackson wished he could lift her up and carry her through the restaurant. Carry her openly, for everyone to see. Carry her back to the hotel and into his room. Make love to her without the guilt of knowing he was betraying his sister.

“The way you were looking at Garreth... Fuck, Rach. You’re ripping my heart out.”

“H-how was I looking at him?”

He growled low in his throat. “Like he was breakfast.”

Rachel swallowed audibly before murmuring something so soft he couldn’t hear her. “What did you say?” he was forced to ask.

“Garreth wants to have a threesome,” she whispered. “Him, me and you.”

Jackson groaned out loud. He couldn’t fucking believe Gazza had told her. He also couldn’t fucking believe how hard his dick was.

“I-I said no. We couldn’t do that. Not to Jenna.”

Jackson took a very deep breath. “You said no. But is that what you want?”

Rachel didn’t answer. But her shaking body gave her away. Her breasts heaved against him, her nipples torturing his chest.

“You want it, don’t you?”

Her breath quickened, but she still didn’t answer.

Something twisted in his chest. “You want to sleep with him and with me.”

"I do," she said at last. "God help me, but I do."

Fuck, how could more blood fill his dick? There wasn't space. The pain was excruciating. "Do..." The words wouldn't come out. He cleared his throat. "Do you love him?"

She laughed, although the sound was not humorous. "I hardly know him."

"You know him well enough."

"We've slept together. I'm attracted to him. I don't love him."

"But you want to fuck him. Again."

She caught her breath then released it with a hiss. "Yes."

"Alone? Just you and him?"

"No." There was no hesitation whatsoever in her answer.

"You want me there too?"

A soft moan escaped her mouth, as though she'd tried to contain it but couldn't. "Yes."

"You want to fuck me and my housemate at the same time?" He didn't know if he was angry beyond measure, or aroused beyond control. Probably both.

She shook her head. "I-I want to fuck your housemate. I want to make love with you."

"Fuck it!" Frustration swamped him and he slammed his hand against the wall beside her head. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

She cringed. "I shouldn't have told you," she said, instantly contrite. "I should just have kept my big mouth shut."

"No!" He shook his head fiercely. "No secrets between us. Ever. There are enough damned secrets in our lives."

She wrapped her arms around him, held him close. So close he had no hope of hiding the effect she had on him. He didn't try.

"I'm sorry, Jackson. So sorry. I wanted so much for this weekend to go smoothly. To pretend nothing had ever happened between us. That we were no more than friends." She shook her head. "But I can't do that. I can't act like I don't feel all of these things. Can't pretend I don't want to fuck Garreth again. Can't pretend I don't want to make love to you. Or that I don't love you. Because I do. I love you. I am quite hopelessly in love with you." The tears were back, falling down her cheeks. "And now I am going to walk away again, before we do anything stupid. I'm going to drive back to the hotel and lock myself in my room."

He wanted to stop her. Wanted to refuse to let her go, but knew better than that. Rachel was doing the right thing. She was walking away. She was doing it for Jenna's sake.

"Please, give Jenna my apologies. Tell her I had a headache or something." She disentangled herself from his embrace. "Tell her I'll see her in the morning."

With that, she fled back inside the restaurant, leaving Jackson empty and hollow. And so fucking aroused he ached.

For several moments he remained where he was, rooted to the spot. Waiting desperately for his erection to subside. The freezing air helped, forcing blood away from his dick and to his heart in an effort to keep warm. His hands were blocks of ice and his toes almost too cold to wiggle.

His mobile phone buzzed in his back pocket, and he fumbled taking it out, his frozen fingers barely able to hold the phone, let alone press the necessary buttons.

A text message? At this time of night?

And then he saw the sender's name. And the message.

"I'm going after her. Tonight. Coming?"

Chapter Six

It was past midnight when the knock came, loud enough that had she been sleeping it would have woken her.

But she wasn't sleeping, she was curled in a ball on the couch in front of the fire, desperately trying to get rid of the chill. Rain had begun to fall outside, the drops pelting the roof, dropping the temperature even lower. Wind howled around the windows.

Her silk pajamas gave her no protection from the cold. Funny that she needed the warmth of the flames, because inside she burned. Heat flowed through her, a persistent reminder of the arousal that would not quit. Of the lust she felt for Garreth and the love she felt for Jackson.

Yet on the outside she shivered. Her skin was covered in prickles. She simply could not shrug off the cold. No, it wasn't physical. It was an emotional chill. One that told her all her hard work, all her efforts to get over Jackson had come to naught.

God help her, she still loved him. So much it hurt just to breathe around him. So much that had he been anyone else's brother she would have thrown caution to the wind and gone after him. Chased him until she wore down his defenses and made him hers.

But he wasn't anyone else's brother. He was Jenna's, and Jackson would never hurt his sister. No matter how much he might love Rachel, his first duty would always be to Jenna. Yes, he'd slipped more than once, even slept with her. But he'd rectified that mistake. They both had.

Garreth had said something earlier in the evening that left Rachel with food for thought.

You may be Jenna's best friend, but you're not the stupid kid who fucked up her life, and it's not fair to assign that responsibility to you.

Never had truer words been spoken. Rachel wasn't that kid. But she was Jenna's friend, and somehow, because she and Jackson were involved, Rachel now had the potential to become that kid. The person with the power to hurt Jenna. Which was of course nonsense, since Jenna was the last person in the world Rachel would ever hurt.

Not for the first time, Rachel wondered how Jenna would react if she just came out and told her the truth. If she just confessed her love for Jackson. She'd be upset, no question about it. But would the hurt and disappointment persist? Would Jenna be able to overcome that initial burst of panic? Would she believe that no matter what happened, Rachel would always be her friend? Could she trust Rachel and Jackson enough to know they had no intention of hurting her, that they simply wanted to be together?

It was a useless debate to have with herself. Jackson would never allow her to speak openly to Jenna. The knock came again.

Rachel knew who it was. And she knew she was going to open the door.

When she did, Garreth raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't sure you'd answer."

Good grief, he was gorgeous. "I'll always answer when you knock. I'm just not sure I'll let you in." Rain fell steadily behind him, and the wind cut a path into the chalet, chilling her to the bone.

"Let me in, sweet thing. You know you want to."

Shit, he was right. She did. She wanted to haul him inside, rip off his clothes and fuck him mercilessly. She also wanted to get the damned door closed so she could trap the heat inside and the cold out. "You sure you want to come in? Knowing I love Jackson this much?"

"I told you this morning, it doesn't bother me at all. And knowing it's Jackson on your mind just turns me on more."

Her pussy jumped. Damn, did he say all the right things or what? "He's not with you, is he?" She knew the answer would be no. As hard as she tried, she couldn't hide the disappointment.

"No." Garreth shook his head. "I'm sorry. I was so sure he'd come after you."

She gave him a sad smile. "He has to put his sister first." Rachel chewed on her lower lip. "Garreth?"

"Yeah?"

"I can't do this." She hadn't been sure what her answer would be until this second, but now she'd voiced it she knew there could be no other choice. "I think you're wonderful. I do. I also think you're about the sexiest man I've ever laid eyes on." She smiled a small smile, telling him in her own way that he was forgiven for keeping the truth from her.

"But?"

"But I can't make love to you again. Not without Jackson. Not knowing who you are and how you fit in with Jackson's life."

His eyes filled with the warmth she'd come to associate with him. "Ah, sweet thing. I never expected you to sleep with me without him."

"You, uh, didn't?"

"You and Jack are supposed to be together. I told you that. There's no way you'd be disloyal to him with me now."

God, his insight was truly astounding. "Then why did you come here?"

The wind shrieked around him. "Because I thought he'd follow."

