

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Hired

LILY HARLEM



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One hundred grand to babysit bad boy Logan “Phoenix” Taylor on a paradise island – seriously, how *bad* could he be?

Frankly, it didn’t matter. Not when it would make my dreams of going to nursing school possible. I wasn’t even expected to talk to him, just hang out in a luxurious villa on a private beach and study. Simple, right?

But I hadn’t counted on Logan being so deliciously bad that he was oh so good. And when the temperature cranked to boiling point, he knew just how to satisfy the deepest, darkest part of my soul and give my body exactly what it needed. Amongst the sand and waves, we transported each other to an exquisite world of pleasure where only we existed, only we mattered.

But the heady mix of emotions and lust couldn’t keep things from spiraling out of control back in reality, where I *had* to keep the secret that I’d been hired to entertain him...even if it shattered my delicate heart. Even if it cost my destiny.

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Hired

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Chapter One

My best friend Giselle is a call girl. A very high class, very discerning call girl but still, that doesn't change the fact that she sells her body for money—lots of money. Of course, that wasn't her dream when we were in high school together, never what she wrote on her career forms. But her destiny, like everyone's, was set out in the stars, and she had no choice but to follow the winding path it took her on.

I love and respect her and have long since accepted this part of her soul. If she's happy and healthy it doesn't matter to me what she does to keep a roof over her head. Fate brought Giselle and me together the day I moved to my Aunt Belinda's in Orlando. It was exactly one week after my parents had been killed in a car crash, and she was the only kid on the block brave enough to knock on the front door and call for me. Barbie in one hand, Ken in the other, she asked if playing mommies and daddies would make me feel less sad. Of course it didn't, but having a new friend when I'd lost everything made me feel a little stronger about the future.

As the years went by, I realized the spirits had given me a sister in Giselle, and now, as I watched her fussing over a trailing display of exotic flowers on her marble mantel, I thought once again how lucky I was to have her.

At the moment I was officially down on my luck, my karma was all over the place and I was living in her sumptuous apartment after finding the courage to leave Sam. He'd cheated and lied time and again, and looking back I couldn't understand how I'd put up with it for three miserable years. He'd been the worst sort of man, charming and good-looking with an easy tongue for declaring love and a quick mind for creating lies.

Naturally, living with Giselle in the apartment where she entertained clients wasn't the best arrangement for either of us and couldn't go on indefinitely. Luckily I tended to be at The Grill most of the time scraping tuition fees together, which left her to do her job in private. I had dreams of nursing college and was preparing for the entrance exam, but with so little time to study and a dire lack of money for tuition, I couldn't help but wonder if it would ever happen for me. Perhaps my destiny was never to move on from becoming a waitress in a greasy cafe.

"What do you think?" Giselle asked, stepping back and scrutinizing her final arrangement. "Too many stems hanging down?"

"No, not at all, it's lovely." I tipped my head. The pink orchid display was a feast for the nose as well as the eyes and must have cost a fortune. Of course she hadn't bought them, they'd been a gift from a very satisfied client she'd serviced over the weekend. But the streaks of pink were a perfect match with her aura, which I saw as a soft, powdery pink with a hint of silver when she was content and relaxed. "I think you

might want to turn down the air-conditioning, they're tropical plants and they need jungle warmth."

Giselle always had the air-conditioning on shivering cold. She didn't have to worry about expense and she hated the Florida humidity the way most people hated toe fungus, whereas I was longing for heat. Constantly having goose bumps was getting old, but I couldn't exactly complain when I was living at her place rent-free.

The Batphone, the telephone number Giselle gave to clients, trilled to life and echoed over the tiled floor and up the high ceilings. If the other phone rang, her silver mobile, then it was family or friends and she answered without the coy simper in her voice.

"Oh, Fergal," she said on a sigh. "I've missed you, it's been three weeks."

She went quiet and coiled her finger into one of her long, auburn curls. "I know, I'm looking forward to it." She giggled. "Any particular type of cream?" Her eyes caught mine and rolled ever so slightly. "Whipped, that's perfect, it's my favorite."

I buried my head in my book and sank deeper into the black leather sofa. Giselle hated cream—not the taste or texture, the calories. She was vigilant about her svelte figure. It was, as she was fond of saying, her livelihood. I on the other hand had long ago embraced my curves. It seemed a much better option than fighting them, not to mention a lot less effort.

"Well, no, of course I couldn't go and I wouldn't want to," she was saying behind me. "Not with our date in the calendar for next week. But give me a few minutes and I might just be able to help you out."

My ears pricked as I sensed the energy in the conversation shift.

"Yes, okay, Fergal, yes, I understand, urgent, yes, I'll call right you back." The phone clicked down.

"What was that all about?" I asked as she rounded the sofa and perched on the far end. She knotted her hands on her lap and her dark brown eyes penetrated mine.

"Now don't be mad," she said, tugging at her bottom lip. "This is only a suggestion and until you've heard me out don't make a decision."

"I don't understand." I upended my book on clinical pharmacology and cocked my head. "What decision?"

"That was Fergal on the phone."

"I gathered that much."

"Fergal owns the Orlando Vipers."

"And?"

Giselle sighed. "Oh, Brooke, you really should pay a bit more interest in the state's best ice hockey team."

"I don't have time to follow a group of grown men on skates." I frowned. "So what's Fergal owning the Orlando Vipers got to do with me making a decision?"

"Fergal's best forward, Logan Taylor, has had a rough time lately on and off the ice."

I shrugged in a *So?* kind of way.

"So...Fergal's sending him to his private beach villa to get his head and body together. A bit of time out. Get himself back in the zone."

I held my palms to the ceiling and widened my eyes. "And?" I'd never heard of the guy, but how bad could life be with the megabucks NHL players earned?

"He needs a companion."

"Who does?"

"Logan Taylor."

I clicked my tongue, either my mind was processing really slowly or Giselle was communicating in a foreign language. "Stop talking in riddles, Giselle, it's irritating. And what's this possibly got to do with me?"

"Fergal asked me if I know anyone who'd be interested in going with him. Obviously he doesn't want me to go, we have a cream party planned on Wednesday afternoon when Sheila is at the hairdresser..." She paused and twisted her hands together. "I thought maybe..."

"You thought..." My mouth hung open as my jaw muscles slackened. She couldn't be serious. "You thought...maybe I'd go?"

"Now this is where I said don't get all prissy on me," Giselle said firmly. "Not until I've told you the whole deal."

"Prissy?" I didn't know if I objected more to being called prissy or to Giselle thinking I'd consider taking a deal from one of her sugar daddy clients.

"Yes, prissy. This is not about sex, Brooke, this is about companionship. Fergal doesn't want Logan skulking around all week, moping and brooding, watching reruns of bad games and drinking himself into a coma every night. The place is really isolated, quite beautiful, but totally tucked away."

I'd have to come back to the prissy thing later. Remind her that I was incredibly unprissy. Probably the most unprissy best friend she could ever have. "You've been there?"

"Yes, last year, remember that weekend away in the spring? Sheila was away on a charity convention and he flew me there on his private jet to join him."

I nodded even though I couldn't remember. Giselle's movements were hard to track. "But," I said, getting my head back to the more pressing matter. "But why would I go? Why would Fergal, or Logan, want me there?"

"Fergal wants a woman about the place, a distraction for Logan. His wife left him a while ago and he's had several injuries this season which have threatened his form. He's down, his mood is black and his temper frays when he's in a game. It's going to cost him his career if he spends any more time in the sin bin. No one will want him, including Fergal."

"How do you know all this?"

"Fergal likes to chat after sex." Giselle shrugged. "Anyway, Brooke, if you went and hung out, did your reading," she gestured to my discarded book, "caught some rays, had a dip in the sea, nothing more than that, it would be worth..." She dragged in a breath and arched her perfect brows. "One hundred thousand dollars."

"What!" I leapt up from the sofa.

"One hundred thousand, Brooke. One. Hundred. Thousand. Dollars." She stood, punctuating each number by stabbing her finger in the air.

"But, but, why?" Now my head was really buzzing. "Why would anyone pay that much for someone to just hang out? It's ludicrous, ridiculous."

"Because," Giselle said. "This guy cost Fergal over a *million* dollars when he bought his contract two years ago, and each season his wages are double that. One hundred thousand to help Logan Taylor get his mojo back is chicken feed to Fergal."

"Not to me it's not."

"Exactly." Giselle stepped over. She took my hands in hers. I hadn't realized mine were shaking until her slender fingers squeezed them still. "One hundred thousand would set you straight. It isn't even really a week, just Monday to Friday. You could forget about the few hundred Sam owes you, chuck in your job at The Grill, and concentrate on nursing for the next three years knowing you had a healthy nest egg to see you through."

I swallowed down a lump of nervous apprehension mixed with excitement. I did need my own little apartment. And I needed money for tuition, fees, textbooks, food and bills—the list was endless. "I wouldn't have to sleep with him?" I asked quietly, not believing I was even contemplating the suggestion. My biorhythms must have been completely knocked out of whack from too little sleep and too many hours on my feet. "We've had this conversation many times, Giselle, you live your life one way and I live mine another. I can see how this looks too good to refuse, but I will refuse it if I'm expected to have sex with a guy for money."

"No, I promise you won't have to, because the beauty of it is Logan won't even know you're being paid to be there."

I squinted. "How is that going to work?"

"Logan isn't the sort of guy to, er, use a woman like me. Fergal will tell him you're the daughter of an old college friend and he'd promised the villa to you for a week of study before an exam. He'll apologize for the double-booking but point out the place is so big you could both rattle around and barely see each other."

"And Logan will buy it?"

"Sure, why wouldn't he?"

I took my hands from Giselle's and ran my fingertips over my brows. I could feel a throb starting in my temple. But I was tempted, I couldn't deny it. Giselle had promised I wouldn't have to sleep with this overpaid, bad-tempered jock. So if all I had to do was

be there, then the thought of a sunny beach and lapping waves, peace and quiet, a future, was all very enticing. Not to mention it didn't sound like a whole lot of hard work.

"The only trouble is I need a decision quick." Giselle nodded at the mantel clock. "Logan flies out tomorrow morning and Fergal wants you, or whoever takes the job, to be on the plane with him. Something about only one lot of airport tax."

I opened my mouth to speak.

She beat me to it. "Just call Max at The Grill and take your overdue leave."

I stared at the clock and then the orchids. Could this backfire on me? Could this go really wrong? I couldn't see how—it did *seem* the perfect solution to my dilemma. Money beyond my wildest dreams, a holiday in paradise and the chance to cram my head full of pharmacology and models of care for the long-awaited exam, now only two weeks away.

"Okay," I said drawing in a huge breath. "I'll go and hang out. I'll be polite to him, this Logan Taylor. I'll interact if conversation is intelligent but that's it. Nothing more, separate bedrooms, separate bathrooms, everything."

Giselle grinned, flashing expensive teeth. "The place has five beds and four baths, Brooke. I don't think avoiding him will be a problem if he's as surly as Fergal makes out. And it's just for a week then the rest of your life is sorted. How fab is that?"

I swallowed, my mouth dry. Had I really just said yes?

Giselle's face dropped and she placed her hand on my arm. "Seriously, I wouldn't have suggested it if I thought there was any chance you'd have to sleep with him. Just be polite and if he hunkers down and mopes all week so what? I'll just tell Fergal you did your best to cheer him up. Logan Taylor is important to Fergal but not to me, not to us." She reached for her phone. "I couldn't care less if he's kicked off the team and rots in a miserable depression. You're the one I care about, and this will set you on your way to your nursing dreams."

I walked into the kitchen to pour a glass of water. My tongue had stuck to the roof of my mouth. As I drank I heard Giselle simpering on the phone again. She was full of coos and reassurances and proclamations of excitement for the upcoming creamy date.

When she'd finished, she strolled back into the kitchen, Gucci handbag in hand. "Come on," she said, shoving her feet into brown leather sandals. "We've got three hours before the mall shuts and you need new clothes."

"No I don't." I put my hands on my hips. "I've got enough bits to throw in a suitcase for a week on the beach."

"Yeah, old, faded bits. You need some nice new things. It's a posh place and you're supposed to be from a wealthy family. Now come on."

"I can't afford it." I leaned back against the counter. "I don't have the money yet and even when I do I'm not going to blow it on clothes, Giselle."

"I can't remember when I last saw you in something new, and as for affording it, shove it on a credit card and if Fergal's not good for the money at the end of the week I'll settle the bill for you."

"I can't let you do that."

"Of course you can, because if you go to the villa with Logan Taylor and don't get paid it will be my fault."

Chapter Two

At ten o'clock the next morning, a shiny black limousine pulled into the shrub-lined parking lot below Giselle's apartment.

"Time to go," Giselle said, stepping back from the window and quickly doing up the zip on my new cerise rolling suitcase. "Clifford is here."

"Clifford?"

"Yes, Clifford, Fergal's driver."

I gripped the handle of my case so tightly my new long, French-manicured fingernails stabbed my palm. "See you then," I said, pulling my handbag onto my shoulder.

"You'll be fine," Giselle said, giving me a quick hug. "Really, just relax and enjoy, it's not every day you get paid to take a holiday."

I managed a strained smile. Suddenly it didn't seem such a good idea to be going off to a small island with a stranger for the week. It had been fun yesterday afternoon, shopping, getting my hair and nails done, a quick wax, choosing new toiletries. Giselle had gotten carried away but I'd drawn the line at designer dresses. I had no intention of doing anything other than lounging on the beach with my books and for that I just needed a nice two-piece, a few sarongs and some light clothes for the evenings.

"Here," she said, handing me a pair of sunglasses. "I picked these up for you when you were paying at the hairdressers."

"Thanks," I said, slipping them on. "Hey, these were the ones I wanted."

"I know, I saw you try them on, smile in the mirror and then put them back when you looked at the price tag."

I frowned remembering the price tag. "You shouldn't have, they were too expensive."

"Count it as an early birthday present."

"But it's not my birthday for ages!"

"Quit arguing, come on, the plane will leave without you." Giselle's heels tapped to the front door. "Go and chill out, enjoy, and call me if you need anything."

I took a deep breath and rolled my case along the tiles into the hallway. My heart fluttered, and despite the coolness of the apartment I could feel a patch of sweat in the center of my back. But it was too late now. Arrangements had been put in place, the deal had been sealed.

I had been hired.

* * * * *

Clifford was silent on the journey to the airport. I was grateful and sat in the backseat trying to project an air of calm around myself. I visualized the gentle sway of delicately frothed waves. Heard the clicking and clacking of tiny stones as they brushed past each other in the push and pull of the tide. Felt my toes, with my new, glossy red nails, sinking into tiny grains of pure white sand and disappearing under little swells of cool water.

By the time we pulled into the private parking lot next to the small runway, I was sufficiently calm and restored. I would be fine. I'd have a nice time and earn a packet of money in the process. There really was nothing to worry about.

I stepped out and was greeted with the hum of the plane's engines from fifty yards away. The hazy air was thick with the smell of aviation fuel and I longed for a fresh, salty breeze to embrace me. Clifford gestured for me to lead the way and I dropped my shades and clicked my new heels across the sweltering Florida concrete.

A navy-suited older gentleman with copilot written on his brass badge alighted from the plane as I approached. "Miss Ambrose," he said with a broad beam. "I trust you had a pleasant trip to the airport."

"Yes, fine, thank you." I smiled and thought how nice it was to be treated civilly, unlike the way some of my more gruff customers spoke to me at The Grill.

"Please, do climb aboard, we're nearly set for takeoff." He gestured up the steps then took my suitcase from Clifford.

I touched the single metal rail to aid my trip up the steps. I wasn't as used to heels as Giselle, but I only made contact with the rail for a second—it was piping hot and seared my palm.

Frowning, I rubbed my hands together as I stepped into the fuselage. I glanced left and saw the pilot studying his instruments then turned right to search out a seat.

There were only six seats and the front five were empty. In the sixth seat at the back sat an enormous hulk of a guy dressed entirely in black. He had tousled russet brown hair that touched the base of his collar, and a square jawline dense with stubble, heaviest over his top lip. His wide mouth was pressed into a thin line, his glossy Ray-Bans directed out the small oval window and his huge arms folded tight over his chest.

Logan Taylor made no move to acknowledge my arrival on the plane, not a hello, not a curious glance, not even a twitch of his head.

I didn't let my gaze linger. If he wasn't the chatty, sociable sort that suited me all the better. Taking the front seat, the one nearest the door, I buckled my belt and pulled a book from my handbag.

The copilot dragged up the steps, shut the door with a series of levers and gave me a wink. "All set?"

"Yes," I said with a smile.

"We'll be in the air for just over an hour, it's not far down to Mr. Gunner's island retreat. Help yourself to refreshments once we're up." He nodded at a small glass fridge stocked entirely with individual bottles of champagne.

"Thank you."

"My pleasure." He ducked into the tiny cockpit and closed the door.

Within minutes we were in the air, soaring heavenward, the small engines droning as the wings sliced through thin wisps of cloud. I looked out the window as we tipped southwest, trying to make out familiar landmarks, but soon we were far away from Orlando and it was just the navy of deep sea and tiny spots of green land below us.

I buried my head in a small digest on nursing calculations and hoped I wouldn't get too many questions on math next month.

Before I knew it my ears were popping and we'd begun our descent. I gazed out the window at an endless stretch of water. Tiny breakers whitened the surface and I could make out several boats bobbing lazily.

There was a clunk as the wheels came down, then we were flying over land, fast. I saw a blur of houses that made up a small town. Dense woodland and few patches of farmland all encircled by a ring of gold, which in turn was surrounded by the most beautiful shimmering turquoise I'd ever seen.

A quiver of excitement settled in my stomach—I'd flown to paradise.

As the plane came to a halt I heard a rustle over my right shoulder and remembered I wasn't the only passenger. Logan had been so quiet I'd forgotten all about him.

I turned and saw his head stooped and shoulders hunched as he struggled to stand within the confines of the plane. The man was a giant. I could stand comfortably without my head touching the roof. He certainly couldn't, he was well over six feet. He reached for a battered brown bag, his shades still in place and his mouth still stern.

The copilot burst out of the cockpit. "Welcome to Honeysuckle Key," he said as he shoved at levers and flung open the door. He lowered the steps and climbed down.

I descended after him into the sunshine, holding the now-cool steel rail. Pulling in the fresh, salt-laden air I looked around. The airport terminal was no more than a small, lime-washed hut. A shabbily suited man, cigarette hanging from his mouth and can of cola in his hand, ambled through the open door toward us.

"Your lift is over there, Miss Ambrose," the copilot said, pointing toward the terminal. "Mr. Fergal's driver will take you to the villa."

I spotted a shiny black Mercedes. The tinted windows made it look like a secret agent's car and the purring engine rumbled like a sleeping tiger.

"ID," the scruffy-looking official said around his cigarette butt.

I handed over my driver's license and as Logan did the same I bid goodbye to the copilot.

"See you Friday," he said, grinning. "Have fun."

"Thanks," I said, matching his smile.

Logan ignored him and set off toward the waiting Mercedes, leaving me to totter behind, dragging my suitcase over the uneven ground of the makeshift parking lot.

It was a silent ride through the small town toward Fergal's villa. Logan and I sat in the back with the gap between us as wide as possible. I tried to blank him out but his bulk and looming presence were hard to avoid. He took up way more than his share of the seat, and despite the fact it was a big car, his legs were overbent and his knees sat above the edge of the seat. His scent was also impossible to ignore. He had on a delicious cologne. It smelled expensive and masculine, perhaps sandalwood, or maybe cinnamon, I couldn't quite decide. Whatever it was it swirled around the car's air-conditioning and settled on my tongue like incense. It smelled so good I found it hard to believe it was radiating from such a sour man.

We navigated through remote-controlled gates and the car bumped slowly up a long, palm-lined driveway. I watched out the window as from thick tropical greenery a low bungalow with a heavy reed roof came into view. Three steps led up to a large, glass-fronted door, on either side of which the house tapered sideways into the shrubs. Large dark windows faced onto the small roundabout at the front. And at the center of the roundabout—a stone pond complete with a cherub on one leg spouted water from a curled horn.

I unclasped my seat belt and sat forward. As soon as the car came to a stop I was out. Free from air-conditioning. I hoped the villa didn't have any. I might just be lucky. The sea breeze tickling over my skin and feathering through my hair for a whole week would do me fine.

The driver handed me my suitcase then delved into his pocket. He produced a silver key on a small starfish key ring and held it out to Logan.

Logan took it, offering no more than a gruff, "Thanks," then turned, battered carryon in hand, crunched over the gravel and strode up the steps.

"Thank you so much," I said to the driver, irrationally feeling the need to overcompensate for my companion's rude behavior. "That was really kind of you to pick us up."

"No problem, Miss. If you want to go anywhere during the week my number is by the house phone. If I don't hear from you I'll be back next Friday morning to take you to the airport." He pulled open the driver's door and put a foot in. "The fridge is stocked from the local market as is the freezer, anything you need from the shop call Miranda, her number is next to mine. Oh, and a newspaper will be delivered every morning down at the main gate." He shut the door with a quiet click and the Mercedes crunched through the gravel back onto the long driveway.

My suitcase wouldn't roll on the stones so I had to carry it, a considerable struggle in heels. By the time I got to the open door I was hot and bothered and relieved to drop it on the terra-cotta-tiled floor.

"You choose." Logan's deep voice rumbled from the darkness of the hallway.

I lifted my shades and saw him standing, feet apart, arms crossed and his own shades perched on top of his head.

"Pardon?" I asked, closing the front door.

"You choose which bedroom you want, I don't want to take the best one and have you sulk about it."

"I don't sulk, sulking is for babies, whiners and losers," I said, toeing off my sandals and absorbing the coolness of the tiles through the balls of my feet.

He grunted something incoherent, turned and walked deeper into the villa. I followed, dragging my case. He was by far the biggest sulker I'd ever met, and I hadn't even officially met him.

To the right was a corridor with several doors leading off. I decided to find a bedroom and dump my case before I explored the rest of the place.

The first door I came to opened up to a beautiful big bedroom decorated in pale cream and a delicate moss green. A dark wooden bed was surrounded by white netting hanging from a hoop on the ceiling. Opposite were a huge dressing table and a towering wardrobe. Several pictures dotted the walls, mainly photographs of tropical woodland, each one in soft tones that complemented the hues of the room. I peered through a door to my right, a shiny white en-suite that smelled faintly of cleaning fluid. Perfect, this room would do.

I moved to the window and to my delight saw it was in fact French doors. Pulling back the soft, cotton curtain, I caught my breath. The doors led right onto the beach. Well, there was a small decked area with a chair and a table and a few potted plants, but then it was just perfect white sand slipping down a gentle slope to the waves. Impatiently I fiddled with the lock and opened the doors. The sound of the sea meandered into my room, ebbing and flowing on the breeze I'd been dreaming of. I sent up a prayer of thanks to whichever spirit was looking after me today. Who'd have thought, Brooke the girl from The Grill who served fries and burgers, coffee and juice fifty hours a week, would be in a place like this? This really was more than I ever could have imagined.

With renewed strength I threw my suitcase onto the bed and plucked out my new bikini. It was black with big scarlet flowers dotted about randomly. The top had a good amount of support for my heavy breasts and the bottoms came up high enough to hide the bit I really wasn't fond of at the base of my stomach. I fastened my blonde curls on top of my head and reached for a towel from the en-suite.

Feeling like a kid let loose at the playground, I padded into the sunshine. Desperate to get those little grains of sand between my toes and the sea lapping over my body, I stepped down from my deck. I gasped. The sand was hot, real hot—I should have worn my flip-flops.

I made a dash down to the waves, holding my chest with flattened hands. My bikini was good, but not that good. I was relieved when my soles hit cool, wet sand and the

burn receded. Turning, I chucked my towel onto the dry sand and padded into the water.

Squinting at the clear, straight horizon I sucked in the pure air. There wasn't another person or any sign of habitation in sight, just miles of sea and sand and acres of crystal blue sky.

I waded in deeper and sighed as my shoulders dipped below the surface, pushed out and swam several fast strokes, throwing my arms over my head and releasing the tension in my shoulders. Then I flipped onto my back, shut my eyes against the glare of the sun and lazily swam parallel to the beach, kicking my legs and swishing my arms. It was bliss being in the cool water with the hot sun overhead. The peace and the quiet and being at one with Mother Nature were so good for my soul.

And I was getting paid for it.

After half an hour my stomach made a low, gurgling noise. It was well past lunchtime. I made my way back to shore in a lazy, made-up, sideways stroke and when I could touch the ground waded out of the sea. Forcing my legs through the back-flowing waves, I checked every part of my bikini was in position, then stretched my hands above my head, squeezed the drips from my hair and re-clipped the thick strands on top of my head.

It was then I spotted Logan.

He was leaning against a doorframe holding a bottle of beer. His shades were on, his mouth set tight and his right ankle was crossed over the left. I'd forgotten all about his surly presence.

Prickles of self-consciousness suddenly washed over me. My breasts were big and soft and shifted up and down with each step. My hips rolled as I walked and my thighs met at the top. There was no getting around it, this was the shape I was. It was the shape my poor departed mother had been, which was why I'd always embraced it, accepted it. But being studied by a churlish superstar who was no doubt used to bedding waif-like supermodels pushed even my confidence. Wavered even my faith in positive body image.

But I refused to let him see I was ruffled. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. So I carried on strutting with barely a falter in my step, feeling the water lower around my thighs, knees and finally my shins and ankles. Since he wore shades I had no idea where he was actually looking, so I made a point of not making eye contact and instead stared at a patch of lush vegetation crammed with long-stemmed orange flowers as I tried to control the wild beating of my heart.

Holding my chest, I stooped to pick up the towel I'd dropped earlier. Wrapping it around my body, I fisted it at my sternum, relieved to have my wobbling bits finally covered.

I walked toward my room, trying to ignore the burn on my soles, which made me want to hop and skip. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Logan drain his beer and uncross his ankle. He pushed his bunched-up shoulder from the doorframe, turned and

went into the darkness of the villa. The show was over, nothing else to see. His steely face made me think I wasn't a show he'd particularly enjoyed, but hey, he hadn't been asked to watch.

It felt good to shower the salt from my skin and wash my hair with fragrant coconut shampoo and conditioner. Afterward I pulled on a soft pair of capris and a fuchsia vest top and combed the kinks from my hair, letting it hang damp around my shoulders. It wouldn't take long to dry in this heat.

I headed into the main room in search of food. Logan sat on a wide, L-shaped sofa with his feet up on a coffee table, new beer in hand. He was staring at a huge plasma TV and, as Giselle had predicted, a hockey game was blazing across the screen. The crowd was cheering and shouting, the chattering commentator was overexcited and the players whizzed this way and that, crashing into the Plexiglas and tripping over one another.

In the kitchen area, acres of marble surface set with all kinds of implements shone at me. The cupboards looked like bamboo but were perfectly smooth. A giant stainless steel fridge towered to the left of the complicated-looking stovetop and a deep double sink nestled below a window with thick, emerald leaves pushing up against the lower half of the glass.

"Mother fuck, what the hell... The guy is fucking blind!"

Startled by the sudden booming voice and negative energy coming from the living room, I spun toward Logan, who shifted to the edge of the sofa, slammed his beer on the table and looked ready to burst upward like a cobra coiled for striking.

"Goddamn idiot," he seethed, grabbing the remote and rewinding the game ten seconds. "How can he call himself a ref?" The game started up again, the same scream from the crowd, the same yelp of excitement from the commentator and the same piercing whistle from the referee.

"Jesus, fucking, Christ!"

I frowned. I much preferred brooding silence to angry cursing. It was easier on the ears. I took a deep cleansing breath and went to hunt out my iPod. I'd listen to something soothing and melodic while preparing a meal. It would be so much better for my spirit than his Neanderthal grunting. I was supposed to be working on harmonizing my balance, not tipping toward the edge of my nerves.

Two minutes later, with Jack Johnson strumming his guitar gently into my ears, I examined the fridge. Like the driver promised, it was crammed with fresh island produce, colorful and vibrant—shiny red tomatoes, lush green salad leaves and rosy red peppers. The spread of fish, cheese, cold meat, wine and beer was decadent, more than I'd ever seen at my Aunt Belinda's even at Christmastime.

I spotted two plump, shiny tuna steaks on the bottom shelf and my mouth watered. Perfect. I reached for one, dropped it in a bowl, ducked back into the fridge and gathered up cilantro, garlic, chili and a lime. I glanced at the other steak. Should I cook

Logan one? No, that was silly, he was happy with his beer. He probably didn't eat tuna anyway, he more than likely ripped raw meat from the bone with his teeth.

I mashed up a paste to coat the steak. The smell was divine—the zing of cilantro mixing with lime and the pungency of the chili and garlic. But I'd made far too much, so, as Jack Johnson sang about banana pancakes I took the spare tuna steak and basted it alongside mine. No point in wasting my mushy, colorful creation, and if Logan didn't want to eat, it would go on bread for my lunch tomorrow.

I bobbed my head to the melody and set about chopping tomatoes and shredding lettuce. The tuna sizzled away in a frying pan and before I knew it the meal was done. I treated myself to a glass of chilled white wine—after all I was on holiday—and put the two plates and my wine on a tray along with cutlery.

I glanced out the huge lounge door leading onto the beach. I'd find somewhere outside to sit, no point hiding away in my bedroom all week when the breeze was calling me.

Walking past the lounge section I set the food on a high occasional table, removed my iPod and dropped it on the tray. "Here," I said, placing down the meaty fish and salad on the low table next to Logan. "I thought you might be hungry."

His frowning blue eyes shifted from the TV to my face and he stared at me as though I'd landed from Mars.

I held his stern gaze. I refused to be intimidated by his unblinking sullenness. I noticed he had a two-inch jagged cut just above his left brow—it was healing, the scab dark and thin. "I was cooking and I made too much," I said with a small shrug, suddenly not wanting him to think I cared if he was hungry or not. "If you don't want it shove it in the fridge, it will do tomorrow."

He looked at the meal and took a draw of his beer. His tongue retrieved a small drop of foam from his top lip then he turned back to his game.

I straightened and reached for my tray. I couldn't care less if he ate it or not, nor was I bothered if he didn't speak to me. This really was going to be an easy week and an easy packet of money if I didn't even have to acknowledge my ignorant housemate.

The decking off the main body of the house was lavish. I hadn't noticed it when I'd walked past Logan earlier, I was too busy trying not to look self-conscious. But now, stepping outside, I stopped and admired. Sun-bleached boards stretched to the sand and worn pillars supported a twisted rope sectioning off the decking from the beach. Several large bronze tubs boasted delicate-looking fronds surrounding an enormous seating area. There were enough chairs for twelve—brown wicker with cream cushions—they looked meant for relaxing in for an entire evening, not just a formal meal. A scarlet parasol kept the entire seating area screened from the sun's rays and small lights were set amongst the spindles.

I picked a chair facing the sea and listened to the waves instead of music as I ate my lunch.

Stomach full, wine drunk, I eyed a lavish four-poster bed on the opposite side of the decking. It matched the seating area—constructed of dark brown wood and cream covers, it was probably meant for sun bathing. But against the house and shrubs and with its white-netted roof, the mattress was dappled in shade. My eyes felt heavy just looking at it and my bones could already feel the squashy mattress molding around them. Life had been a whirlwind of work and study lately, and the last twenty-four hours had been emotionally draining as well as physically exhausting.