Tears rushed to her eyes. He'd done that for her? For Jackson? "Damn it, Garreth. If I wasn't already in love with Jackson, I'd fall for you like a ton of bricks. Even if your logic is somewhat twisted."

"Yeah, and if I wasn't in love with someone else, I'd fall for you too."

They smiled at each other, a sad smile borne of mutual compassion. If two people ever understood each other, it was her and Garreth. “Would you like to come in anyway? I have wine and scotch in the bar fridge. We can drown our sorrows together.”

Garreth nodded. “I’d love to.” He stepped inside and walked over to the couch.

Rachel pushed the door shut and headed to the fridge. Before the door had a chance to latch, it was shoved open again, so hard it slammed against the wall.

A furious Jackson stormed into the room, looking menacing. Water dripped from his hair and jacket. His cheeks were scarlet, and his chest heaved as though he’d run all the way here from the restaurant. His eyes blazed with fury.

“You are not fucking doing this,” he roared. “No way. No how. Do you understand me?”

“Jack,” Garreth nodded at him, calm as anything.

“You,” he pointed at Garreth. “You don’t get to touch her one more time.”

Rachel gasped.

“And you—” He turned to glare at Rachel “—You don’t get to fuck him. Ever again.”

Rachel gaped at him. “What—”

“I told you,” he raged. “You are not fucking doing this. *Not without me!*”

“Not without...” Rachel let the words trail off as their meaning registered. She lost her breath.

“Finally come to your senses, asshole?” Garreth asked.

Jackson tore off his jacket. It landed in a wet pile on the floor. “Don’t asshole me, you prick. I told you all along. She’s mine.” He yanked his sweater over his head and shook his hair out. Droplets splashed around him.

Rachel blinked. “I am?”

His hands stilled on the buttons of his shirt which he’d begun to open, and his expression softened. “You know you are, Rach. You always have been.”

Her heart pounded.

Garreth stepped up behind her and pressed himself to her back. “She wasn’t yours last night,” he told Jackson. “She was all mine. Every last naked inch of her.” His cock, which he’d strategically positioned snugly behind her butt, shifted. It grew with every word he spoke.

Jackson’s eyes flashed dangerously.

Garreth wrapped an arm around her waist and pushed her pajama top up, exposing her belly. He dragged his hand over her stomach, igniting all sorts of fires inside her. She looked at Jackson, felt Garreth’s touch on her naked flesh and groaned.

Garreth had been right. Jackson, thinking Garreth intended to sleep with her, hadn’t been able to stay away. He’d come after her. She could have kissed Garreth.

She *did* kiss him.

She twirled around his arms, held his face in her hands and pressed her mouth to his. His lips parted to meet hers instantly. Even with his tongue sweeping into her mouth, she could feel his lips curving into a smile.

She smiled right back.

Until Jackson interrupted the kiss with one furious word. "Enough!"

Garreth pulled away an inch. "Go to it, sweet thing," he whispered. "Make him yours." He gave her a gentle push, and she lost her balance and toppled over.

Jackson caught her, spun her around and kissed her. So forcefully she couldn't breathe. But that was okay. What was a little life-saving oxygen when the man she'd loved forever kissed her as though his very life depended on it?

He kissed her and he kissed her and he kissed her. And when Rachel began to think she might pass out from the sheer pleasure his mouth induced, he kissed her some more. And she kissed him back, cherishing every second.

An eternity passed before Jackson pulled away, before he looked over her shoulder at Garreth and nodded. "This is it. The last night we share. Ever."

"Then we best make it worth our while. And Rachel's."

Rachel smiled. Oh, this was going to be worth all of their whiles. She put her hands on Jackson's shirt and finished off the task of opening his buttons for him.

Jackson shivered beneath her touch, and his hand tightened in her hair. "Enjoy it, Halt. After this you don't get to touch her again."

Let the men argue it out. Let them iron out all the creases. She just wanted to touch them. Both of them. Rachel pushed Jackson's shirt off, showing his lean, muscled chest. She pressed her lips to one of his nipples and then the other, making him groan out loud.

She smiled at the knowledge she and Garreth shared. They'd already accepted the fact they wouldn't touch again. Tonight, now, was simply an added bonus for both of them.

Rachel turned to face Garreth, still smiling, and he winked at her. She went to work on the buttons of his shirt too. The six-pack covering his stomach made her mouth water. Both of them, Garreth and Jackson, looked ridiculously good shirtless. Two hot-blooded males, filling her room.

She could hardly wait for them to dispose of their pants.

She leaned in to lick one of Garreth's nipples and he brushed his hand through her hair. "Oh, yeah, sweet thing. Just like that."

Rachel sucked the nipple into her mouth, making Garreth shudder.

"Christ," he rasped. "I need to see you naked."

Rachel grinned as she released his flesh. "Then get rid of these pajamas."

"I'll let Jackson do the honors," he said, and turned her in his arms so she faced the man she loved.

He stood less than a meter away. His eyes were dark as night and heated breath escaped his parted lips. When he stepped forward and lifted his hands to undo her buttons, they shook.

It probably didn't take long to open her pajama top, but it felt like forever. His hands worked tortuously against her. They were icy cold, making her nipples bead instantly, but it was the soft flicking of his fingers over her breasts that drove her wild. It had her moaning in Garreth's hold. The cold prickles that had covered her skin vanished. Goose bumps took their place, erupting all over her arms and shoulders. Her nipples were tight buds, desperate for Jackson's touch. For Garreth's mouth.

Wet heat pooled in her pussy.

Jackson heaved in a deep breath as her top fell open. "Dear God." His voice was dry as grit, and he spent several seconds just staring at her.

Her breasts grew heavy beneath his gaze. Needy.

"Damn, Rach." Jackson swallowed hard. "You're beautiful."

Garreth's arms reached around her, and he cupped her breasts. One he massaged gently, and the other he brushed with his thumb, running it over her erect nipple.

Rachel let out a squeak. God, that felt stunning.

Jackson leaned in and kissed her. She drank from his lips thirstily, dying for another taste of his mouth, his tongue. His hands found her hips and he stepped even closer, holding his lower body snug against hers. His erection ground into her stomach through his jeans.

Behind her, Garreth nuzzled his nose through her hair to nibble at her neck. He pressed his cock between her buttocks.

Rachel had trouble remembering to breathe. How could she, when every sense was inundated by these beautiful men? When Garreth, the gorgeous stranger she'd grown so fond of, tantalized her neck with tiny kisses and tormented her breasts with perfect strokes of his hands? When Jackson, the man she'd loved forever and given up hoping for, kissed her like he might never kiss another woman again?

Guilt licked at her subconscious. This was wrong. They shouldn't be here. Shouldn't be doing this.

She pushed it away, refusing to think about it. Later there'd be time for self-doubt and recrimination. Later she could face the consequences of her actions. And Jackson's. Now she just intended to luxuriate in those actions. To relish every second spent in Jackson's and Garreth's arms.

As Jackson had said to Garreth, this was a one-off thing, the last night. She wasn't about to waste a second on shame and remorse. Not now. Tomorrow. But not now.

Garreth's hands left her breasts and his cock left her ass. He moved against her back, lowering himself to his knees, dropping light kisses all the way down her spine, making her tingle. He steadied himself by holding her around her hips, just like Jackson.

And then slowly her pants were sliding over those same hips. Whether Jackson was pushing at them, or Garreth was tugging them down, she couldn't tell. She just knew they were coming off, and the

knowledge had her chest squeezing in anticipation. The liquid pooling in her pussy oozed from her lips and slid onto her inner thigh.

As Garreth nuzzled her buttock, Jackson dipped his head forward and drew a nipple into his mouth.