I found myself wandering over and the next thing I knew my head was settling into the deep pillows and my legs stretching into the mottled light.

Utterly contented, I sighed and let the dreamy glow of wine drift me into an afternoon doze. My mind became part of the sea, the waves, I was flying like a bird and swimming like a fish. The breeze was cashmere wrapping around my body, the cushions as soft as lying on marshmallow. I could feel karma being restored deep within my core. It felt good, so good.

* * * * *

I don't know how long I slept, but when I eased the knots from my bones and shifted up the pillow, sunset was stretching citrus fingers along the watery horizon. Down by a rocky outcrop, a solitary silhouetted figure ran on the shoreline, legs pounding, arms tight, a long, dark shadow moving over the sand.

I yawned and rubbed the heels of my hands into my eyes. I hadn't expected to see anyone else on our private beach. As I focused I saw the jogging figure was a man, a big man wearing nothing but black shorts and sunglasses.

I tapped around for my own glasses but I'd left them on the dining table. I was just about to retrieve them when the figure turned up the beach. It was then I realized it wasn't any old jogger, it was Logan Taylor.

He was making a beeline for the villa, getting closer and closer each second. Over the sound of the surf I could hear the soft thuds of his bare feet and couldn't help but notice that unlike mine, his body didn't jiggle when he ran. It was perfectly still, honed into place by taut layers of skin.

He slowed to a walk and stepped up onto the decking. I knew he was big, but now I also saw he was solid. Solid muscle. His golden chest was broad with a handful of dark hairs at his sternum. He had small chocolate-colored nipples that pointed slightly downward owing to the square outline of his pecs. His wide shoulders were balled and his biceps bulged even though his arms hung relaxed. I don't know why I was surprised he was pure muscle, he was after all a finely tuned athlete, but there was something about his brutish manner and his swearing and beer swilling that made me think he'd be sloppy under his clothes.

"You're awake," he said in a voice deep with the effort of catching his breath. He stepped up to the bed and slid his shades from his face to the top of his head.

"Yes." I swallowed to moisten my dry throat, dry from wine and sleep, not from seeing a perfect specimen of the male body appear before me—or so I told myself.

"I wanted to say thanks for lunch, but you were asleep when I came out for my run."

I shrugged as the smell of fresh male sweat mingled with the breeze and washed over me. "Like I said, I was cooking anyway." I felt uncomfortable thinking he'd been by the bed when I was sleeping. Had he stopped and stared at me with those pale blue eyes? Had he run them over my body in a lazy, critical way and wondered why I wasn't toned and tight?

"Yeah, well, you didn't have to cook extra. I appreciated it, I was hungry after the trip." A lock of dark hair fell over his right eye and he pushed it away, wiping the back of his arm over his forehead.

My eyes slid to his stomach, I tried to will them not to, but the packs of abdominal muscles and the dark trail of hair leading from his navel into the waistband of his shorts were like a magnet. The hairs looked so soft and they feathered outward in neat lines, each row getting denser until they disappeared from view. His shorts were loose-fitting and hit just above the knees. Loose fitting everywhere except right below the waistband, where they looked like space could be an issue.

"You want some water?" he asked. If he'd noticed me checking him out he didn't react.

"Please," I said, shifting to the edge of the bed and staring at my red toenails to avoid looking other places.

"I'll get it." He turned and disappeared into the villa.

I stared at his retreating back, wide at the top, tapered at the waist. But it was the way he held himself that really caught my attention, not the acres of perfect skin. He moved with such precision, such grace. An enormous man would normally lump around but not Logan, he was almost elegant in the way he controlled his movements.

Within minutes he was back. He set a tray on the table and poured two glasses of water from a jug chock full of lime and ice. As I sat on the same plush chair I'd used earlier he yanked a cord at the end of the decking and stood under a sudden shower of water, rubbing his hands over his body as though soaping his skin and raking the water through his hair. When the water stopped raining down, he grabbed a towel and vigorously wiped his chest and shoulders and scraped his hair backward over his head with his fingers.

Despite the fact he'd been so rude earlier, watching him I couldn't help wondering how it would feel to be one of those tiny droplets of water sliding down all that hard, chiseled muscle. Of their own accord my fingers twitched in my lap, rubbing together and imagining what it would be like to touch his golden skin, slick with water and heated from the sun. He may act Neanderthal but he had the body of a god.

He sat opposite me and twisted the towel so it hung around his thick neck. "We should start again," he said with a hint of a smile.

I swallowed a lump in my throat and pushed my shades up the bridge of my nose. Watched a trickle run from his temple, past his ear and down his neck, settling in the hollow of his throat and glistening in the sunlight.

"I was rude," he said, "I'm sorry. I hate flying and I hate surprises even more."

"What was the surprise?" I forced myself to look at his face.

"You."

"Me!"

"Yeah, I thought I was going to have the place to myself for the week, that's what Fergal said, then last night he rings me up and tells me I have to share it with some girl doing college exams."

I took a sip of water. The ice clinked against the glass. I wasn't about to apologize for being there.

"I was high-sticked in the forehead last week by a dumb Russian, it set me in a bad mood, big-time... What else can I say?" He shrugged. "I'm sorry."

"Is that how you got the cut?" I flicked my eyes to the wound across his head.

"Yeah." He pressed his fingertips against it. "Stitches came out yesterday."

"How many?"

"Seven."

"Its healing well, I don't think you'll have much of a scar."

"It's not bleeding into my eye anymore, that's enough for me."

I rested back in the chair and flopped my arms to the side. A breeze lifted my hair and I caught it in a deep breathy sigh as it caressed my neck and shoulders.

"So," he said.

"So what?"

"So, aren't you, you know..." He shrugged again.

"What...?"

"Going to apologize to me."

"Apologize?" I was shocked. "For what?"

"You threw me an evil glare when you got on the plane, refused to speak to me in the car and then when I tried to be civil when you were cooking you ignored me." He folded his arms over his chest and his biceps swelled all the more.

"What are you taking about?" I had no idea. Glared at him when I got on the plane? I was sure I hadn't. And he hadn't spoken to me as much as I hadn't spoken to him in the car. I decided to start with the easiest accusation. "You didn't say anything other than swear when I was in the kitchen."

"Sure I did." He gulped at his water. "I called you to come and see the third crap decision the ref made at last week's match against Denver."

"And why on earth would I be interested in a wrong decision?"

He frowned. "It was a major league game, a playoff for the Stanley Cup."

"Major league, minor league, its all the same to me, hockey is really not my thing and until Gis...Fergal told me yesterday about the double booking I'd not only never heard of," I did quotation marks with my fingers, "Logan Taylor, but I also don't follow the Orlando Snipers."

"Vipers," he said with a scowl, though the corner of his mouth twitched. "Orlando Vipers."

I shrugged again. "So you can see why I wasn't interested in watching some rubbish referee decision, I'm just not bothered." I spotted my iPod strewn on the surface of the table. "But I didn't ignore you, I was wearing this." I fingered the thin white headphone lead. "I was listening to music, trying to restore my calm center after your outburst of cursing."

He looked at my hair lying tousled around my shoulders. "I guess the wires were hidden."

"And the plane," I said, squinting as I remembered back. "I'd just burned my hand on the rail – it was piping hot. I was probably scowling in pain."

"Yeah," he frowned. "What a hot fucker, that got me too."

I lowered my brows. He used swear words like normal people used nouns and adjectives. It only served to increase his caveman-like quality.

"And," he said with a shrug, "I was pissed 'cause I thought you were going to be a rink bunny."

"A rink bunny?" Did he think I'd have long ears and fluffy tail? "What on earth is that?"

"You know, the girls that hang around the changing rooms and the local bars, hoping to hook up with a hockey player."

I gave a disbelieving head shake. "Do I look like a rink bunny?"

"I'm pleased to say no, not at all." His gaze dropped to my throat and then headed lower to my deep cleavage. His cheeky stare was like a hot caress and prickles of sensation swept over me like tiny whips of fire. I crossed my arms over my breasts, I didn't want this jock staring at me.

"So..." he said, suddenly standing and dragging his attention back up to my face. "You know my name but I don't know yours."

"Brooke," I said. "Brooke Ambrose."

"Nice to meet you, Brooke," he drawled as he picked up his glass of water and stepped into the villa. "I'm going to get a proper shower now we've cleared up our little misunderstanding."

* * * * *

Logan showered and stayed in his room afterward. I sat on the edge of the decking with another glass of wine and watched the most brilliant aura of them all, the setting sun's. After that I was happy to spread a selection of healing crystals around my room, sprinkle a few drops of lavender on my pillow and settle into the cool sheets of the über-soft bed. I read up on anatomy for an hour then drifted into a deep and dreamless sleep. Calm was definitely returning to my world.

Chapter Three

As I stepped from my room the next morning, the fragrant smell of roasted coffee hit me. Wearing my bikini and a matching sarong, I walked barefoot into the kitchen, letting my nose lead the way, my tongue already tingling in anticipation of caffeine.

Logan was sprawled on the sofa in his black shorts, a big red mug in his hand and yet more noisy hockey on the TV. But until I'd had at least one cup of coffee on board I wasn't a sociable person, so I said nothing, reaching for the pot and pouring steaming liquid into a mug.

I added a splash of milk and wandered past the sofa, through the open doors and into the morning sunshine. Padding over the deck and onto the sand, I was pleased to find it hadn't transformed to molten glass – yet.

The lull of the waves called so I headed to the shoreline, walking toward the outcrop of gnarled, reddish brown rocks, stopping every now and then to admire the view and sip coffee.

When I reached the rocks I dipped my feet into the shallow pools and let the sun warm my shoulders. Tiny blue fish skittered through strands of lime-green weeds, a larger, golden fish with bulging black eyes showed a brief interest in my red toenails before darting back behind his rock. A lone gull screeched overhead and I spotted an orange crab scampering sideways beneath a rock – then something pierced the side of my left foot.

"Argh!" I screamed. I couldn't help it, the pain was so sudden and so severe. Like an electric shock shooting up my leg in agonizing slices of heat. I half fell, half hopped away from the water. My cup dropped and landed upside down, spilling the last of my coffee. I sat heavily, just beyond the waves, grasping my ankle and jerking my foot up to examine the source of the sting, dreading what I'd discover.

Protruding from the side of my arch were three long, black, incredibly thin needles. I gritted my teeth and hissed. They'd pierced my skin deep and disappeared well beneath the surface. A bright globule of blood was already seeping from one puncture site. The scarlet red against the shiny black and my pale flesh was sickening and my coffee threatened to surface as my stomach clenched.

Tears welled in my eyes. It hurt so much, like a burn and a stab wound at the same time. How would I get the needles out? How would I get back to the house? The black shards became a blur as I stared at them unblinking. I'd allow myself a moment of self-pity then hop or crawl or drag myself back to my room. I was sure I'd packed a pair of tweezers. I'd pull the spines out, if only I could make it.

"Hey, hey, what's going on?" a deep voice called from behind me. "You all right?"

I turned and through watery eyes saw Logan jogging down the beach, sunglasses shading his eyes, bare feet kicking up sand.

"No," I said, with a wobble in my voice. Why was I such a wimp with pain? I wished I was tougher but it had never been in my genetic makeup. "I've stood on something, something really horrid and sharp, it's stuck in me."

"Let's see." He dropped to his knees, shoving his shades on top of his head. Small creases darted from the corners of his eyes as he lowered his dark head over my foot.

I caught my breath. Suddenly I had something other than pain to concentrate on. The breeze lifted his brown hair around the base of his neck. His broad, golden shoulders shone in the sun and the delicious scent that filled the car yesterday washed over me. I tried again to pinpoint it, neroli and cedar perhaps?

"Sea anemone," he said with a frown, wrapping his big hand around my calf and lifting my foot higher. "But at least they're on the side and not the base. Once we've managed to get them out, you'll still be able to walk."

"Managed to get them out?" I asked, swallowing a shake in my voice.

"Yeah, nasty little bastards, they have a shot of poison in them, makes you feel like you've been hit by an electric shock. Got to get them out quick, otherwise they keep on pumping in their venom."

I glanced at the house, it was a good hundred yards away. "Would you go find some tweezers?" I asked. "And I'll have a go at pulling them out."

"Why don't you come up to the villa?"

"No, it hurts too much to walk. I'll wait here."

He scowled at my foot then looked up at my face. "Are you crying?"

"No." I swiped several tears from my cheeks. "Not at all."

"Come on," he said with a frown. "Let's get you back up there."

The next thing I knew, he'd wrapped one arm round my waist, the other beneath my thighs, swung me into the air and pressed me sideways against his hard chest. "Hey," I said, pointing out my foot so there was no danger of it knocking against the other one. "What are you doing?"

"Taking you up to the villa. You said it hurts too much to walk."

He shifted me in his arms as though I was no heavier than a feather, forcing me to wrap an arm around the hot skin of his neck to support myself. No one had ever picked me up—well, not since I was a little girl and my dad used to swing me onto his shoulders so I could see where we were going. But I'd been tiny then, a fraction of the size I was now.

"I'll try to walk," I said, fearing for the future stability of his spine.

"Why?"

"Because...because I'm heavy."

He let out a snort and his blue gaze captured mine. "No, you're not."

"I wouldn't want you to hurt yourself."

"Brooke, I've lifted heavier ice skates than you."

"But..."

"You want me to run back to the villa to prove it?"

"No, no," I said, tightening my grip as he upped his already swift pace. "Walking is fine, really."

His warm skin and hard muscle against my body felt good, reassuring. As he trooped along in silence I became aware of his sweet coffee breath washing over me and his heart thudding steadily against my side. The loose curls that licked the back of his head tickled my arm, and my foot didn't feel quite so bad.

"Here you go," he said, carefully lowering me onto the large four-poster I'd slept on the previous afternoon. "I spotted tweezers in my bathroom, I'll be right back."

The second he stepped into the villa the pain returned with a vengeance. It spread around my foot, inside and out, shooting up my leg to my knee in mean little spurts. I gnawed at the inside of my cheek and hoped he wouldn't be long. I just wanted to pull the needles out fast, get it over with.

"Here we go," Logan said, stepping onto the deck and holding up silver tweezers as if he'd won a trophy.

"Thanks." I held out my hand.

"Let me do it."

"I can manage."

"I know you can but let me, I've done it before, you have to grip them right at the end otherwise you inject more bad stuff, it'll hurt longer." He sat on the end of the bed and reached for my foot.

My muscles tensed as he rested it on top of his hard thigh. "You won't hurt me?"

"No." His jaw clenched and a muscle in his cheek flexed as he looked me in the eye. "I won't hurt you."

Warily I watched him hunch over my foot. He pressed one calloused palm on my shin to hold me still, the other hand holding the tweezers.

"Ouch!" I said as he touched the longest of the barbs.

"That didn't hurt," he said, glancing up and narrowing his eyes.

"Yes it did."

He didn't argue, just bobbed his head low again. He was so big he took up all the space around me and I could feel the warmth from his body seeping into my skin. I stared at a silvery scar on his scalp, no doubt the result of another "high stick" to the head.

"There we go," he said, holding up the first of the long black needles. "One little bugga out."

"I didn't even feel you do it." A wave of relief washed over me.

"I know." He grinned. It was the first time I'd seen him give a full wattage smile. It suited him. He had neat straight teeth and the smile went right up to his eyes, generating a sparkle in their pale blue depths and creasing the corners toward his temples. "Now look away and I'll do the others."

Within minutes the other two needles were out. Logan went to drop them in the kitchen trash bin and when he returned he carried two mugs of coffee.

"I guess you need a fresh one," he said, nodding in the direction of my abandoned mug.

"Yeah, I'll get that before the tide comes back in later." I reached gratefully for the coffee he held out, took a sip and rested back on the pillow, relieved my morning ordeal was over so quickly and my peaceful center was returning—all thanks to Logan.

He walked around the other side of the bed, rearranged a couple of pillows and sat next to me with his coffee, his long legs stretching out way beyond mine and his weight dipping the mattress.

It should have felt weird sitting on a bed with a man I barely knew but it didn't. I guess we'd just been so physically close in my moment of trauma that it didn't matter. And now he didn't seem quite as unenlightened as he had when I'd first met him. He had a softer side, even if it was beneath a hard layer.

"So tell me, Mr. Logan Taylor," I said, looking at the dusting of sand on his big feet. "How come you're so good at removing anemone needles?"

He sipped his coffee and stared at the waves. They'd increased in energy and were rolling and curling with rising gusto, pounding and frothing enthusiastically against the beach. I wouldn't be able to bob around on my back today if this kept up. "Tina and I used to have a house in Key West. The little bastards were everywhere, we always had to wear those plastic shoes if we went swimming from the back terrace."

"Who's Tina?"

His brow furrowed. "My ex-wife."

"How ex?"

He let out a tight sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger.

"I told you," I said, tipping my head to look at him. "I'm not interested in hockey, I don't follow it so I have no idea what's in your past. I'm not some rink bunny who has a scrapbook on you."

He glanced at me, the frown etching an even deeper line between his brows. "It's old news."

"Old news," I said in a softer tone, "that I haven't heard."

A palm swaying in the breeze sent shadows flickering over his face. "Oh, what the hell," he said, looking back out to sea. "She left me just over a year ago for her hairdresser."

"She left you for a hairdresser?"

"Yeah, her hairdresser, Charlene."

I just about choked on my coffee. "Charlene! As in, a woman?"

"Yep, that's right." His jaw tensed. "Logan Taylor's wife left him for a woman. She'd had enough of macho stuff, hockey, my loud mates...me. Said I always took everything to the extreme and she wanted a quiet life." He shrugged. "But it's who I am. If I was satisfied with anything less than one hundred percent effort and result in every aspect of my life I wouldn't be much of a sportsman, would I?"

"I guess not."

He let out a long, low sigh. "But can you imagine the ribbing I got in the locker room? The guys wouldn't let it drop, the jokes were endless and trust me, they milked it big-time. They were relentless, always on about it, how I'd turned a woman off the entire male species. Bastards." He snorted in amusement. "Then one day I took Brick's feet from under him and threatened to pulverize his sorry ass if he said another word. They all got the message then and it stopped."

"That's awful," I said, wondering what sort of a mother would call her child Brick. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be, it's not your fault." He shrugged.

"No, it's not my fault, but still, I'm sorry if it hurt you."

"It hurt here for a while." He banged a fist to his chest. "But it hurt my damn wallet a whole lot more and for a whole lot longer. She took me for all she could—she had to, how much does a fucking hairdresser earn? Certainly not the bucks I get. Tina had to see herself right off our divorce because she's never worked a day in her life and never intends to."

"Does she have the house in the Keys?"

"Yep, all part of the deal her smarmy lawyer worked out. But I got the big one, just down the coast from Sarasota. It's great, I've had it all refurbished. It's a real guy's place now, no more girly frills or dried fucking flowers."

I scowled at him. "Do you have to do that?"

"What?"

"Curse all the time."

"I don't."

"You do and it's shocking you don't even notice yourself doing it."

He shrugged against the pillows. "Sorry."

"I'll forgive you," I said with a smile. "Seeing as you've just saved me from the evil sea anemone."

He raised one thick brow at me.

A sudden gust of wind rattled the parasol and we both twisted our necks and watched it wobble in its slot before becoming still again.

"You want to walk to the cafe up the beach?" Logan asked. "Fergal says they do a mean brunch." He gestured in the opposite direction of the rocky outcrop.

"I don't know." I looked at my foot. He'd put a small flesh-colored Band-Aid over the three tiny holes. "It might not be wise to walk."

"It'll be fine now, I promise. Try to stand."

I tugged my bottom lip with my teeth.

"Okay, I'll let you off for a bit." He jumped up. "I'll go for a run and a shower and you can have another hour to recover."

I nodded. "Would you just reach me the magazine by my bed?" As soon as the words fell from my mouth I realized how cheeky I'd been. I couldn't ask Logan Taylor to do my fetching and carrying.

"Sure," he said, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. His bare feet padded over the decking and once again I admired the way his body moved. He didn't waste energy, it was stored up in his muscles, like a full battery of power waiting to be unleashed.

He returned one minute later with the latest copy of *Nursing into the Future*. "Here you go."

"Thanks."

"Are you a nurse?" He took my empty coffee cup.

"No, not yet, hoping to be though." I shrugged. "I've got the entrance exam in a few weeks. Fingers crossed I'll pass and then I'll get an interview with a chance to start in September."

"Don't they teach you all this in school?" He twisted his head and squinted at the cover with its headlines, "*Autonomy in nursing – is it being threatened?*" and "*New guidelines for CVA management.*"

"Sure, but it's good to be able to talk intelligently about the current issues affecting nurses when I go to the interview."

"I think you'll do just fine."

"You do?"

"Yeah." He tipped one corner of his mouth in a half-smile. "You seem like the type of girl, I mean, woman, who can do anything you set your mind to."

"I do?"

Flattening his mouth, he nodded. "Yep, definitely." His gaze drifted down my face and my throat, settling on my bikini top. "When Fergal said I was sharing with a girl doing college exams," he said, his eyes still lowered and his lashes creating tiny shadows on his cheeks, "you were the last thing I expected."

I wondered why now I felt caressed by his gaze instead of ogled at. "You thought I'd be a rink bunny," I said quietly.

His gaze came back up to my face. He didn't look in the least remorseful that he'd quite blatantly studied my breasts. "Yeah, I also thought you'd be some spoiled little rich kid whose daddy did everything for her. Any friend of Fergal's is bound to be loaded or powerful or both, especially a friend who gets favors like using this place."

What could I say? My fictional daddy was not a good topic of conversation. I flipped open the journal and crossed my legs.

"What's he do, your father?" Logan folded his arms, rocking back on his heels.

"This and that, you know, business stuff." I hated telling lies, I hated telling lies like I hated Halloween, it was so bad for my karma.

"What business?"

"Oh, I don't know, a bit of everything," I said on a sigh as if the subject was beyond boring because I'd discussed it so many times with so many different people.

"Like?" His eyes bored into mine. They were the color of the shallowest part of the water surrounding the island, a stunning clear aqua. But I couldn't hold his gaze, not when I was busy forcing a pile of false statements from between my lips.

I shrugged. "All sorts, real estate, investments, you know..." I pretended to take great interest in a reader's letter on faulty colostomy bag seals. "I don't take much notice of what he's up to."

"And your mother, is she a nurse?"

I felt a stab of pain behind my breastbone and my stomach tensed. "She was," I said truthfully. "But she died in a car crash."

"I'm sorry."

"It was a long time ago." I looked up at him looming next to me in the dappled sunlight and spotted his aura for the first time, it was a rich scarlet with spiky streaks of black. "Old news," I said, forcing a tight smile. "Anyway, I thought you were going for a shower?" I needed to end this conversation. It was throwing my entire cosmic balance off center.

"I am," he said. "Then we'll go eat."

* * * * *

An hour later Logan and I ambled along the beach to the cafe. My foot felt fine, though I was careful not to walk in the waves and dampen the Band-Aid. We picked a table overlooking the small harbor and watched the boats bob as we gorged on ham and cheese served on bread still warm from the oven.

The local fishermen were busy tightening down hatches and securing colorful boats to brightly painted posts. Women scurried about in floral headscarves, clutching wicker baskets stuffed with produce, children and dogs trotted along at their feet.

Logan had on a pale blue shirt with a small embroidered anchor on the breast pocket. The breeze was getting stronger and flattened the material against his wide

chest from time to time. I wished I'd brought a band to tie back my hair, it was lifting around my face, tickling my neck and getting in the way of my breakfast. I was glad of the long-sleeved red cardigan I'd put over my halter-top and the three-quarter trousers I'd slipped into. The breeze wasn't cold, but something about its increasing strength gave my skin a chill.

"We close in five minutes," the short round waitress said, topping up our coffee for the third time. "There's a dry storm rolling in, I gotta get home and pen in me chickens."

"No problem," Logan said, reaching into his wallet. "How much do we owe you?"

She scribbled on a pad and dropped it on the table.

"I'll get this." I plucked cash from my pocket.

"No, you won't."

I scowled. "Well let me pay half, we've eaten loads."

"Absolutely not." He handed the waitress several notes. "I invited you out to brunch."

"Yeah, but it wasn't like a date or anything."

A strong gust flapped the tablecloth upward like a stingray's wings. "Wasn't it?" One side of his mouth twitched and thick strands of his hair lifted. "That's a shame, I was kind of hoping it was."

A tingle that had nothing to do with the wind traveled over my skin.

"And I made a big effort not to curse," he said, leaning over the table, eyes twinkling as if he were sharing a secret. "'Cause I thought it was a date. Didn't you notice?"

Now I wondered if he was teasing me. "Yes, I did notice, it suited you much better." I grabbed my hair into a ponytail to stop it whipping my cheeks. "Come on, we ought to go. I'm not sure what a dry storm is but it's going to be wild judging by the way the locals are strapping everything down."

We headed back along the sand at a speedy pace. The waves were roaring now, six-foot-high tunnels of angry sea rolling in from the jagged horizon. Great swathes of energy boiling and frothing. The wind could no longer be described as a breeze, it was a gale and we were facing it head-on as we made our way down the deserted beach.

I ducked my head and hunched my shoulders to battle against it. Even the smallest grains of sand were streaming over the surface of the beach, hitting my shins like tiny bullets, stinging and nipping. The deep, dry sand made each step an uphill struggle and my legs soon ached with the effort.

"Here," Logan said, holding out his hand. "Come on, I'll pull you."

I looked up. He seemed unaffected by the wind whereas it just about blew me over when it punched out an extra strong gust. But he just stood there, shirt and black shorts flapping wildly and the sheets of sand sliding around his calves and feet like water slipping around a boulder.

I reached for his hand, glad of the support. But as soon as our flesh connected I wondered just what I'd done. My stomach lurched and my heart fluttered. A sensation stronger than any sea anemone shot up my arm. His hand squeezing and tugging mine was like yin connecting with yang, two magnetic poles reaching for one another. And the feeling didn't stop there, it spread over my shoulder, seeped down my back and settled deep in my chest.

I couldn't deny it. I was attracted to Logan Taylor. There was something about his manner, his raw maleness, his aura that appealed to my feminine side. His conversation over the last couple of hours had been intelligent and witty, his smile infectious, and the fact that he'd tried not to curse was sweet.

"Nearly there," he shouted over the wind as the villa came into view.

A palm tree overhead creaked ominously and I scurried closer into his side, wrapping my other hand around his thick biceps as I glanced upward.

"It's okay," he said, releasing my hand and circling my waist with his arm. "It won't fall on you." He dragged me against his body, urging me more quickly through the sand.

I found myself taking two paces to his one and within minutes we were climbing onto the deck. Shifting sand danced around the table and chair legs. The pillows and cushions from the bed had rolled to the floor and were tumbling about in the golden dust and lodging in leaves and branches. The parasol clattered against the table, the pole lifting up from the floor and threatening to take off into the sky.

"You grab the cushions," Logan called over the noise of the flapping shrubbery. "I'll anchor down the parasol."

Unlocking the door to the living area, I grabbed three pillows and chucked them inside. I went back for the other three then tumbled in, half shutting the door behind myself. My hair was wild, my cheeks stung and my heart pounded as I caught my breath.

I watched Logan close the umbrella and secure the pole into place. He glanced around, shading his eyes with his hand, checking for anything else that might blow away, then headed my way with a train of dry, flat leaves skittering past his feet. I opened the door wide to let him through. He stepped in, still squinting against the dust, as I pushed the door shut with a loud click. The world went silent. After the howling wind and the roaring sea, the quiet of the house was acute and heavy and fell around us like a dense cloak.

Leaning back against the door, I pulled in a deep breath. "Made it," I gasped.

"Yeah," he said, stepping up close – real close.

When I looked up, his cheeks were stained red, several grains of sand hung in his long lashes and his hair was tousled and dusted with gold. "Is that everything tied down?" I asked, trying to ignore my breasts heaving against my halter-top.

"Well, almost everything," he said with a decidedly carnal grin.

I swallowed and flattened my palms against the cool glass door behind me. "What else do you need to tie down?"

The right side of his mouth creased upward and his brows gave the tiniest of twitches. "I'd quite like to tie you down," he said, his gaze coming to rest on my mouth. "To the bed."

Licking my lips, I tasted salt. My stomach knotted as excitement, anticipation and sin collided in a delicious tangle.

"But I guess that's moving a bit fast," he murmured, bending his head lower. "We only just met."

"A bit fast for me," I agreed, absorbing the burning heat from his body as it radiated against mine.

"Brooke." He raised one hand and rested it against the wooden doorframe by my left ear. His body moved in closer still. The gorgeous spiced aftershave he wore invaded my nostrils and settled not just on my tongue but somewhere else deep inside me. "Do you remember when you walked out of the water yesterday?" he asked in a low, rumbling voice.

"Yes." How could I forget the toe-curling embarrassment? He'd stared silently toward me as I'd ambled up the beach, trying desperately to look cool and unflustered. I felt my cheeks warming further at the memory as my stomach twisted.

"It was a million times better than any Bond movie."

"It was?"

"Hell, yeah. If they had you as a Bond girl it would be my favorite film by miles. Not just 007, but in general, any film ever." His mouth slid upward in a grin. "You just about blew my mind."

"I did?" My eyes widened in surprise. He'd liked what he'd seen, and I thought he'd been unimpressed with my curvy attributes.

"Oh, yeah, and other parts of my anatomy."

He ducked his head, his lips a whisper from mine. I could almost taste the salt on his mouth.

"Well, we wouldn't want that would we, Logan?" I murmured.

"Wouldn't we?" His brows raised.

"Sounds painful." I swallowed, my throat felt tight.

"It's already getting painful." He shifted his weight to the other foot. We were so close now my breast brushed against his chest and my nipples, which had tightened to hard pinched peaks, scraped against him.

I reached up to touch his jaw, his bristles catching on my fingertips. Our gazes connected and I rose onto the balls of my feet and pressed my mouth to his.

He opened up and took immediate control of the kiss. He tasted so good—man and ocean, wind and sun—he tasted of everything I was missing in my life and had been for

so long. My hands moved to his shoulders and squeezed hard muscles through his soft cotton shirt. The tip of his tongue probed farther into my mouth, shooting desire into every fiber I possessed. My tongue searched for his and began to explore his mouth.

Logan groaned and let go of the doorframe, cradling the base of my skull in his palm and winding his other arm around my waist. He pulled me close and as the length of our bodies touched, right in the very center of my abdomen, he pressed his steely erection forward. He was right, he was painfully hard.

"Damn, you taste good," he murmured, trailing a gentle kiss across my cheek.

I tipped my head back and let him explore the base of my ear, the angle of my jaw and the hollow of my throat. "I taste like salt," I said.

"You taste of the beach and flowers and coconut," he whispered between kisses. "The most delicious combination of flavors I've ever experienced." He pulled back slightly, slipping his fingertips under the shoulders of my cardigan and easing it down my arms. It fell to the floor and he slid his palms back up over my elbows to the base of my neck. Each tiny section of flesh he touched came alive with sensation and pricked with greedy little goose bumps searching out his caress. I found his mouth again and ran my fingers into the collar-length hair at the nape of his neck. I pulled his head to mine harder. I wanted more. Much more.