Rachel's head fell back as sensation and lust tore through her.

Garreth inserted his hand between her thighs, pushing her legs apart. Jackson suckled on her nipple, the action sending a dart of pleasure rippling through her, deep into her pussy.

When Garreth swiped a finger over her slick, wet folds and found her clit, Rachel lost it.

She came. Just like that. With Garreth on his knees behind her, and Jackson latched onto her breast.

Her knees gave way as waves of bliss crashed over her. Jackson caught her before she fell and carried her to the couch, where he lay her down. She barely had time to breathe before he crouched and buried his face between her legs.

Rachel's eyes popped open. Jackson was licking her pussy. She stared at Garreth in disbelief.

He grinned at her. "Told you," he mouthed silently.

Rachel tried to smile back, but Jackson lifted her leg up high and tongued her clit as he slid a finger inside her, making her howl almost as loud as the wind outside.

Garreth stripped off his pants and headed to the couch, his erection bobbing proudly before him. "You and me have unfinished business," he told her. "This morning, when Jackson walked in on us, he disturbed us. Remember?"

She nodded. God, how could she ever forget?

He gripped the base of his cock. "Wanna try again?"

"God, yes." She licked her lips. Her pussy in Jackson's mouth, Garreth's cock in her mouth? Damn straight she wanted to try again. Jackson moaned out loud as cream gushed from her pussy. He licked up every drop, still using his finger to fuck her.

Garreth placed his hands on the back of the couch and leaned over her, bringing his balls to her lips. She dragged her tongue over them.

The sac pulled tight against the base of his dick and he threw his head back. "Oh, yeah!"

Jackson paused to look up and watch them. His expression was black, as if seeing them together hurt physically.

She drew a testicle into her mouth and sucked it gently.

Jackson inhaled a sharp breath and his eyes darkened, lust lurking in their depths. His finger moved rhythmically inside her. In, out. In, out.

She released the testicle and repeated the process with Garreth's other one.

Using his free hand, Jackson palmed his shaft. He grimaced, as though this was the last place he wanted to be, and the only place he could be.

Rachel palmed Garreth's shaft, pulling him down at a different angle so she could place her mouth over the tip of his cock.

Jackson stroked himself as his finger caressed her channel.

Rachel swallowed the drops of precome that beaded on Garreth's tip. She closed her mouth over his cock and took him in as deep as she could.

Garreth's groan echoed through the room.

With a growl, Jackson lowered his head back to her pussy and licked her from her clit, over her lips and around his finger, and between her butt cheeks.

Then he did it again.

Rachel broke. She came in his mouth with a loud cry.

Garreth's cock slipped from her mouth as the orgasm continued. God, she was coming. On Jackson's face. With his finger buried in her pussy.

Jackson.

She moaned his name out loud.

He continued to lick her. Even as the spasms subsided, he licked her. Relentlessly. Refusing to stop. He licked her all the way back into another orgasm, which ripped through her, leaving her winded and breathless.

Only when the ripples of that climax faded did he give her a break.

Still shuddering in the aftermath of her pleasure, Rachel rolled over. Garreth had knelt on the floor, and because he was so tall, he was at the exact right height. She took his cock back into her mouth. Knowing Jackson watched every move, his gaze both disturbed and aroused, she hungrily sucked Garreth off. And she would have kept on going if Garreth hadn't pulled back.

"Easy there, sweet thing," he muttered. "My staying power is about zero right now." He looked at Jackson. "Switch?"

A muscle worked in Jackson's jaw. "Oh, yeah." He ditched his jeans.

Rachel stared at Jackson's erection, entranced. God, it looked delicious. Long and hard and weeping.

He and Garreth swapped places, but Jackson did not kneel. Instead he took her hand and drew her upright into a sitting position. All Rachel need do was lean forward and part her lips.

"Love me, Rach," he urged with a groan.

She did, licking off his spilled semen, and Jackson growled his pleasure at the contact. She opened her mouth wide and swallowed him down.

Dear God. She had Jackson's dick in her mouth. Jackson's. Yes, she'd tasted it once before, but the guilt associated with the act had dulled the memory. She'd forgotten how easily he slid over her tongue. How greedy she'd been to get him in deeper, to take him all the way down her throat. The memories flooded back now. His taste, his length, delighted her.

“Ah, fuck.” Jackson’s entire body tensed. “God, baby. That feels so good.”

She took him in as far as she could and used her hand to cover the rest of his dick. Then she bobbed her head up and down, loving him with her mouth.

Garreth squeezed in behind her on the couch, placing a thigh on either side of hers and pushing his cock against the small of her back. Rachel edged forward, closer to Jackson, to give him more space.

She nearly hit the roof when Garreth’s hand found her pussy.

She’d just come three times in quick succession. She wasn’t sure if she could bear the sensitivity of being touched again.

But Garreth must have been wise to her mood, because his touch was not designed to arouse. It was designed to soothe. And soothe her he did, sliding his fingers gently over her pussy, using her cream to prevent his hand from abrading her delicate skin.

The soothing lasted mere seconds before she began to squirm. Before need slammed into her once again, and she no longer wanted his gentle touch. She wanted more. So much more. And she wanted it as much as she wanted Jackson in her mouth.

“You ready?” Jackson asked, his voice lower than she’d ever heard it before. He sounded both resigned and aroused. Resigned to Garreth’s presence—and aroused by it.

Ready for what? She couldn’t ask. Her mouth was full.

“Fuck, yeah,” Garreth answered.

Jackson put his hands on her head, stilling her movements. “Stand up, Rach. Just for a minute.”

She pulled off him reluctantly, and he swore, as though the loss of her mouth might kill him. It might kill her as well. Now that she had him where she wanted him, she hated for him to draw away.

Garreth pushed her hair aside and nibbled on her ear. “I’m going to fuck you, sweet thing,” he whispered. “While you blow Jack. I’m going to slide my cock deep into your pussy, and you’re going to ride me while you suck him. You okay with that?”

Was that a trick question? “Hell, yeah.” The walls of her pussy constricted, as if searching for his dick. “Do you have a condom?”

“Already on.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

“For you to stand up.”

“Why?”

“So that when you sit back down I’ll be ready for you.”

A fresh gush of juice trickled from her pussy.

Jackson took her hand and pulled her up, straight into his arms. He didn’t give her a chance to say anything. He simply kissed her.

God, he kissed like a dream. Like a beautiful, wonderful dream. She got lost in his kiss, lost to the gentle delights of his mouth. Lost in his arms.

Jackson.

"I love you," she whispered when he released her lips.

He stared at her with intense eyes. "You're mine, Rach. Always. Remember that when you're fucking him."

And then there was a pair of hands on her waist, urging her down. "Straddle my legs, sweet thing," Garreth said in a voice wicked as night.

She did as he requested, and he pulled her down. He'd moved, closed his legs and shifted down a little on the couch. With his guidance, Rachel lowered herself onto him, and her pussy met the tip of his cock.

They moaned together. Liquid seeped between her legs.

"Take me in, sweet thing. Take me in all the way."

Slow as could be, she seated herself on his lap. For long seconds neither of them moved. They simply sat, joined together like one. She inhaled, relishing the sheer pleasure of holding him inside her.

"Know what the good thing about this position is?" Garreth asked. "Neither of us has to move. Jackson's gonna do all the work."

"He is?" Her voice was virtually non-existent. "How?" She looked up at Jackson. He stood before her, slowly pumping his dick. His gaze was rooted to her face.

"You're gonna lean over him, just like you did before, and lick his dick. He'll do the rest."

She was higher than before, and had to lean forward a little more this time. She opened her mouth wide and sucked Jackson back in.