His big fingers were busy, fiddling with the knot at the back of my halter-top. It was cleverly designed with a fitted bra, it had cost a fortune but was well worth it. I felt it slipping free and pulled back from the kiss, crossing my arm over my chest and gripping my opposite shoulder to hold it in place.

"What's the matter?" Logan asked, his eyes heavy with desire and his voice thick with lust.

"I'm...I'm big," I said in a rush then felt silly for saying something so insecure and obvious.

"Me too," he said, a provocative grin playing on his mouth. "Relax, Brooke, it's all good, trust me."

A nervous giggle escaped my lips. He continued to undo the straps, his light touch sending tingles down my spine. Then he lifted each one forward past my ears and the only thing holding up my top was my arm.

"Are you stuck like that?" he asked, laying the straps down and running his knuckles over my collarbone.

I shook my head and dropped my arm. The top slipped slowly down, exposing the large orbs of my breasts and my peaked, pink nipples. I waited for him to make some lewd remark about their size, or grab them with both hands and squeeze.

But he didn't. Instead Logan studied me with heavy eyes. "You said you were big," he said, "but you should have warned me you were perfect too." He cupped my right breast in his palm and kissed my mouth, long and lazy. He slowly brushed his thumb around my nipple and when it was hard and tight he scraped gently over it. I melted against him, no one had ever touched me so reverently or with such delicate caresses.

Men, Sam in particular, had groped and squeezed and thought that worked for my bigger breasts. Despite me telling him to the contrary, he'd persisted in kneading me like dough, thinking it would get me horny.

Appreciation and desire flooded through me as Logan continued with his feathery touches and his delicate kisses. He was getting it just right. I felt like a woman, like a treasured possession. His lips left mine and he ducked down, stooping so he could take my nipple into his hot mouth. I let out a moan, ran my fingers up through his hair and arched toward him. Blood pooled in my pelvis, hunger built, a yearning was growing that needed to be satisfied.

Looking down, I watched his tongue dance across my cleavage to circle the other nipple. His eyes were closed. I could see the small scar on the top of his head again.

He dipped his hands to my waist and pressed over the flare of my hips as he stood upright. The fire of desire burned hot in his eyes, and his breathing had picked up to match my rasping breaths. "I want you," he said determinedly. "Now."

My stomach dropped. Nausea twisted my gut.

What the hell was I doing? I was behaving like a whore. I'd been paid to be in the villa, to be a companion for Logan, and here I was, half naked against the door, buzzing for him, desperate for him. I was about to sleep with him, have sex with him. In the next few minutes I'd be getting paid one hundred thousand dollars to fuck him when that was exactly what I said I wouldn't do. My good karma was about to be dropkicked into a dark corner of the universe, never to return.

I let out a whimper of shame and scooted out of his reach. "I'm sorry," I said, yanking my top up. "I'm sorry, Logan, I can't."

He stiffened, dropping his arms to his sides and clenching his fists.

"I'm really, really sorry," I said.

Pain and confusion flickered across his beautiful blue eyes. He rubbed his fingers across his forehead and blew out a long breath through pursed lips.

My gaze dropped to his shorts. The bulge of his erection strained against his zipper and the tiny metal teeth looked ready to rip apart. He shoved his other hand down his waistband and rearranged himself. A grimace crossed his face. He looked like a starving man who'd just been offered his favorite dish then had it taken away.

"I...I just can't," I said as a sob bubbled in my chest. "It's not you, Logan, honestly, it's not."

"Whatever," he said through tight-clenched teeth. "I'm not exactly going to force myself on you. I just thought you were into it too. I thought the attraction was mutual."

"I am, it is, it's just..." I paused, what could I say? That I'd be whoring myself if I slept with him. If I followed my carnal desires and got naked, sweaty and downright dirty with him I'd be stepping over a line I'd promised myself not to.

He walked to the sofa and sank down, still shifting the material of his shorts and wearing an uncomfortable expression.

I muttered another apology and fled the room. I'd brought so much bad karma on myself. I'd be looking over my shoulder for weeks.

Chapter Four

I dropped on the end of the bed with my head in my hands and my heart beating like a drum. I'd wanted him so badly, so desperately. I still did.

Standing, I walked to the French doors and stared out at the raging sea and the palms fronds flattening in the wind. I could still feel Logan's mouth on my skin, his tongue tracing my lips. He'd been a hungry man but his appetite had been carefully harnessed. He knew his power, his size and his formidable strength.

Moving restlessly, I went into the en-suite and flicked on the shower. They said a cold shower worked for men so perhaps it would work for a woman too. I had to do something to dampen the fire raging in me. The need, the want, the lust—it was like another part of my being, battling for control.

I stripped naked and stepped into the cool water, reaching for my lily shower gel and soaping my body. My breasts were tingling and heavy, my nipples still hard and erect. As I washed between my legs my lips felt swollen and hot. Beneath my fingertips my clitoris was engorged and crying out for attention. I gave it a little rub, tipped my head up to the pouring water and squeezed my eyes shut, circling it some more. But it was no good, it just wasn't right. An orgasm at my own hand would not take the edge off my appetite or the heat from the fire Logan had ignited. I would have to wait for it to burn itself out—which could be some time.

Feeling beyond frustrated, I stepped out, dried off and pulled on sweatpants and a baggy gray t-shirt, scraping my hair into a ponytail and applying salve to my wind-beaten lips to stop them chapping. I couldn't stay in my bedroom all week, that was ridiculous. But if I made an effort not to look too good, scruffy even, then perhaps it would put Logan off me. Because my armor was thin, and if he kissed me again, touched me in his gentle, seductive way, I didn't know if I'd be able to resist him.

I sprawled on the bed and read for a couple of hours, listening to the wind beating the villa and the bushes whipping against one another. Eventually thirst sent me into the living area, where I was greeted by the noise of a cheering crowd and a commentator jabbering eagerly from the surround sound. Logan sat on the sofa, much the same as yesterday—feet on table, beer in hand, hockey on screen.

I poured myself a tumbler of ice water and took a long drink, then helped myself to a glass of wine and walked over to him. I cleared my throat. "Hey."

He didn't look up.

"Can I join you?"

"Suit yourself." He took a long slug of beer as I sat down a safe distance from him. I didn't want to smell him, or feel his body heat or be able to do anything dangerous like study his soft mouth too closely – the soft mouth that he knew how to use so well.

"What are you watching?" *Duh!* I could have kicked myself immediately.

"Vipers versus Washington Capitals. It's an important match. We need the points to go up in the league above Seattle."

"We?" I asked. "As in Orlando, your team? Why aren't you playing?"

His brows dropped low and he knocked back the last of his beer. "'Cause some dumb-nut wound me up last week and I lost it."

"I don't understand."

"I got dumped in the sin bin one time too many. I'm suspended from this game."

"Because of the Russian?" My eyes flicked to his forehead. "The one who high-sticked you?"

"Yep." His jaw tightened and his lips mashed together. "That bastard has a lot to answer for." His gaze slid over to me. "Sorry."

He didn't look it. I took a sip of wine.

The whistle blew and the game started up. Logan leaned forward, put his beer on the table and rested his elbows on his knees. "Come on, Brick," he shouted at the enormous screen. "Don't let that fat..." he paused and glanced at me, "idiot have you like that."

"Must have been awful growing up with that name," I said.

"It's a nickname, obviously." He lifted off the sofa slightly as the puck shot toward the goal, but then he sank back down, deflated, when it missed. "Damn."

I thought about it. "It's still odd."

"He's tough, hard and dependable, like a brick. Everyone calls him it, even his mother now."

The commentator's voice filled the living room. "And that's why they need Phoenix. A shot like that would have counted. A shot like that would have got this game off on the right foot for the Vipers."

"You want another drink?" Logan stood, stepping past me to head into the kitchen.

"No, I'm fine, thanks." I tried not to suck in the delicious scent he'd left hanging in the air right in front of me. He'd showered too, and I'd bet my best aromatherapy candle that his shower gel contained ginger, but only a drop, because the overall scent was like the first taste of mulled wine at Christmas, heavy and fruity, thick with promise.

He slammed the fridge door, dropped back down next to me and popped another beer.

"Phoenix has got to be kicking himself right now," the commentator continued. "A match like this, with the Caps in top form. It would have been right up his alley. The Vipers really are going to miss his on-ice skill."

"Who's Phoenix?" I asked.

Logan took a deep breath and the muscle in his jaw danced. "Me," he said with a scowl.

"He's talking about you?" I raised my brows. "You're Phoenix?"

"Yeah, and everything he's saying is right. I should be there, they could use me. I never would have missed the shot Brick just took. I'd have been three yards closer, I'm quicker, a better aim."

"Modest too," I said.

He gave a huff of amusement. "I've been doing it longer, he's still a kid. He'll get there soon enough."

"So if Brick gets his name because he's hard and dependable, why do you call yourself Phoenix?"

"I don't and I didn't choose it myself."

"So why did they give you the name Phoenix?"

"Because I always get up. You know, like the Phoenix rising from the ashes." He paused as the puck went dangerously near the opposite goal. When it missed he continued, "I get broken, winded, messed up, and I carry on. I'm not a sissy that cries to the refs at the first drip of blood."

I would never have put Logan in the sissy category and I couldn't imagine anyone, anywhere on the planet would. "So what happened last week, with the Russian?"

Logan frowned. "He shoved me against the boards one too many times so I retaliated."

"But how did he cut your head? Didn't you have a helmet?" I gestured at the screen where the players wore helmets with cages covering their faces.

"I threw it off, it got personal." He shrugged. "I lost my temper."

I thought of how he'd held me, touched me. I couldn't imagine Logan losing it, using that strength to fight, not now I'd seen, felt it used so gently and sweetly. "Do you do that a lot? Lose your temper."

"Something I'm working on," he said, turning to me. "It's why Fergal sent me here, to have some time out, 'get a grip' as he put it." He cocked his head. "I thought it was a crazy idea. I humored him by coming 'cause I had nothing else to do this week, but the thing is I've actually felt better, especially today at the cafe, you know, with you. I felt different, calm, like a weight I didn't even know was there had lifted from my shoulders."

I nodded. "It's my aura," I said. "I have a blue aura, similar color to your eyes I believe."

"It's your what?"

"My aura, it's pale blue. Blue is always a calming influence." Well, most of the time it was pale blue, at the moment it was probably blotched with navy. "I have to work at it of course, to keep it calm and healing, I have to balance my karma and ease through problems as they arise."

His brows rose. "You have a pale blue aura that you have to work on? What, like a ring of blue...around you?" He was looking at me as if I was a total fruitcake. I'd seen the look before when I'd explained auras to people.

"Yes, my Aunt Belinda, God rest her soul, used to see it the best. She could tell what mood I was in when I visited even before I said anything."

"And...and do I have an aura?" He glanced down at his arms as if searching for a ring of color.

"Oh yes, but you can't see your own. Yours is blood red with black lines streaking through it." I studied him. "Though there's not as much black today. Perhaps it was that upsetting your balance, making you lose your temper when you were playing."

"Black streaks." He shook his head. "In my aura?"

"Yes, they can't be good for you, not really."

"You're saying black streaks in my aura caused me to pummel Yusof?"

"More than likely. Having just one pure color is the thing to strive for."

"And how do I get that?"

"Keep hanging out with me, I guess," I said with a smile. "It seems my aura is cleansing yours."

His brow furrowed and his wound creased. "You really believe that?"

"Yes."

He huffed. "Well, if you cleansed it this morning I reckon you sent it completely black when we got back here." He placed his beer on the table and I studied three neat lines on his shirt stretching between his shoulder blades as he leaned forward.

"So tell me the rules," I said, feigning fascination at a penalty shot. "I've never watched a game of ice hockey in my life."

"Brooke." He sat back up.

"Mmm?"

"Was it something I did? I could use the feedback."

"It was nothing *you* did." My heart did a flip of remorse. I should never have let it go so far. I should never have led him on by kissing him first.

"You just didn't like making out with a thick jock like me, eh?"

"Logan, you might be thickset but there's nothing thick about you." My gaze scanned his shirt, tight around his biceps, then dropped lower to his wide, powerful thighs.

He grunted. "Yeah, well there's obviously something fundamentally wrong with me. Like the guys said, I turned Tina off the whole male species."

I looked at his handsome features, stiff with worry and frustration. "I'm sure you get plenty of offers from slim, glamorous 'rink bunnies'."

"Yeah, sure, but they're exactly that, rink bunnies. They're false and they just want to date a hockey player. They don't want to date *me*. If I worked in a bank, or on a construction site, they wouldn't be interested." His gaze scanned down my t-shirt and sweatpants. "Besides, I don't like skinny girls," he said flatly. "I like women, women who are soft and have curves in all the right places. Women who look and feel like women. And I like women who like me for me, not because I'm good at whacking a puck into a net."

I looked into his eyes for a sign that he was lying. Did he really like my curvy shape? There was no shifting of his irises, his words had been honest. It meant a lot to a girl who'd struggled to maintain a positive relationship with hips that wouldn't fit into skinny jeans and breasts that needed support at all times. "I like you for you," I said, my insides melting at his openness. "A lot."

"Yeah, right." He folded his arms over his chest and studied the screen.

Suddenly I saw a way to fix my karma. I could prove to Logan just how much I liked him and do something about the white-hot lust that he'd injected into my veins. I would simply refuse the money from Fergal. I still had my job at The Grill because I'd taken leave to come to the island. So I could revert to my original plan of working my way through nursing college. The bonus being, I'd have had a fabulous holiday to catch up on study, for free, and to top it all off, the company of a gorgeous, sexy guy.

Karma would be restored.

Simple.

I placed my empty wineglass on the table and moved closer to Logan. "I really am sorry about earlier. If I could explain I would."

His looked at me and his gaze dropped to my mouth. I thought for a second he might shift away, but he didn't. He stayed very still, frozen, as if exerting considerable willpower to remain motionless with his hands in his lap.

"Perhaps you'll let me make it up to you," I said quietly. I could already feel my body crying out for his. The remembered sensation of those lips on my naked flesh had my heart rate picking up and blood pooling in my pelvis.

"What, and have you walk away again?" He ran his tongue over his bottom lip, coating it in a soft sheen. "And leave me in need of another damn cold shower."

"I'm not going anywhere." I pressed the palm of my hand to his stubbled jawline and kept his focus on me. "I'm staying right here." I moved my head so close our noses touched. "On this very soft, very long sofa."

His eyes narrowed.

"And I'm going to take off all these old clothes," I whispered onto his mouth. "If that helps persuade you to let me make it up to you."

Heat smoldered from his intense gaze. "I'm persuaded," he murmured, just before his lips took possession of mine. His kiss was still gentle but hotter than before, and there was an urgency to it now as well. His tongue plundered in, caught mine and started a crazy dance that took my breath away.

I felt his hands brush my stomach as he curled his fingers under my t-shirt, pulling it over my head and freeing my messy ponytail from its band. My hair settled on my bare shoulders, tickling the hypersensitive flesh. I got the feeling he wasn't going to give me a chance to change my mind this time. But he didn't need to worry, I was buzzing for him, as desperate as he was to pick up where we'd left off.

He paused in his kissing and looked at the white satin bra I was wearing. "Now that's not old," he said in a rumbling voice, brushing the tip of his thumb over the scalloped lace of the cup. "But I want it off anyway."

He slid his hands up my spine and released the hooks of my bra, smoothing the straps down my arms and dropping it to the floor. My breasts hung heavy and free, aching with longing, my skin tightening in anticipation of Logan's touch. He reached out and cupped the heavy underside of my left breast, filling his hand with my pale flesh and brushing his thumb over the nipple as he kissed me again.

Both nipples tightened and twisted deliciously. I reached for the top button of his shirt and, with fumbling fingers, freed it. Logan pulled back, released my breast and, without taking his hungry gaze from my chest, fisted his shirt between his shoulders and dragged it over his head.

Immediately the temperature cranked up. His strong body heat and divine scent had me squirming with impatience. The sight of his beautiful chest had my hands itching to touch him.

But Logan didn't reach for me again, instead he stood, towering above me. He retrieved his wallet from his pocket, dropped it on the table and stepped out of his shorts, revealing tight black boxers. Then he stooped, wrapped an arm around my waist and effortlessly slid me lengthways along the couch so I was on my back looking up at him. "These have definitely seen better days," he said, tugging at my sweatpants with determined fingers.

"I agree." I lifted my hips so he could pull them, along with my white panties, down my legs and over my feet.

He shoved a hand through his hair and looked down at me sprawled naked on the couch. His eyes glistened with lust.

"And Phoenix is going to wish he was here!" the commentator shouted from the TV. The crowd erupted. The whiz of skates slicing over ice filled the room. "Phoenix will be so sorry to miss this."

"Oh no, I'm not," Logan said with a decidedly feral grin and hitting mute on the remote. "I'm exactly where I want to be. This is much more fun than work."

The only sounds now were our rapid breaths, the wind screeching over the roof and the big, flat leaves whipping against the kitchen window. It was as though all my senses were amplified, heightened, and I was part of the storm, our passion was part of nature—it was meant to be.

Logan dropped, kneeling half on the floor, half on the sofa. He pushed up my knees, resting my left leg over his shoulder. He planted a kiss on my navel and settled his rounded biceps against my inner thighs. “You’re so soft,” he murmured. “Everything about you is so soft and smooth and...” He dropped a kiss lower, in the center of my small patch of blonde pubic hair. “And tastes delicious.”

I looked down between my heaving breasts and tried to control a quiver running up my spine as he tilted my hips to his face. “You like that I’m soft...?” I managed as his gaze lingered on my exposed pussy. “You like that I’m soft and not all toned from the gym?”

“Hell, yeah.” He smiled up at me, a dark delicious smile that promised a whole load of sin. “And I’m gonna show you just how much I like it.” He ducked his head and I was left looking at that white scar through his hair, again. The delicate flesh on my inner thigh trembled at the moist touch of his tongue and the scratch of his chin. I dropped my head on the cushion and let out a small moan of appreciation as his fingers found my slick flesh, touching and separating my lips, pulling back the hood of my clitoris and exposing its dampness to the air.

His mouth was only a second behind his fingers, kissing and licking briefly before he created a solid, hot suction over my clit. It had been so long since Sam had treated me to this. He much preferred me doing all the work when it came to oral sex. And now the immediate, wild, barely remembered sensation stole my breath away. My toes and fingers curled as a deep moan of pleasure escaped my throat. “Oh god, Logan,” I said, arching my back and clenching my fists at the sudden and devastatingly accurate aim of his caress. “That’s it, just there.”

He continued for a long, heavenly minute then released my clit and began to explore lower with his tongue, delving into my entrance with the tip and then spreading my desire for him into every crease and crevice of my pussy lips. My head fell to the side, my eyes squeezed shut. He was building me up so fast.

He upped the pressure and captured my clit again in a deep, luscious kiss, setting up a rhythm around my needy nub with his tongue. His fingers teased, hovering at my entrance but barely dipping in.

“Please,” I said, shifting my pelvis toward him. I felt like an empty vessel that needed to be filled. “Please, I need you...in me.”

He pushed one thick finger in right to the knuckle. I gripped him hard with my internal muscles. The first tug of an orgasm called my name and I moaned in appreciation as he stroked over my G-spot.

He treated me to another finger, filling me deliciously then withdrawing. The climax was there, in the pit of my stomach, building like a rocket getting ready for

takeoff. Having him sucking on my clit and filling me with his fingers was about to spin me out of control.

"Logan," I panted. "I'm going to—"

He pulled his fingers out, lifted his face from between my legs and wiped his mouth on the back of his forearm. "Wait for me, sweetie," he said, reaching for his wallet. The foot draped over his shoulder fell to the floor with a whump. He took out a blue foil package and tore at the wrapper with his teeth.

My vision blurred and my desperate clit was buzzing. Logan shoved off his boxers and released his erection. He hadn't been joking earlier when he'd said he was big. He rolled the condom down his thick shaft and then loomed over me, one knee on the sofa, the other foot planted on the floor. I grabbed for his hard shoulders and stared into his eyes, which flooded with need and greed as he positioned himself.

I wrapped one leg around his waist and smoothed my palms over his marble-hard shoulders. He lowered his face and as his warm, musky tongue entered my mouth, pushed his cock into my body. I was so ready, so wet, but still the size of him stretching me, invading me had me groaning at the sweetest, most delicious bite of pain imaginable.

"You're not going anywhere now, are you?" he asked in a voice as smooth as velvet but at the same time as rough as sandpaper.

"No," I said, dragging my fingers through his mussed-up hair. "No way. I'm staying...right...here."

"Good, 'cause I'm just about to go past..." He pulled out and shoved back in. "The point of no return."

"I've...gone...past...that," I panted on the breaths expelled from my lungs with the force of each one of his now-hammering thrusts.

"So have I..." He gritted his teeth. "Is it good for you, Brooke?"

"God, yes." I cupped his cheeks in my hands and stared up at his face. "So good, Logan, you feel so good."

He pumped his hips faster, harder and I clung, welcoming each pound of his powerful muscles. His cock was so hard, rubbing over every spot on my internal walls perfectly and filling me completely.

He kissed me again, his tongue gliding in and around my mouth. His breaths became hard and sharp as he increased to an even stronger, faster tempo. I bucked up to meet him and his body pressed against my clit, hard and relentless, drawing me closer to orgasm. I reveled in the exquisite pleasure he was generating deep within me. Each wild push stroked me toward the explosion, an explosion that held all the promise of an almighty climax.

He tore his mouth from mine and ducked to suckle my nipple. I groaned with delight—mixed with everything else going on in my body the sensation was

exaggerated, intensified. His driving hips didn't let up as he nibbled and sucked then switched to the other breast, treating it to the same lapping and caressing.

"Logan," I said, grasping his shoulders and feeling my clit preparing to reach the pinnacle of sensation. "Come...come with me."

He raised his head and stared deep into my eyes without a pause in rhythm. "Now?"

"Yes...now."

"You sure?"

"Yes, yes..."

He plunged in, deeper, farther, raw power behind the all-consuming movement. It was no longer harnessed and controlled, he was taking what he wanted. Taking what he needed from my body. I sucked in a breath, suspended in a moment of pure ecstasy.

I tumbled over the edge. My whole world splintered, shattered and my pussy erupted into a series of potent spasms that rocked me to my core. I cried out, overwhelmed, wrapping my arms around his body and sinking my nails into his back. I spasmed and pulsed around his cock as lights burst before my eyelids.

He thrust one last time, buried as deep as he could possibly go. His body turned to granite and he swore like the bad boy hockey player he was. He scooped his arms beneath me and held me fixed against his chest. Then he, too, was pulsing, pumping inside me, and with his face nestled in my neck, his breath whooshed from his lungs into my ear louder than any storm.

My internal muscles gripped him, held him and absorbed his last delicious pulsations as I tried to catch my breath around his weight.

"That was..." he said, lifting slightly and relaxing his crushing hold. "I don't think I've ever had such trouble waiting. Stamina is usually my *forte* but Christ, you sap it away, Brooke."

I sucked in a great breath of air. "Is that a good thing?"

"It sure feels good." A crooked smile twisted his mouth. "It just means I might need a little extra training while we're here."

"Mmm." I grinned, smoothing my hands over his tense butt cheeks. "I think we were in perfect synchrony, but practice can be arranged if that's what you really want."

"Oh, yes. It's definitely what I want."

Logan withdrew and stood, pulling off the condom. He walked naked to the kitchen and I heard the trash bin lid lift.

"You always have a condom in your wallet?" I asked, sitting upright and pushing hair from my face.

"Yeah, habit left over from college years—I was ever hopeful."

"Only one?" I wriggled into my panties.

"Yeah, only one." He walked back over carrying two glasses of water and pulled on his boxers. "But don't panic, I noticed Fergal keeps a stash in the main bathroom cabinet." He gave a little snort of amusement. "I bet he brings his girlfriend here all the time, don't you?"

I took a sip of water and reached for my bra. "He's married to Sheila."

Logan frowned and sank onto the sofa. "Oh, yeah, sorry, of course he is."

"You think he's got a girlfriend?"

"I can't discuss that with you, can I?"

"Why not?"

"Well you probably know Sheila if your families are friends."

"No, er, I haven't seen Sheila in years."

"Oh, well in that case, yeah, Fergal has a girlfriend. It's common knowledge amongst the guys, she's a young hottie." He shrugged. "If you like that look."

"What look?"

"Overly made up, stick thin and always teetering about on high heels—you know the sort."

"Really, but he's so old."

"Yeah, old and rich. I guess she likes the rich part best."

I thought of Giselle. She was always perfectly made up, very thin, had an unhealthy obsession with stilettos, and she was definitely interested in Fergal's money. I had no doubt in my mind that Logan was talking about her.

I took a deep, purifying breath and put my arms through my bra straps. Whatever Giselle and Fergal got up to in the villa was not the same as what Logan and I had just done.

"Do you really need to put that on?" Logan said, eying my bra as I lifted my breasts into the cups.

"Yes," I said through a smile. "I do."

"Well it won't be on for long, trust me..." He gave a naughty smile. "That was just a warm-up, remember?"

We watched the rest of the game in our underwear. Logan explained to me about icing calls and penalties and I tried to keep up with the difference between points and goals.

I became distracted when Logan reached for my sore foot at the second period break and carefully peeled off the bandage to check my wounds. Satisfied I wasn't about to drop down dead, he rubbed and massaged my foot, ankle and calf. His big hands were surprisingly gentle for a man who spent most of his time ramming people into boards and whacking pucks with a stick. He swapped to the other foot just before Brick scored a winning goal in the final minute.

"That was great," I said from my reclined position, reluctant to move anywhere. "I can't believe I've never watched a hockey game before." I let out a contented yawn.

"You liked it?"

"Yes, all that whizzing about, barging and fouling. Real entertainment."

He studied me as if he wasn't sure if I was being sarcastic. "You want me to get you a ticket for Saturday night's game?"

"That would be great."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, I'd love to come and watch you play."

"Then I'll get you a great seat." He grinned and hit the remote, silencing the commentators' end-of-match chatter. "And you can come and meet the guys after."

"That would be lovely." I glanced out the glass doors. Dusk had taken hold and deep shadows stretched over the decking. "I think the storm has passed. I can't hear the wind anymore."

Logan looked outside. "Yeah, everything's gone still." He placed my foot on the cushions and stood. As he walked to the door I admired his butt—his boxer briefs clung tight to the outline of his cheeks and the two little dimples at the base of his back were perfectly symmetrical and deepened in turn as he walked.

"Yep, it all looks calm again," he said. "A bit battered and blown, but the sea is gentle and the leaves are still."

"Good," I said, walking over and letting my fingers dip into the dimples I'd been admiring. "That means I can go for a swim."

"You really want to after the sea anemone attack this morning?" He turned to me with a worried crease between his eyes.

"Sure, I can't let that put me off." I shrugged. "I adore swimming in the sea, especially in the evening, it's so cleansing. I'll just stay away from the rock pools." I paused. "Want to join me?"

He licked his lips and his gaze dropped down my body. "On one condition."

"What's that?" I had a fairly good idea what he was about to say. The workings of Logan Taylor's mind were becoming clear to me.

"We go skinny-dipping." His gaze lifted to my eyes and his wide hand circled my waist and smoothed to the hollow of my back. "We take off our clothes and swim as bare as the day we were born."

I raised my brows. "Don't you think someone might see?"

"Not a chance, this is a private stretch of beach and I haven't seen a boat since we got here." He tucked a strand of hair behind my ear and embraced me with both arms. "Go on," he whispered.

I slid my fingers from his smooth dimples to the elastic of his boxers, poked underneath and stroked the top of his butt—it was so hard with muscle, just like the

rest of his body. "Okay," I said, tugging at my bottom lip as a flutter of excitement tickled my stomach. I'd never been skinny-dipping before, I was always too busy worrying about covering up. It would be a new experience. "We'll skinny-dip. But I'm not walking all the way down to the shore without a bra. It's just not comfortable."

Logan let go of me and opened the door. Warm sea air blew in. "Deal," he said as he entwined his fingers with mine and tugged. "That probably gives you about thirty seconds of leeway then."

We stepped over the decking and onto the beach. The sky held the last rays of the light in the west and in the east, dense navy had taken hold. The first stars had come out to play along with a creamy crescent moon.

"What star sign are you?" I asked as our feet halted just before the sea line.

"Aries."

"Of course." I nodded.

"What do you mean, of course?"

"I should have guessed, that's all."

"What, because I'm like a ram, put my head down and charge?" He let go of my hand, reached round my back and released my bra, letting it drop to the sand.

"It's the most masculine sign, fiery, quick-tempered. Warriors are nearly always Aries," I said. The breeze tickled over my nipples and cool air swept over my flesh. The night air on my skin was wonderful, liberating.

"Mmm, I guess that sounds like me." He let his index fingers sweep under the heavy curves of my breasts. "I bet you're the sexy lady, which one is that?" His fingers traveled to the waistband of my panties. "Virgo or something." He stooped and pulled the slip of white material down my thighs and over my knees to my ankles.

I placed a hand on his hard shoulder as I stepped out of each leg. "Good guess."

He stood up with a grin and kicked out of his boxers. His erection sprang forward from his dark pubic hair and the pale moonlight cast sharp angled shadows over his perfect chest and abs.

One glance at his heavy, hungry eyes roaming my body made me wonder if we would get into the sea. "Come on," I said quickly, "let's swim." I waded into the tepid water. Delicate waves captured my lower legs, inviting me deeper. The gentle twilight was hypnotic and I rejoiced at my nakedness with each tiny splash that hit me.

Logan suddenly sprang into action. With a burst of noise and energy he took six enormous strides past me, kicked up spray and dived into the crest of a wave. His arms flew out to the side in great arcs and his head and back curled forward. The wave claimed the lower half of his body as it rolled over itself in a froth of ghostly white and he disappeared into the darkness.

I laughed and then tensed as the wave rolled past me and teetered my balance. He surfaced, flicking water from his hair, and took several fast strokes deeper out to sea. "Come on," he called, stopping and turning to the shore. "It's lovely."

As the sea hit my thighs I fell forward and let it claim me too. The water lifted the weight of my breasts and as I kicked, coolness seeped between my legs. I caught my breath, the feeling of being so at one with the planet was wonderful. I was part of the ocean, part of the sky, part of the universe, there was nothing between us.

"Hey, sexy Virgo," Logan said, suddenly popping up behind me and wrapping his arms around my waist. "Can you stand here?"

I put my feet down into soft sand and found the ebbing water at my waist. "Yes." I curled my hands over his corded forearms and leaned back against his warm, strong body.

"Good," he said as he pressed a kiss to my temple. "'Cause I want to hold you, right here."

I glanced back at the weak light pouring from our villa onto the beach. "Hey, what was that?" Something up the hill, to the right, had flashed from the undergrowth.

"What?"

"I thought I saw something, a flashlight perhaps."

Logan raised his head and his shoulders shifted as he followed my line of sight. "I can't see anything."

"No, I can't now either." I frowned. "Perhaps it was a shooting star or something."

"Mmm, or something." He nuzzled into my neck again as his hands came up to palm the underside of my breasts. "You have the best..." He stroked his thumbs over my rigid nipples, already tight from the coolness of the water. "The best breasts I've ever had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with." He slid his big hands up and cupped them entirely. "And they fit so well in my hands, perfect, it's like they were made for each other, two halves coming together."