A hoarse cry rent the air. Jackson's? Garreth's?

Jackson began moving almost immediately, rocking his hips, pumping into her as she sucked him. Every time he pumped, Rachel was driven back slightly. Not too much, but enough that her hips moved as well, making her pussy clench over Garreth's dick with every thrust of Jackson's hips.

It was a subtle delight. Nothing too vigorous, nothing that would make either her or Garreth come, but delicious enough that they both gasped for air.

With her hands clutching the firm, round cheeks of Jackson's ass, she gorged on him, relishing the fluttery sensations in her groin as she did. Long, delicious moments passed.

"Christ, this is better than I imagined," Garreth gasped.

Jackson growled low in his throat and took a step back, making Rachel lean over farther. Garreth's response was instantaneous. He drew his finger between her butt cheeks to play with her anus. Light, feathery strokes at first, strokes that took her breath away and forced her to concentrate on Jackson's dick harder. Then firmer ones. Wetter ones.

Garreth must have squeezed lube onto his finger, because he eased it past the tight ring of muscle, all the way up to his knuckle with no difficulty.

She groaned around Jackson's shaft. Christ, that felt good. So unbelievably good her pussy began to spasm.

Garreth withdrew his finger immediately. "Uh uh, sweet thing. You come, I come. And I'm not ready."

Frustration grabbed hold of her and she clenched her ass cheeks together, over and over. She wanted his finger back. Now.

She got what she wanted. Only this time it was more than one finger, and although they slipped inside her easily enough, the unexpected stretch was enough to bring tears to her eyes. The need to come shriveled.

"Breathe through it, Rach," Jackson urged. "It'll be worth it. I swear. Just breathe deep." He ran his hands over her shoulders, soothing her.

Rachel had no doubt it would be worth it. Even though the pain persisted, the pleasure was now back, twofold, because Garreth filled both of her holes.

Garreth behind her, and Jackson in front.

"My fantasy is about to become a reality," Garreth whispered, his breath fanning up her spine. "I'm going to take your ass now, Rachel. And when I do, Jackson's going to make love to you. Just like he's been wanting to do since the day I met him."

Rachel whimpered. Liquid gushed to her pussy.

"Oh yeah," Garreth rasped. "You like that idea, don't you, sweet thing?"

"I can't wait, Rach," Jackson said hoarsely. "Can't wait to make love to you."

Rachel released his dick. "Now," she demanded. "Do it now." She lifted herself off Garreth with a wet squelch, then thrust her hips forward, so instead of his cockhead touching her pussy, it now pressed into her ass.

Garreth grabbed his dick, holding himself firm. "Oh, fuck. Christ, and holy shit."

She lowered herself onto him. Slowly, ever so slowly, gritting her teeth because as freaking good as it felt, and as smooth as the lube made the path, it also burned like hell.

Jackson moaned out loud. "I could come just watching you."

"No." No way was he coming like that. "Inside me." Okay, so she wasn't big on words right now, but he got the general idea. After waiting for him all this time there was no way he was coming anywhere but inside her pussy.

The breath left her lungs as she sat down. Garreth was seated all the way in her ass.

He panted behind her and spread his legs wide. “Put your feet on my thighs.” His voice was barely a whisper, as though talking was impossible. He placed his hands on her hips, balancing her as she pulled her knees up, and rested her feet on his thighs. She put her hands on the couch on either side of Garreth.

Dear God, in this position, she was totally exposed. Jackson, who could not seem to tear his eyes away, had a bird’s eye view of everything. *Everything*.

His hand was on his cock again, stroking. “Touch yourself, Rach. Rub your clit.”

She shook her head violently. “C-can’t. I’ll come.” With Garreth’s shaft in her ass, her pussy stretched wide for Jackson, and Jackson’s gaze between her legs, she wouldn’t last a second.

Jackson reached over to the coffee table and grabbed a condom she hadn’t known was there. “I want you to come. I want to watch you climaxing.” He ripped the package open without taking his eyes off her.

“Touch your clit, sweet thing,” Garreth wheezed. “Do it for all of us.”

How could she resist? Her clit throbbed, aching for the contact. As she reached down and stroked her finger over the stiff bud between her legs, Jackson sheathed himself.

He massaged his balls as she rubbed tiny circles around her clit.

Too much. Way too much. She didn’t make ten seconds before the sensation overwhelmed her. She climaxed with Garreth buried in her ass.

Cream spilled from her pussy as her muscles clenched rhythmically.

“Oh, fuck.” Garreth groaned. “Jesus fucking Christ.” He froze beneath her, not moving an inch.

Jackson dropped to his knees with a loud moan, and before the orgasm subsided, licked her pussy thoroughly. She came again and again. Perspiration beaded on her forehead. Shivers shook through her body, and her pussy undulated in pleasure.

“Jackson, fuck, I can’t take much more,” Garreth yelled at him. “Do it. Now!”

Rachel dropped her head back against Garreth’s shoulder, absolutely shattered. Her eyes were closed. She couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t move. Tremors raced up her spine and down again.

And then Jackson stood. What he did, she didn’t know, but something touched her thigh. A foot? A knee? The cushions on the couch shifted, and he was there. Leaning over her. Into her. His cock was centered at her pussy—and he pushed.

Rachel cried out as he drove into her. Her pussy, still pulsating from her orgasms, jumped at the intrusion. Holy crap. She was full. So full she couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t think. And Jackson was only halfway in.

He thrust again, and a long, low rasping *aaahhh* escaped his mouth.

“God. Fuck, yes!” Garreth ground out behind her.

“Rachel?”

She opened her eyes. Jackson gazed at her from inches away. “I love you, baby. Always have, always will.”

He gave one final thrust and was in all the way.

Rachel came again, at the exact same minute that she burst into tears.

This, here, was the single most intense experience she'd ever had. Physically she was so aroused she thought she might simply implode. Yes, there was pain. But damn it, the pain only made the pleasure better. More exquisite. And yes, she was stuffed full to overflowing. But that fullness was about the best damn thing she'd ever felt.

And emotionally? This weekend probably topped the scales. She'd met a stranger and made love to him. And that stranger had done everything in his power to make her every fantasy come true. Which explained why, here and now, her fantasy half-stood, half-knelt before her, his cock in her pussy, professing his love for her.

Tears streamed down her face, even as her body writhed in ecstasy.

Jackson kissed them away as they fell.

"Don't cry, sweet thing," Garreth puffed in her ear. "Please don't cry." His hands rubbed her hips, soothing her.

She shook her head against his shoulder and smiled through the tears. "It's good crying," she told him. "Promise."

"You sure?" he asked.

"I'm positive," she said.

"You enjoying this?" He thrust up into her ass as he asked, and she clenched her butt in response. Jackson groaned out loud.

"Loving it." She sighed in pleasure. "Do that again."

He did. It was all any of them needed. Even as the remaining tingles of the orgasm fluttered away, Garreth and Jackson began to fuck her in earnest. Jackson plunged into her and then withdrew, and Garreth bounced her on his lap, driving up her from behind.

Rachel couldn't hold still. When Jackson plunged into her again, she thrust back against his invading cock, and when Garreth drove up her back passage, she ground down on him.

Perhaps it was the men's past experience, but Rachel was surprised there was no fumbling, no misplaced body parts. The two of them worked in perfect harmony, bringing her such exquisite delight she thought she might die from it.

Perfect, passionate pleasure at the hands of two men.

Garreth and Jackson.

Jackson and Garreth.

So perfect was the pleasure, she couldn't deter the build to another climax. It spiraled down upon her, overwhelming her, usurping her senses, commandeering her desires. The sensation of two penises inside her was too powerful.

The orgasm hit, the most potent one ever. It tore through her, shattering her composure. Surges of satisfaction rocked her world. Her pussy and her ass clamped down around Jackson and Garreth, milking them both.

Garreth lost control. As Rachel exploded around him, he slammed into her one last time and howled. His dick beat rhythmically in her ass, telling her he was spurting stream upon stream of semen into his condom.

His release must have spurred Jackson's, because he froze, for just a second, before crying out in agony. He threw his shoulders back, arched his back and erupted in her pussy.

A more magnificent sight Rachel had never seen. A more incredible experience she'd never had. It was a night, a moment, Rachel knew she'd remember for the rest of her life.

Chapter Seven

They bathed together. All three of them, in the massive spa bath in the bathroom, with Garreth and Jackson soaping away every last trace of stickiness from her body. Then they climbed into bed and fell into an exhausted sleep.

In the wee hours of the morning, they woke again. Their love making was calmer this time, but just as gratifying. Rachel lay on Jackson, chest to chest, his cock in her pussy, and Garreth knelt behind them, his shaft buried in her ass.

“Last time,” Garreth murmured, seconds before they came together in a heated rush.

When Jackson disappeared into the bathroom after lovingly cleaning Rachel with a warm cloth, Garreth stood, leaned over her and pressed a kiss to Rachel’s lips. She sat up, satisfied but tender.

“Those were my marching orders,” he told her. “It’s time for me to go.”

Rachel stared at him with wide eyes. “Now? In the middle of the night?”

He smiled at her. “My job here is done. The two of you need to be alone.”

She frowned. “And you’re okay with that?” He felt no resentment?

“More than okay. I told you, you and Jack are meant to be together. Not you, Jack and me.”

She gave him a half smile. Sure, she and Jack were meant to be together, but a night of ménage sex hadn’t changed anything. Jenna still stood between them like an impenetrable brick wall.

She laid a hand on her cheek. “Thank you, Garreth. For everything.” He’d tried to give Jackson and her a start at something, and for that she would be forever grateful—even if Jackson chose to walk out of her chalet just minutes after Garreth left.

“My pleasure, sweet thing.”

“You know, when we first met, you called me an alchemist. But you’re the real alchemist here. You’re the one who’s striving to create gold where none exists.”

“You and Jackson could become gold together. You just need to work out a few things.”

She leaned forward and kissed his lips. “I hope that one day the woman you love comes to her senses and realizes what she’s missing out on.”

She must have caught Garreth off-guard, because his face fell. He looked at her with devastated, haunted eyes. “I do too,” he said at last. “But it’s not going to happen.” His skin paled and his eyes filled with grief.

He'd looked just as broken when they'd spoken last night. When Garreth had told her he knew the truth about Jenna's past.

Oh, dear God. Could it be? Was it possible?

It was. And it made sense too. It would explain why Garreth was so desperate to get her and Jackson together: because he understood how they felt being forced apart. And he understood because, if Rachel's guess was correct, he'd experienced almost the identical torment.

"It's Jenna," Rachel said. "The woman you love. Isn't it?"

He blinked hard but didn't answer.

"That's why you're so intent on things working out between Jackson and myself. You understand it all too well because you've been through it too."

Garreth rubbed a hand over his eyes, looking suddenly bone-weary.

"She loves you too?"

He nodded.

"But she won't act on it because you're Jackson's friend." Jenna staunchly believed that if Jackson could not date her friends, then his friends were strictly off-limits to her. Since the *incident*, she'd had a very strong sense of fairness and justice.

He gave her a sad smile. "I'm like you. Off-limits to the Brooks twin I love."

"God, Garreth, I'm so sorry." Her heart broke a little then. For him and for her. For the two people helplessly in love with the twins who refused to openly love them back—regardless of their feelings for them.

"Me too, sweet thing. Me too." He shrugged. "That's why I'm going back to Canada. I can't have her, and I can't bear to see her with anyone else. It's killing me." He gave her a self-deprecating smile. "Pathetic, huh?"

As pathetic as her being in Sydney. She suspected he'd deliberately used the very word she'd used yesterday. "No. Just sad. Just very, very sad."

And then, because she didn't know what else to say, she stood up and hugged him. He hugged her back, holding her tight.

"Make it work, Rach. Don't let Jackson walk away. You have him in your bed. Now keep him in your life."

"I'll try," she promised. And she would. But what could she do? Jackson had protected his sister for twelve years. He wouldn't stop now. Not even for her.

"Where's Gazza?" Jackson looked around the room, expecting to see him. Rachel was curled up on the couch by herself.

“He left.”

“Voluntarily?” Would surprises never cease?

She nodded and bit her lower lip. “He said we needed to be alone. You and I.”

Ah, that they did. He and Rachel, alone. Just the two of them. For the rest of their lives.

Not going to happen.

Fuck that. Jackson crossed the room to sit beside her. When he opened his arms wide, Rachel moved into them without hesitation. She crawled onto his lap and wound her arms around his neck. He held her close. Held her tight. Held her to him and refused to let go. Ever. A wave of love rolled through him, so powerful it made him shake.

Over two years ago he’d vowed to never touch her again, never make love to her again. He’d broken those vows. Smashed them to smithereens. Christ, he should have known it would come to this. Should have realized he’d never be able to hold back.

He and Rachel were meant to be together. They were interlocking pieces of the puzzle called love. What the two of them shared wasn’t a passing whim. It wasn’t a quick fuck when his sister wasn’t looking. It was the real thing. Walking away wasn’t going to make it less real. It wasn’t going to make his feelings go away. They’d tried that route. Tried it for years, and look how successful they’d been.

Not at all.

“I love you, baby.” The words were out before he realized he’d spoken them. “I love you so damn much it hurts just to be near you.”

Rachel looked up at him, meeting his gaze. Her eyes filled with tears. “It hurts more when we’re apart,” she whispered. “I hate it. Hate not being near you. Hate not being able to talk to you. I h-hate not seeing you.”

Christ, what a fucked-up situation. They couldn’t be together, and they couldn’t survive apart. With a frustrated groan, he crushed his lips over hers, kissing her with every iota of passion and love he felt.

If Rachel had sat lifelessly in his arms and merely accepted his mouth, the force of his kiss may have hurt her, but she wasn’t passive. She kissed him back with just as much emotion. Just as much passion.

Frustration and dissatisfaction swirled around them, a couple supposed to be together and forced to be apart. Fuck, it wasn’t right. Wasn’t fair.

He pulled away to catch his breath, and her scent filled his nose. She smelled of him. And of sex. And of Gazza.

She smelled of Garreth. His woman smelled of his housemate.

No fucking way. Never again. Last night he’d been prepared to share. Now the scent of another man on his woman made his hackles rise.

Without thinking twice, he rose, still holding Rachel in his arms. Within seconds they stood naked in the shower beneath a torrent of scalding water.

Making love to her with Gazza had fucked with his head. The thought of Garreth touching his woman still made him so irate he could do his friend serious injury. Yes, sharing a woman with his friend was erotic beyond his wildest imagination, and sharing Rachel with Garreth... Christ. He was getting hard again just thinking about it.

But if Garreth ever came near his woman in a sexual way again, his housemate would not live to see another day. Their era of threesomes was over. Tonight had been the last hurrah. Tonight they'd crossed a line. They'd slept with the woman Jackson loved, and as hugely arousing as it had been, it had also disturbed Jackson no end.

"The water's too hot," Rachel complained.

He set his face in a stubborn frown. "It has to be this hot. It has to burn away every last trace of Garreth from your skin, from your memory."