I let out a sigh as the heat from his palms absorbed through my skin and settled between my legs. I leaned farther into him and his erection lodged tighter into the hollow of my back. "I'm glad you approve," I said, tipping my head to the winking stars and letting the breeze lift my hair from my shoulders. Perhaps we were two halves and this crazy way of our paths crossing had been planned millions of years ago in the heavens.

"Sweetie, I more than approve. You've got me flying as high as those stars up there."

"That's *your* star," I said, pointing. "The one with a hint of red."

"It is?" He lifted his head.

"Yes, that's Mars, the ruler of Aries."

"Mars, as in the planet."

"Yes, as in the planet, but Mars is also the Roman god of war, he's confident and aggressive, full of ambition and energy."

"I think you're describing me perfectly," Logan murmured, pressing a kiss to the pulse in my neck. "Especially when I'm hammering an opponent into submission." His hands left my breasts and dipped below the water line tickling at my waist.

"He's also very," I whispered, "sexual...in an assertive, impulsive way."

"I'm feeling very sexual now," he mumbled onto my shoulder. "In an assertive, impulsive way." He sneaked his right hand lower as his other arm held my body tighter to his. "Open your legs," he whispered into my ear as he ruffled his fingertips through my pubic hair. "Let me touch you."

I went to turn around, I wanted more. I wanted to touch him. I wanted him inside me, but he halted my movements effortlessly and with barely a splash. I huffed in frustration and a chuckle came up from his chest. "Easy, sweetie, I haven't got a condom hidden in the waves, you know." He pushed my feet apart with one of his and slipped his fingertips through the top folds of my pussy. "Let me give you pleasure as you look at the stars and the ocean laps against your delectable body."

He didn't wait for me to answer and my knees turned weak as his clever fingers slid through hot flesh, easing apart folds to let the sea swirl over my clitoris. I reached back and hooked my hands over his shoulders, just managing to link them at the nape of his neck before I turned into a boneless heap.

"Tell me what you want, Brooke," he said, his body holding me like an anchor in a storm. "Tell me what you want from me." As he spoke the stubble on his chin rubbed my face and I knew he was looking down at my breasts lifted up to the night sky.

"I want you to..."

He reached farther down and slid a big finger into my entrance. Cold and hot, all at the same time, it took away my breath and my words.

"You want me to what?" His voice was as smooth as treacle—thick, black, sugary treacle.

"I want you to..." He added another finger and pushed up higher, stretching me exquisitely and sharply. But the heat from the stretch was immediately washed away by the cool water around me, in me, the fire dampened so only the intense filling sensation remained. I moaned in appreciation and contracted around him. How did he expect me to answer his questions when he did stuff like that?

"Maybe you want me to do this?" He pressed the heel of his hand over my clit and caught the tight bud in a long, slow glide as he pushed into me again.

"Oh, god, yes," I groaned, suddenly glad of his arm supporting me. "Yes, yes, I want that, that's it."

"Anything else?" He began a steady pump in and out of me, never releasing my clit as he finger-fucked me.

"No, no that's good." I stared up at Venus. Phosphorus-white it glowed down from the sky, which was rapidly becoming dense as velvet. I stared until my eyes blurred

then squeezed them shut. Lost to everything except what Logan's hand was doing to me. Where Logan's hand was taking me.

"Is there a man in your life, Brooke?" He tensed as a stronger wave pressed against us, relaxing when it passed.

"No, no." I shuddered with the sweet pleasure his touch was creating. It was building again, every cell in my body was tuned in to his promise of satisfaction and I was getting edgy with the need to come. "Not anymore."

"Why, what did you do with him?"

"I dumped him, he was a liar and a cheat," I said in a strained voice.

"Mmm, sounds like you need a warrior to go sort him out."

"He's sorted...ancient history."

"But he hurt you?" His hot, open mouth just below my ear sent a shivery warmth sliding down my neck as his breathing picked up.

"Yes, but it was my fault. I never should have kept taking him back."

"You like to see the best in people, Brooke."

"I guess." I loved the way he said my name, all soft and deep with the double "oo" extended in a drawl, it made my mouth go dry and my body ache for him to say it again.

"But he broke your faith, damaged your ability to trust, am I right, Brooke?"

"Yeah, I guess." Why were we having this conversation as I teetered on the brink of orgasm? Was it because he knew I was too distracted to tell him anything but the truth?

"Maybe I could give you that."

"What?" My mind wasn't keeping up. Who could blame me?

"Maybe I could give you back your ability to trust a man."

"Mmm, maybe..."

He upped the pace and with the heel of his hand added small rotations, sending my clit into a state of frenzy.

"Ahh..." I said, curling my toes in the sand. "I'm, going to, ahh, Logan..."

"Trust me to look after you, trust me take you higher than you ever thought your body would go, let me give you pleasure you didn't even know existed."

"Yes, yes, Oh, god, Logan." White-hot liquid was pumping from my pelvis, flooding the rest of my body, preparing for takeoff. Had this moment been written in the stars for me? It sure felt like destiny.

He sped up his movements and held me tighter. The cool waves splashed around us but I felt burning hot. I was getting ready to come. I could taste the salt in the air and the scent of his skin had settled in my mouth and nose, filling my lungs—filling my soul.

"Your pussy feels so greedy for me, it's hot and wet and clamping my fingers, sucking me in." He pressed his cheek to mine. "Look up, open your eyes and look up at the sky."

I opened my eyes and searched out Mars. The stars around it were like fireworks, dancing and partying all over the place, celebrating with me. I groaned and sank down farther onto Logan's impaling fingers. I could hardly catch my breath, it had become lodged in my throat as every fiber in my body braced for the eruption.

"Come, Brooke, come, trust me to hold you and give you that, come for me, sweetie."

His hot, gravelly words sent the climax rolling through my body like a tsunami of pure bliss. The moment seemed to go on forever as Logan's strong, determined fingers kept me riding through the waves of sensation. "Logan, Logan," I half shouted, half groaned as my spine arched and my pelvis tipped greedily for his thrusts. His hard cock jabbed into my back and his breaths were loud in my ear.

I let out a long, low moan as a last tremor of pleasure tore through me. Mars still twinkled down. I focused on its ruby aura and let myself fly high on life, high on lust.

"That was amazing," I panted, releasing my hands from behind his neck and hanging like a rag doll in his arms.

"Tell me about it." He pulled his hand from between my legs and spun me into his chest. "You're so in tune with my touch."

"Your touch is pretty awesome." I pressed a kiss to his small, dark nipple and curled my fingers into the wet coils of his chest hair.

"I'm glad you think so." He tilted my face to his with the crook of his finger.

I looked up into his eyes, small creases shot from the sides as they sparkled down at me through the darkness.

"I've never come so hard or for so long," I said. "Only a man who completely understands a woman's needs can do that, Logan."

"You think so?"

"Yeah, Tina was obviously never really into men, because you could wreck a woman for all other guys, raise the bar so high it can never be matched." I caught his face in my hands, and as my pussy gave a final spasm I kissed him hard and appreciatively. I, for one, had definitely never encountered a man like Logan Taylor, and I was already beginning to wonder if I ever would again.

Chapter Five

We gathered our underwear and walked back to the villa hand in hand. A shiver of cold attacked my damp, sated body and as we stepped inside, Logan quickly reached for a huge, fluffy towel.

"You okay?" he asked, wrapping it around my shoulders and giving my back a gentle rub.

"Better than okay." I hugged it around my chest and glanced at his nakedness. His cock looked fit to burst. He was still so hard and engorged while I was reveling in satisfaction, utterly fulfilled.

"I'm going to take a shower," he said, shoving his hand through his hair and turning away.

"Want company?"

He looked over his shoulder and raised one brow. "I thought you'd be too tired after your orgasmic, cosmic experience."

"I can't imagine ever being too tired for a shower with the infamous Phoenix."

His brows lowered. "Don't call me that."

"Why not? I thought everyone did."

"Because you're not everyone and I like the fact you call me Logan. Nobody else does, not anymore. But it is my name."

"Okay, but if you don't like Phoenix then why do you have that?" I pointed to the tattoo I'd just spotted on his perfect left butt cheek. It was a flapping orange and red bird with its beak stretched open, a phoenix rising from scarlet and yellow flames.

He smoothed his hand over it. "Phoenix will always be part of me. I guess I just like the fact that you had a chance to get to know me without him getting in the way."

I stepped up and touched the bird's outstretched wings, traced my finger along the lavish feathers and the pointed beak. His skin was cool and damp, small goose bumps invaded his flesh. "Come on," I said. "Let's get the hot water on."

We went into Logan's bedroom. His en-suite was much more lavish than mine. He had a huge double walk-in shower decorated in plush gold and soft cream, a triple sink unit and a Jacuzzi bath.

I hit the faucet and the shower filled with streams of pounding water from several different heads on the ceiling and set in the tiles. He stepped in and I was close behind him.

"Turn around," I said firmly, feeling a sudden need for control.

"What?" He frowned at me through the billowing steam.

"Turn around." I pressed my hand to his shoulder. "My turn to touch you."

His brow twitched and so did his cock. He did as he was told and faced the wall, offering me his long, wide back, tight butt and muscular legs coated in soft dark hairs that thinned to nothing at the top of his thighs.

"Spread your hands out," I said, cupping his triceps and urging his arms forward so his palms pressed against the tiles. "Like you've been arrested."

He grunted deeply in amusement. "You getting all dominant police lady on me?" he asked, dropping his head and spreading out his fingers. The water filled his thick hair and sluiced down the gutter of his spine.

"Why, can't you handle it?" I tickled my finger through the river of water in the hollow of his back. "A woman taking control of you?"

"Oh, I can handle it fine, but just remember, if we're taking turns then be careful what you get me going on, I might just finish it."

"Oh, I think I know what will get you going, and I'm pretty sure I can finish it." I reached for a big yellow sponge and filled it with dark red shower gel. Squeezed and massaged until my fingers were white with thick, creamy foam and the scent of ginger and cinnamon filled the shower.

As the water beat on my back I placed the sponge on the top curve of his shoulders and wiped from left to right. The pouring water slid the bubbles over his gleaming, golden skin. I squeezed some more and watched the soapy stream run through every trough and dip of his back, down the neat crack of his butt and on to his solid thighs, finally settling around his ankles before swirling down the drain.

I touched the phoenix again with my fingertips and trailed upward to several crescent nail marks at the base of his shoulder blades. Stab marks from my frenzied orgasm on the sofa. "Sorry about this," I said.

"My favorite kind of wound," he said in a tight voice.

"Yes, but I'm still sorry if I hurt you."

He huffed. "You didn't hurt me." His voice was as dry as he was wet. "But if you feel bad and want to make it up to me, feel free to, at any time."

I knew exactly how I was going to make it up to him. "Okay, turn around."

He shifted his big body in the shower and loomed over me with the look of the devil in the depths of his blue eyes. But I pressed firmly against his water-slick chest until he was backed against the tiles. "I've finished with your shoulders and butt now," I said. "Though I reckon your front needs some attention."

He swept his tongue over his bottom lip and narrowed his eyes. He looked like he was done playing my game and was about to grab me. But he didn't, he stayed where I'd put him, though his fists clenched and his muscles tensed.

Deliberately slow, I refilled the sponge with shower gel, worked up a lather and set it on his right collarbone. Sliding it to the left I squeezed and watched as white froth trickled down his sternum, caught through the fuzz at his navel and settled in his pubic

hair. "You're getting good and clean now," I said, shifting the sponge to the right collarbone again. "What do you think, Logan?"

"Clean as I'm ever gonna get," he growled as a muscle flexed in his cheek. I'd noticed this happened when he was getting frustrated or impatient. I couldn't decide if it was cute or dangerous – probably the latter.

I dropped the sponge on the floor and rested my hands on top of his soapy hips, right where the sharp angle of muscle tapered inward and downward from his six-pack. "Does that mean you're always a little bit dirty?" I licked my lips. "Even when you're soaped up in the shower?"

"Only when I'm in the shower and your mouth is looking so damn appealing."

"You like my mouth?" I raised my brows.

"Hell, yeah, sexiest mouth I've ever seen."

He leaned in for a kiss but I dodged and shoved him back against the tiles by his hips. "Mmm, I'm glad about that," I said, pulling provocatively on my lower lip with my teeth. "Because I'm hungry, really hungry." I looked down at his erect cock jutting forward, slid my fingers into his pubes and tangled them in wiry hairs and bubbles. Then I headed lower and wrapped my right hand around his thick, rigid shaft and sent the left to cup his balls.

Logan let out a groan. "Ahh, fuck," he said, looking down. "Your little hands are so sweet on me."

I squeezed until I could feel his pulse beating in my palm and stroked up to the wide head, learning the shape and texture of him.

"Ah, that's it," he said, shutting his eyes and tipping his head back until it rested on the tiles.

I gave him another stroke downward, right to the base, and glided back up again. Then sank to my knees, making sure my body had as much contact as possible with his as I went, and finally, through the steam, came face-to-face with his big, hungry cock.

He muttered something approving and suddenly I couldn't wait to feel Logan Taylor's beautiful cock slide onto my tongue. I opened up, greedy for him. He twined his fingertips in my wet hair and locked his knees as I guided him into my mouth.

I had to open to the max. The wide, crested head only just fit. Like the rest of his big body, his cock was on a different scale to everyone else. But as the musky, slightly soapy flavor of him invaded my taste buds and made me dizzy with longing, I knew I could do it. I knew I could take all of him.

Determinedly, I beat down my gag reflex and fed him in farther with my hand. Thick throbbing veins and skin as smooth as silk rode over my tongue and palate.

He groaned above me. "Fuck, Brooke," he said in a tight voice. "You don't pussyfoot about do you? Straight for a deep throat."

In answer I cupped his testicles again, where the hair was sparser, and rolled and fondled them like two balls in a bag, my fingertips gently exploring their shape through loose skin.

"Ah, fuck, you're turning me inside out." His fingers tightened against my scalp and his knees jerked, sending him farther forward in a sudden rush.

I dragged hot, misty air through my nose as he hit the sensitive flesh of the back of my throat and lodged there. My heart was hammering, my own body flying.

I created a strong suction. With my thumb and index finger I set up a steady push-pull at the base of his cock. My tongue laved and fondled his shaft as I bobbed backward and forward at his groin, taking him deeper and deeper each time.

"Brooke," he gasped above me. "Watch it, sweetie, or I'm gonna come down that pretty throat of yours."

That was my plan, but I didn't stop to tell him.

"I mean it, Brooke." His fingers were like claws in my hair.

I felt empowered and utterly sensual. I had this big, strong man at my mercy and tottering on the edge of his control. I cast my gaze up, his face was lowered, hanging down. His heavy-lidded eyes caught mine, his teeth sank into his lower lip and his hands tightened further into my hair roots. "Stop now, Brooke, or you're gonna get it," he said in a voice so hoarse it almost wasn't recognizable as his.

I had no intention of stopping, I could almost feel the cum boiling in his scrotum, getting ready to jettison from his cock. I was greedy for him, hungry to taste his desire for me. I upped the pace and tightened the suction.

"Sweet Jesus," he panted. "Have mercy." His hands captured my head in a viselike hold and he forged into my mouth. Sank right to the back of my throat, even farther than before.

He stilled.

Any other time, any other man, I would have fought and balked, but Logan had me just about coming with the wildness of his urgency and his domination over my mouth.

I lashed him with my tongue, sucked like my life depended on it and massaged his balls. I could breathe later. I was consuming him, taking all of him. His body was mine. He was a hostage to the pleasure I was giving.

He arched his hips tighter into my face. His cock penetrated the very back of my throat and he hissed and cursed above me as semen burst from the tip of his cock, flooding straight down my throat in long, milky jets. It was never-ending, ripping out of him, flowing from his body into mine as he held my head in a firm grip.