Rachel squared her shoulders as water sluiced around them. "Don't you dare take your frustration out on Garreth." She scowled up at him. "He isn't the issue. He's not what's keeping us apart."

Jackson scowled right back at her. "He slept with you! You slept with him."

"Is that the problem?" Rachel demanded. "Me sleeping with your housemate? Seriously? It's just about sex?"

"What the fuck else could my problem be?" Jackson shot back. "Every time I close my eyes I see him fucking you. Fucking the woman I love."

"Garreth did this for us." Her voice grew louder as she became more agitated. "He did it for you and me, so we could be together. He said you'd come after me if you felt threatened enough by the idea of him and me in bed together."

Jackson had to give his housemate credit. "The little bastard knows me too well."

"He's not a bastard." She glared at him. "He's your friend. And he's a damn good friend if you ask me."

"Maybe so. Doesn't mean I didn't fucking hate watching him touch you."

"Why?"

"Because you're mine, damn it." It was his turn to raise his voice. "You are mine. Not his."

Rachel shrank back, moved away from him, as far away as the shower stall would allow. "No, I'm not."

"What the—"

"I'm not yours, Jackson." Her voice was calmer now, as was her face. "I never have been. Not in all the twelve years I've loved you."

A muscle worked in his jaw as Jackson tried furiously to think of a reply. Nothing came to mind. She was right. Didn't matter how much she loved him or he loved her, not once had she ever truly been his.

Reality had demanded she never would be.

If Jackson were honest with himself, one hundred percent honest, he'd acknowledge that the anger he'd targeted at Garreth had in fact stemmed from the situation that kept him and Rachel apart. It was their forced separation that infuriated him. It wasn't Garreth.

Rachel reached behind him and turned the tap, switching off the water. Silence and steam filled the bathroom.

Drops of water slid from his body, landing with tiny splashes on the floor.

"I love you, Jackson," Rachel said quietly. "I always will. But Jenna might as well be standing between us, right now, pushing us apart. I can never be yours, because neither of you would ever let that happen."

A sense of powerlessness suffused him. "She's my sister. I have to protect her." At least Rachel understood that much. Agreed with him on that.

"Protect her from me?"

Jackson froze.

"That's what it all boils down to with us," Rachel told him. Her hands began to tremble. "You're protecting her from me. From her best friend. Because if you're with me, then Jenna stands a chance of being hurt again."

She placed her hands over her chest. The tremor was no longer restricted to her hands. Her whole body began to shake. "I've become the girl with the power to spread the rumors in high school. The one capable of ruining Jenna's life. You won't be with me because I might hurt Jenna."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I love Jenna. She's my best friend. She'll always be my best friend. I could never hurt her. No matter what happened between you and me."

Rachel's words struck him with the impact of a bullet.

Holy fuck. How could he have never seen it in this light before?

By refusing to be with Rachel, Jackson wasn't protecting Jenna from all the evils out there in the world, he was protecting her from *her own best friend*. A very real best friend, not a teenager with an infantile and selfish view of the world.

Rachel wasn't the selfish bitch who'd ruined Jenna's life. She was the woman who'd drawn his sister out of her shell and helped her find herself again. The woman who'd dried Jenna's tears every time she'd cried, who'd lifted her back up every time she'd stumbled. The woman who'd given up her life to move to another city, just so she wouldn't be tempted by Jenna's brother.

Christ, Gazza had called it the minute he'd met her. He'd seen what Jackson hadn't been able to. That in trying to protect Jenna from an old hurt, he'd turned Rachel into a possible threat.

Rachel wasn't a threat. She never had been. She never would be. She was the person who'd made his sister's life richer, and if he'd just give her the chance, she could be the person who'd make his life whole.

Jackson stared at her, stunned all the way down to his bones. She was the only one who could make his life whole. Fuck knew he'd tried to find someone else when she'd left, and that had been a dismal failure. He'd tried to bury himself in emotionless sex, because the physical relief and release had helped to hide the psychological emptiness. But his life was as hollow now as the day she'd left Brisbane.

"I think you need to leave my chalet," Rachel said quietly. She'd wrapped her arms around herself and stood shivering, naked and wet in the shower stall with him. "I can't do this anymore. I can't pretend I don't love you when I do, and I can't pretend to be the bad guy when I'm not. I'll pack my bags as soon as you're gone. I'll get out of your hair and Jenna's." She bit her lip and stood a little straighter. "And next time you have a birthday celebration, I promise not to come. I promise not to put you under this kind of strain again. It's not fair to any of us." She pushed open the glass door and stepped into the bathroom. "Happy birthday, by the way."

Shock rendered him speechless. He couldn't move.

Christ, it was officially his birthday. He was thirty.

Thirty and alone.

The thought of her leaving him, of her walking away again, powered him into action.

"No!"

He went after her, streaking out the shower and through the bathroom, leaving a trail of water in his wake. She was beside the bed when he finally caught up to her. He grabbed her arm and hauled her against him, slamming her body into his. "Damn it, Rachel. You're not walking away from me again. From us. I let you go the last time, thinking it was the right thing to do. This time I won't. I'll never let you go again."

"Jack—"

"You're right, Rach. About everything. I've been a fucking idiot. Blind to my actions. Without ever meaning to, I've made you into a potential threat. I've imbued you with all these evil powers you'd never use. God knows you're incapable of ever hurting Jenna. I know it. Jenna knows. I just never realized that we all subconsciously thought it."

"I'm not a threat, Jackson. I never have been. But Jenna's still my best friend, and you're still her brother. The restrictions are still there. We can't be together, even if we want to." Tears shimmered in her eyes.

"Yes, we can."

She shook her head. "Jenna—"

"Jenna will have to come to terms with it. I've spent my entire adult life living alone because I didn't want Jenna getting hurt again. In the process I've hurt you, the woman I love. The woman I want to spend my life with. By protecting her I've overlooked you. And me. It's our turn, Rach. It's time for us to be happy. Twelve years is long enough to pay for a crime I didn't commit." No, he hadn't been able to protect

Jenna when they were kids. Yes, he'd blamed himself. But when all was said and done, he hadn't done anything wrong.

Jenna had been caught in the revenge attack of a malicious teenager. She'd suffered for it. So had he. But it didn't mean he had to continue suffering for the rest of his life. And it sure as hell didn't mean Rachel had to suffer along with them.

He'd done his penance. They all had.

It was time to move on. It was time to be happy again. To live again, and the only way that could happen for him was to be with Rachel.

"We need to be together, Rach."

Her mouth dropped open.

"Enough secrets. Enough hiding. We love each other. Let's tell the world. Let everyone know. Let's give a relationship, a real relationship between us, a chance."

She shook her head. "I can't. I couldn't do that to Jenna."

"You and Jenna are close enough to be sisters. If I can see that you'll never hurt her, she'll be able to see that too."

She looked at him, incredulous, her mouth opening and closing like a fish. "I want to, Jackson. So much it scares me. But I've moved on, moved away from you. My life's in Sydney. My business is in Sydney. I can't just up and leave it."

She was worried about work? About geography? No fucking way. There'd been enough bullshit keeping them apart. Trivialities like cities and jobs would not come between them. "I'll move to Sydney. I'll apply for a job at one of the newspapers there."

She blinked. "You'd do that? For me?"

"For us, Rach. I'd do anything for us. We've earned it. We deserve it. It's our turn now."

A single tear slid down her cheek. "You're not kidding, are you?"

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life."

"Jenna—"

"Jenna will give us her blessing. Once I've explained everything to her, once she knows how much we love each other, she'd never stand in our way. She'd never be able to see you as a threat to her peace of mind. You've proven to her too often that you're her friend, not her enemy." It wouldn't be easy, and it wouldn't happen quickly, but eventually Jenna would warm to the idea. She'd have to.

"Wh-what about Garreth?"

"I'll thank him. For everything he's done to help us reach this point. For helping me see what a fucking idiot I've been." Christ, it stunned him how easy it was to see Garreth in that light now. Not ten minutes ago he was ready to tear the man's head off. Now he understood Garreth's only intention in

sleeping with Rachel was to make Jackson good and jealous. Damn, the man had succeeded, in one big fucking way.

“What about you,” she asked. “Are you sure?”

“More sure than I’ve ever been about anything. I want to be with you, Rach. I can’t live apart from you anymore. I spent twelve years trying, and refuse to do it for one more day.”

“I...” She frowned, as though searching for another reason to say no.

“Listen to you. You’re so used to denying our love, you’re looking for ways to deny it now. Looking for reasons we shouldn’t be together. There aren’t any. Not anymore. We don’t need to pretend anymore. I don’t want to pretend. I just want to be with you. I just want to give us a chance.”

“I...uh... Okay.”

His heart lurched. “Okay what?”

Her face broke into a smile. “Okay, let’s do this. Let’s give us a chance.” The smile widened, blinding him in its brilliance. “I’ve fantasized about you and I being together my entire adult life. I’m not about to give up on the possibility now that you’re dangling it in front of my eyes. Come and live with me in Sydney. Please.”

It was all he needed to hear.

Their lips met in a kiss as inevitable as their next breath. It continued forever, a kiss borne of love and desire. Borne of twelve years of wanting each other. A kiss that told him this was it. They’d finally accepted each other. They could finally be together.

When at last they pulled apart, it was with a lightness he’d never felt before. A contentment that came with knowing he could kiss her whenever he wanted. Once Jenna knew about them, their love need never be a secret again.

“Remind me to thank Gazza when I see him.” He nuzzled Rachel’s neck. Garreth was responsible for him and Rachel being together now. If not for his housemate, Jackson would never have climbed into her bed again. He’d have continued to live the shadow of a life he’d been leading for twelve years, terrified to love in case Jenna got hurt. “He brought us together.”

Rachel laughed with delight. “That’s because your friend is an alchemist.”

“Pardon?”

“Garreth created gold here tonight. He created us.”

Jackson shook his head. “No, baby, we created us. Garreth just made sure we found each other again.” And then he kissed Rachel again and pulled her onto the bed. It was way past time they created their own alchemy together. Just the two of them.

About the Author

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Full House

Two men plus one woman equals three bodies on fire...

True Heart

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A Red Hot Winter Story

True Wyatt's hands are going to be full enough keeping the herd alive through the dead of winter. The last thing he needs to hear is that his brother Lonny has rented out their isolated hunting cabin to a reclusive writer—especially a sassy, disaster-prone brunette. Who has time to babysit a city girl until spring?

With a deadline looming, erotica writer Honey Cahill is looking forward to six distraction-free weeks to finish her next book. However, between Lonny's flirty sensuality and True's hard-edged intensity, the Wyatt brothers set the stage of her imagination for a winter of wicked delights.

The fire that destroys the cabin, though, is as real as it gets. Forced to seek a bed under True and Lonny's roof, the temptation to experiment—all in the name of research, of course—is overpowering. One night in their arms doesn't feel like enough; it feels like more. Particularly with one cowboy who fires all her cylinders...

Warning: It's a Devlin ménage—expect men with stamina and not an ounce of mercy to behave like sex gods, and the lucky woman to love every minute of it. A little domination goes a long, long way...

Enjoy the following excerpt for True Heart:

Honey sat huddled under a blanket on the couch Lonny had moved nearer the fire. He'd found a pair of insulated leggings for her to wear that fit her well enough. Her ass kept them from falling off. The sweater was large, and fell off whichever shoulder she shrugged, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Her own clothing was salvageable and was in the laundry, but she'd save them for her trip off the mountain once the snowplows cleared the road.

Lonny had checked with the department of transportation and said it might be several days before she could leave. And she was determined to do just that—despite his assurances that she could stay and complete the work she'd come to do.

However, that seemed pointless. She'd saved the thumb drive, but she didn't have the heart to finish the new story. She was supposed to write something sexy and flirty, but all she had the urge to create was a tragedy.

She knew she was feeling sorry for herself, and she should pull up her big-girl panties and get on with it. But she didn't have any panties on.

"I have soup."

She jumped at True's quiet words. The man could creep up on a ghost. And was that all he had to say? *Seriously?*

Honey bit back a retort, recognizing that what she really wanted was to start a fight—with him. She held out her hand and waited while he turned the mug to present her the handle.

A small gesture, but one that fucked with her head. Why be gentle? Why pretend to care whether she burned her fingers? She'd burned down his entire cabin—his quaint little hunting cabin that his father had built years ago. Why wasn't he furious?

She gulped down a sip of chicken soup and blinked.

"Couldn't you tell it was hot?"

She blinked away pain-filled tears and aimed a blistering glare his way.

True's jaw clenched. "I'll leave you to finish." He began to turn away.

She bent to set the cup on the floor. "Why are you avoiding me?" If she could have bit her own tongue and swallowed it whole, she would have.

True hesitated. "You've been through enough."

"Don't give me that crock of—" She glanced away. She wasn't going to cuss at the man. Wasn't going to make herself look any more pathetic than she already was.

"I'm guessing now's not a good time to check on our girl."

Both Honey and True turned to glare at Lonny whose mouth moved like he was biting his lip. Was he laughing at them?

"Don't disappear," True said. "I can't seem to get anything right."

"No kidding," Honey muttered.

Lonny walked deeper into the room, glancing from Honey to True. "I take it you're feeling more yourself, Honey?"

"I've never been less myself," she snarled.

"I don't know about that," he said amiably. "The color's back in your cheeks."

Honey hit her thigh with her fist. "I don't shout at men. I don't ever want to shout at men. But he—" She glared at True. "He manages to push every last one of my buttons."

"And that's a bad thing?" Lonny asked softly. He took a seat beside her. "Quit hovering, True. Take a seat."

True looked reluctant but took up the space on her left side. Wedged between the two brothers, Honey blew out a deep breath. The temperature in the room had skyrocketed. She flipped back her blanket.

True reached for the edge and shoved it over her shoulder.

"I'm warm enough," she muttered.

"You'll get sick."

"And that would be a huge inconvenience on top of the hundred other inconveniences I've caused, wouldn't it?"

True nodded, but her searing glance had him buttoning his lip and glancing away. “I should head out to check on the horses in the barn.”

“They’ll wait,” Lonny said flatly.

Honey flung up her hands. “I can assure both of you that I’m fine. No need for you to worry. If you’ll just show me where I can sleep...”

Lonny laid a hand on her knee and leaned toward her. “That’s part of what we’re going to talk about, sweetheart.”

She narrowed her eyes to give him a mean glare even though inside her heart was thumping loudly in her chest. “Oh, yeah?”

“True mentioned what you’re writing.”

True muttered a curse under his breath.

Honey’s cheeks burned. “Anyone ever tell you that you two are big fat gossips?”

“Not ever. Don’t change the subject. A *ménage*, right?”

“I changed my mind,” she said, folding her arms over her chest. “I’ve decided to scrap the book. Now I’m going to write a post-apocalyptic story—lots of blood and guts. I’m feeling pretty violent at the moment.”

“I think you need to do the right research.”

“Oh, really?” She wouldn’t admit it even on her dying bed, but just the thought of doing a little *research* made her heart flutter madly.

“You can count me out,” True said forcefully.

“Not to your taste, I know,” Lonny said, so cheerfully he made Honey want to scream. “You mentioned that before.”

Honey kept her gaze on Lonny because she was way too chicken to look at True. “You two talked about doing a *ménage* with me? Is anything sacred?”

“Don’t get your panties in a twist.”

“You know damn well I’m not wearing any.”

“Dammit.”

That did it. Honey swung toward True. “Do you know any other cuss words?”

“His vocabulary’s limited,” Lonny quipped.

She lifted her chin when True’s gaze narrowed. “So I noticed,” she said, keeping her tone even.

“Be nice,” Lonny chided.

She grunted and faced forward again. “Sorry.”

“Back to the *ménage*...”

True stirred beside her, and she felt his thighs tense like he was going to rise. Without looking at him, Honey laid her hand on his thigh and pressed down.

“There ought to be a few rules,” Lonny continued. “Things each one of us won’t do.”

“Like swords never crossing,” she quipped.

“For fuck sake,” True ground out. “Did either of you hear what I said? *Not interested.*”

“If I believed that for a minute, I’d lay off.” All humor was gone from Lonny’s voice.

Honey held her breath, waiting...

True stayed tense beneath her hand. His breaths deepened.

“Personally, I’d just as soon not ‘cross swords’ as Honey suggested,” Lonny said slowly.

Honey drew in a deep breath. “I’d just as soon not be tied down.”

Both men pinned her with a glance.

She shrugged. “I like to touch.”

True jerked but didn’t try to rise.

Two men, one woman, one momentous dare

Triple Dare

© 2010 Lexxie Couper

Serious and determined, Joseph Hudson isn't Australia's businessman of the year for nothing. So now he's asking himself, how did he get himself lost on the side of a mountain in the Colorado Rockies—in the middle of winter—with night fast approaching? Three simple words. *I dare you.*

Fear isn't in Rob Thorton's vocabulary. Life is for the taking, and Rob uses both hands. Challenging his best mate to take an impromptu snowboarding trip to the U.S. is just the latest in a lifetime of dares. Besides, he has an ulterior motive for the trip. And a plan...

Park Ranger Anna McCarthy knows what trouble looks like, and it's written all over the two Aussies she first encounters in the ski lodge. Instinct has her following them onto the mountain, and sure enough, they end up needing her winter survival expertise. But not even her skills can stop her body from responding to the sexy muscles she finds beneath their ski suits.

Stuck in a remote cabin until the storm passes, the temperatures rise until all bets are off. And a double dare turns into a triple threat—to their hearts.

Warning: Contains lots of scorching boy-on-girl-on-boy action, a heroine who knows what she wants and two sexy-arsed Australian heroes to really work up a sweat over. Oh, and a soul-deep love story with a revelation that may make you cry.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Triple Dare:

"So, you're the one with the money."

Her question, delivered in the form of a statement, sent a rush of warmth to his face. He hated talking about his money. True, he had a lot of it, a bloody lot of it, but it didn't define him.

"And Rob is the one without the sense," she finished, the smile on her lips curling wider. She tilted her head to the side, crossing her ankles in front of her. "Yeah, I can see that."

Despite himself, Joseph grinned. His cock lurched again in his trousers, enjoying their tête-à-tête almost as much as he was. He liked her dry wit. And her accent. A drawling caress of vowels and consonants that made him wish she'd say his name.

"I guess I should ask your name," he said, removing his own gloves and shoving them into his back pocket. "I should at least know who to address the thank you card to."

She laughed again, and Joseph decided there and then he could seriously become addicted to the soft, throaty sound. "Anna McCarthy. Your local saver of lost Australian lunatics, yeah, that's me."

He cocked an eyebrow. "All Australian lunatics? Do you get many here?"

Her direct grey gaze leveled on his face, a small smile playing with her lips. Lips he wanted to kiss. Soon. Real soon. “No, you’re my first. But depending how it goes tonight, I might have to find some more to save.”

A low growl rumbled in Joseph’s chest at the idea of Anna McCarthy saving any other Australians but himself. “Hmm,” he said, “I think you’ll find saving Aussies is an exhausting, sweaty business.”

She cocked her own eyebrow, the finely arched line of dark blonde hair moving up her forehead with smooth ease. “Is it now? Then perhaps I should take it slow to start with? Saving too hard and too quickly at this altitude could be hazardous to my health, is that what you’re saying?”

Pulse pounding in his ear, dick so hard he thought it was about to explode, he held her gaze with his own. “Too hard and too fast definitely not the way to begin. Slowly, steadily. An exploration of the terrain, followed by a well-executed penetration of the area, that’s the way to begin when saving an Aussie.”

Her lips parted and Joseph could see the ragged way she drew breath into her body. “Then after the beginning it gets hard?”

He unzipped his jacket and shucked it off, placing it on the seat beside him as he took a step closer to her. “It’s already hard. Very hard.”

She swallowed. “Hard is good. I’m always up for a challenge. It’s why I like saving Aussies so much.”

“Glad to hear that,” Rob said, stepping into the cabin and swinging the door shut behind him. He looked at them both over the armful of broken branches and twigs he held against his chest. “Wait. We’re talking about sex, aren’t we?”

Anna held her breath, trying—in vain, she realized—to slow her heart rate down to something close to normal. Her pussy throbbed and pulsed and generally carried on in the most disturbing of ways, telling her in no uncertain terms she was horny. Damn horny.

She swallowed again, her mouth dry, her throat thick. The sexual tension mounting between her and Joseph Hudson hadn’t abated a bit with Rob’s unexpected arrival. No, to the contrary, the moment he’d entered the cabin and made his presence known, she’d almost come there and then.

She studied both of them, knowing one of them was going to make the first move.

Joseph.

Her gaze slid to the taller man, her pulse quickening when she looked at him. Damn, he was stunning. He made Brad Pitt look ugly. Not just tall and lean, but broad shouldered and slightly scruffy, the bristles on his jaw and chin adding to the overall charm, the messy tumble of sandy-blond hair falling over his forehead heightening that charm until the crotch of her panties were sodden.

Oh boy, Anna. You got it bad already.

The loud thud of branches hitting the floor made her start, and she blinked, her gaze snapping to Rob just in time to see him remove his gloves and step over the pile of dead wood at his feet to close the distance between them. "Let me begin to show our appreciation for saving us," he said, his fingers skimming her cheek as he cupped her jaw in his hand.

A flutter of disappointment danced in her belly for a brief moment, like a hundred butterflies had suddenly taken flight, but she forgot it as soon as Rob's lips brushed hers.

The kiss was gentle and yet, at the same time electric. His breath mingled with hers, the tip of his tongue touching the inner edge of her bottom lip, a slow caress charting a path deeper into her mouth.

She parted her lips, meeting his tongue with hers, her nipples growing hard, her pulse racing away from her.

Oh...

She'd been kissed before. Many times, in fact. As far as looks go, she knew she'd been generously smiled upon. But there was something about the Australian's kiss...a delicate passion she hadn't expected. Almost sad.

The notion made her heart quicken. She moaned, the sound vibrating softly in her throat only to be swallowed by Rob's kiss.

He slid his hands up into her hair, his fingers tangling in the strands, her ponytail preventing him from doing anything more than hold her head. It didn't matter. At this point, the feel of his lips on hers, his tongue on hers, was enough to make her pussy weep.

"Ah, fuck."

The growled curse scraped at the heated desire rolling through her. She pulled away from Rob's kiss, her gaze moving to Joseph where he still stood at the chair. He stared at them both, his nostrils flaring, his jaw clenched tight.

"Think we need to get some heat happening quickly," Rob murmured, his hands slipping from her face as he turned back to his friend.

Anna nodded, unable to find anything to say. Her body ached for more, set alight by Rob's simple, tender kiss.



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