I swallowed, managed to drag in air, and continued my assault on the base of his shaft and his retracted balls. I let my finger slide over the thin fold of skin between his sack and his anus, tickled and rubbed the patch of flesh I found.

"Oh, fuck," he said. "Wicked little..."

The last furious pulse of liquid spilled into my mouth.

"Fuck, you trying to finish me off?" he gasped above me. "Good thing I'm fit."

He slid from my mouth and in one quick movement hauled me up against his body. His strength and speed had me dizzy as my feet lifted from the shower floor before he put me down and wrapped me against his panting chest.

"That worked for you then," I said breathlessly, blinking as water poured down my face.

"You know damn well it did." He pressed his lips to mine, hard and fast before saying, "What are you, a witch or something?"

"I've been called that a few times," I said on a grin. "When I chatter on about fate and karma and auras, not usually when I take a man in my mouth."

A slight frown marred his handsome features.

"What?" I pulled my head back and looked into his eyes. His lashes were heavy with drips, his lips tight and his cheeks had risen in color beneath his tan.

"I don't like to think of you having another man in your mouth," he said as if he knew he had no claim on me, either my mouth or my past, but couldn't help saying it anyway.

I tilted my head.

"What you just did was special, well, it was for me, I'd like to think it was for you too."

"Oh, trust me." I cupped his jaw with my hands and smiled. "That was *very* special for me."

"Good." The lines on his forehead relaxed.

I looked down at his chest—the wet hairs were plastered to his skin and my breasts were flattened below his nipples.

"What? What is it, Brooke?"

"I've never let anyone, you know." I looked back up into his face. "I've never let anyone come in my mouth before."

"You haven't?" His brows shot up.

"No, I usually pull away."

"So what was different?"

"I don't know, I guess I just wanted you to have as much fun as I did, out in the sea."

"Oh, I think we can safely say I did." He kissed me again, long and deep. "And thank you, knowing that makes it even more special."

* * * * *

I slept in Logan's room that night. After a bowl of pasta and a glass of water we stretched out naked under the cool sheets. Within minutes he was asleep, his breaths coming slow and deep and his hard muscles as relaxed as I imagined they ever were.

With my head resting on his chest I listened to his heart pounding steadily. I soon realized it had picked up the same rhythm and speed as mine. It was as though our hearts were beating as one, our bodies in perfect tune with one another. My karma felt positive again, balanced. Logan was as good for my aura I was for his. The only blot in my blue was the need to tell Fergal I didn't want the money. Once I'd done that, all would be perfect, all would be harmonious. We still had another two days to enjoy one another before it was back to work, study and the nerves of the exam.

Chapter Six

I woke to the sounds of the sea and the feathery touch of a fresh, salty breeze on my shoulders. Easing my limbs across the bed, I found it empty, but I wasn't concerned, something instinctively told me Logan was nearby.

I rolled over and saw the French doors in his room flung open to the day. A small, yellow bird landed on a branch softly swaying between me and the beach, and began a staccato tune. Sighing, I inhaled Logan's scent, lingering on his pillow. I could get used to waking up in heaven. It suited me very well.

But I was hungry and knew I'd soon have to cave to my caffeine addiction. So I slipped from the sheets, pulled on panties and a bra, and because I couldn't be bothered to go to my room, shrugged into Logan's shirt that he'd worn to the cafe the day before. It was enormous on me, it hung down to my knees and the short sleeves billowed way past my elbow. But it smelled of him, and for once I felt tiny, delicate. It was a good feeling and I padded out of the room humming a summer tune.

I found Logan sitting under the parasol in just shorts. He was reading a paper and sipping from a mug. There was a plate on the table beside him holding a scattering of crumbs.

"Morning," I said, resting my hand between his warm shoulder blades. "What time is it?"

"Gone noon."

"Gosh, I slept in." I paused. Everything about him was stiff with tension. "You okay?"

"I am." He scraped back his chair and stood.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You want coffee and a bagel?" His voice was hard, his jaw tight.

"Please." I tilted my head, searching his face for clues to the source of his tension.

His gaze scanned down my body. "Suits you," he said, his mouth twitching into a half-smile.

He disappeared into the kitchen and I rested back into the soft cushions of a chair, wondering what he meant by "I am". The small yellow bird hopped onto the deck and I tossed Logan's crumbs onto the wood. He pecked at them with his beak, his little gray feet tapping and his nervous eyes darting as he searched for more.

"Here you go." Logan came out with a tray, placing a hot, buttered bagel and a steaming mug of coffee in front of me. He sat and pushed the paper my way. "You better look at this."

"Why?" My spine tensed at the stiff tone of his voice. "What's the matter, Logan?"

"It just landed in the mailbox by the gate."

"It's the paper, it comes every day."

"You've probably never seen a paper like this before." The little muscle in his cheek was hammering away like a tiny drum just under his skin. "Look at the sports section."

Sipping my coffee, I turned to the sports pages.

My hand began to shake. Drips of dark liquid spilled from my mug onto the paper, spreading like ink on silk. I read the headline three times before I believed what my eyes were seeing.

"PHOENIX AND HIS BIRD," it shouted, then in smaller writing, "Orlando Vipers star Phoenix was far from grieving last night as his team struggled to narrowly beat the Washington Capitals. Vacationing in paradise with a mystery woman, he looked the picture of happiness and contentment..."

I couldn't read any more. Beneath the headline was a black and lime green night shot. It was me. It was me and Logan in the water. Logan was pressed behind me and my head was tipped into the curve of his shoulder. We were up to our waists in waves, and his arms were wrapped around me. One beneath my breasts and one beneath the sea line. His lips touched my extended neck and my arms were raised and locked behind his head.

I pinched in a juddering breath and shakily set down my coffee before I spilled the lot. At least the paper had had the decency to fix a black rectangle over my jutting breasts. But it was clear to anyone who looked we were naked and hot for one another. And by the look on my face, even through the shady grains of the picture, I was having a wild time.

"Oh. My. God." I eventually managed. "How, what...I don't understand. Who?"

Logan dropped his brows. "It must have been that flash you saw coming from the bushes, there must have been some lowlife, scum-of-the-earth photographer camping out up there trying to dig up dirt on me. I bet he couldn't believe his luck when he saw us skinny-dipping." He shook his head. "Could have been a camera lens reflecting in the moonlight you saw but more likely just his flashlight as he was moving about in the undergrowth."

"But, but, the picture is so, so, in your face, it's, well, it's quite rude really, isn't it."

"Yeah, it's definitely got the shock factor. He'll have been paid big-time for it. I'm hot news this week after getting suspended."

I rubbed my hand over my temple. I couldn't stop staring at my own face. It hardly looked like me. I was in ecstasy, my mouth slack, my eyes heavenward and my hair lifting in the wind. I looked wanton, sex-crazed—I looked primitive. The way my back was arched against Logan's body was downright erotic. Something funky had really happened in the universe last night for this to land on my breakfast table this

morning—something funky and messed up that had one hell of a sense of humor and absolutely no respect for our privacy.

"I'm really sorry, Brooke." Logan rubbed his hand around the back of his neck. "I'll speak to your father and apologize. He'll be having fits. You were sent here to study, not make out with me."

I looked into Logan's concerned eyes. The pale blue was marred with shadows and lines of worry shot from the corners. I searched out his aura and sure enough, black streaks were stabbing at his brilliant blood red again. But what he'd just said was all wrong, I *had* been sent here for him, to entertain him, to keep him company.

"It's okay, I'll speak to him," I said, resting my hand on his forearm. "I'm twenty-eight years old, so I guess my father pretty much accepts I'm not a virgin anymore." That father lie was going to mess up my karma big-time. I had to stop myself glancing over my shoulder for the lurking bad luck.

"Yeah, that may be, but I'm sure he won't want you hooking up with a guy like me just before you get down to serious academic work and making something of your life."

"A guy like you?" I tipped my head. "What do you mean?"

Logan shifted his gaze to the sea and his forehead furrowed in a frown. "A jock." His chest rose and fell as he took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Someone in the news, hassled by the press, divorced, bad-tempered... The list goes on, you know."

"Logan—"

"Aggressive, impulsive, bad reputation, no professional qualifications, coming up for retirement in the next five years when I get to mid-thirties, sooner if I get injured—"

"Logan, will you stop it," I said firmly. "Yes, this is a pile of rubbish," I jabbed at the paper with my fingers. "I can't even bring myself to read it all, but it's not your fault our privacy was invaded, this is a private villa, that patch of land is dense with vegetation, someone must have climbed the fence, hacked their way through it and sat through the storm hoping we'd show up. He, or she, was very determined, and there was nothing we could do."

"But I should have thought about it when you said you saw a light. I'm used to crap like this but you're not. It was my responsibility, it's my fame that's affected you and your reputation."

"There's two of us standing there," I said, looking at the photo again. "Two of us responsible for where we have sex."

Logan picked up his mug, drained the last of the coffee.

"This is not your fault and I don't blame you... Neither will my father," I said. "And besides, no one is interested in me, or who I am. They're just interested in you and what you're doing while you're out of the game."

"Well, there's no prizes for guessing now, are there?" He lifted his head and with relief I saw a sparkle return. "At least it boosts my rep in the locker room. The guys will know now I don't turn off all women."

I could have retorted that he would turn on one hundred percent of straight women. And that every woman who looked at that photo would be jealous as hell, but I selfishly decided not to put that thought into his head. I kinda liked having him to myself.

"I've already spoken to Fergal's assistant," he said. "She's upping security around the villa's grounds. We won't be bothered again while we're here."

"Oh, okay, good."

He studied me for a moment. "You'll still come to the game on Saturday night, won't you?"

"Of course I will."

"I was worried you wouldn't."

"Why?"

"Because this is my life, this is what it's like, day to day, and if we leave a game together you'll have to expect interest from the press." He reached for my hand. "Since Tina left they haven't had any fodder for gossip when it comes to my sex life." His right eyebrow twitched. "Not to say I've been abstinent, I just haven't met anyone I was happy to go public with, be seen out with until now." His eyes locked with mine. "And now there's a 'mystery woman', there's going to be a lot of interest."

"Well, this is one hell of a way to get seen out with someone."

He lifted the back of my hand to his mouth. "Was good, though, wasn't it?" His hot breath tickled my skin and sent little darts of pleasure up my arm.

I looked at my face again in the picture. There was no denying what he'd just said, it was written all over my expression. "Yes," I said, "it was really, really good."

* * * * *

Logan went for a run on the beach and left me with my bagel and coffee. I couldn't help but read the whole article once he'd disappeared into the distance. My gaze was pulled to it like a magnet. It was like having a big cake and being told not to eat it, irresistible even though you knew it would make you feel sick.

"Vacationing in paradise, he looked the picture of happiness and contentment. Fergal Gunner is going to be glad he sent his best, not to mention most expensive forward away for the week, sun, sea and...sand being the perfect antidote for a player who's lost his temper one time too many lately.

"Great things will be expected now from Phoenix on Saturday against the New York Islanders, if he's not getting a touch of every puck and a piece of every play then questions will be asked about his future in Orlando. Is he financially viable? One bad game doesn't make a season, but any more altercations or visits to the sin bin and the bad boy of ice will be skating right out of the tunnel and right off the team."

I pulled in a deep breath. Bad boy of ice. Logan was bad all right, but in the best possible way. I looked at the picture again and a blush came to my cheeks. I wasn't the

sort of girl who normally indulged in shenanigans such as skinny-dipping. And I should have known it was never going to be without consequence, not with a hockey player, not with a big, sexy, dominant man who'd definitely fallen under the spell of my curves.

But the thought of us being watched last night, watched from the bushes by someone with a long lens and a night-vision camera, gave me a weird thrill at the same time as it made me hopping mad. It had turned into a sex exhibition for some money-hungry photographer, and now the whole country was reading about me and seeing my face at the pinnacle of pleasure.

My blush receded. At least I didn't really have to worry about any family seeing it, since I didn't have any who walked this earth anymore and Giselle would no doubt think it a hoot.

I felt the heat on my cheeks return at the thought of Max, my boss at The Grill, an avid NHL fan, reading this particular sports section. Seeing my face contorted with ecstasy and the big, black block over my breasts would probably cause him to choke on his morning bacon roll and keel over dead. That would send my balance out of kilter for years.

Sighing, I licked butter from my fingers and finished my coffee. I thought of Saturday, of having to face the crowds, the press and the other players now that I'd promised to go. It obviously meant a lot to Logan. We hadn't known each other long but there was a strong connection between us. Something drawing us together like the faithful flock to Mecca. I didn't want to fall in love with him, or even get a crush on him. It was too soon and too complicated, at least until I refused the money and removed that component of our paths crossing.

I looked at the gentle undulation of the waves stretching over the horizon. It was impossible to change history. I knew that. I was here because I'd wanted money, a whole lot of money, and there was no changing that fact. But regardless of the method of our meeting the heavens *had* brought our souls together. All I had to do now was take the money out of the equation for the future. Because it just didn't seem right and it certainly didn't bode well for my karma.

Carrying my breakfast things into the kitchen, I paused at the phone on the hall table. I had a sudden urge to speak to Giselle, tell her everything and see what she made of it all.

I dialed her silver cell phone. It rang six times before I remembered it was her afternoon to meet Fergal for their "cream date". I dropped the phone back in the receiver as an image of Giselle and an old, gray, skinny guy covered in whipped cream entered my head. I shuddered and headed toward my bedroom. It was an image I could have done without.

Shutting myself in my en-suite, I conjured a picture of Logan's big, hunky, golden body covered in whipped cream—whipped cream topped with strawberries and chocolate sprinkles—and maybe a few marshmallows and cherries for good measure.

Now that was much better, and it brought a smile to my face as I set about my morning beauty regimen.

An hour later, just as I was getting bored of my nursing texts, Logan appeared in the doorway. He paused, reaching up and curling his fingers over the doorframe and hung there, eyeing me sprawled on the bed.

His dark, rumpled hair suggested he, too, was fresh from the shower. I licked my lips, he was temptation personified with his broad bare chest, loose gray sweats and bare feet. My gaze slid down his body – apart from a few scars, dents and nicks, his skin and muscles were as solid and flawless as polished brass. I felt my body tingle as a flood of need and female appreciation swamped through me.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Yes, fine.” Apart from the fact I was getting so turned-on just by looking at him that I might actually fling my desperate body at his any second.

“Sure?”

“Not a lot we can do about the newspaper is there?” I guessed that was what he was talking about, rather than my nymph-like thoughts.

“Nope, once it’s printed it’s out there, but tomorrow it’ll be old news.”

I swung my feet off the bed and tossed my book to the side. My nerves were jittery and my heart fluttery, I didn’t trust myself to stand.

Logan let go of the doorframe and walked toward me, glancing at my discarded book with hooded eyes. “You finished reading?”

“Yes, I’m bored stiff of anatomy.”

His brows raised and an amused grin tilted his lips. “Mmm, anatomy makes me stiff too...especially yours.”

My breath scratched my throat. I wanted him so badly. Now that I knew how Logan could make me feel I was greedy for more, much more, and I had to let him know. “So what are you going to do about it...bad boy?” I reached for the waistband of his pants, tugging the elastic and urging him between my knees. Another, even stronger rush of desire seized me as the scent of the rich shower gel we’d used last night filtered up my nose and reminded me of him filling my mouth.

A feral look crossed his face and the amusement left his eyes. He glanced at my breasts, barely contained in a tight white tank top. “I’m going to give you a real good, real interesting lesson in anatomy.” He swiped his tongue out the corner of his mouth and licked across his top lip. “You’re gonna learn all about your body and exactly what it likes best.”

My nipples tightened. Just his gaze turned me on to the point where I was buzzing, actually contracting my internal muscles and imagining him in me again. It was crazy, this new, uncontrollable lust. I’d never felt anything like it before.

He stooped and curled his fingers beneath my t-shirt, yanked it up and over my head. My hair piled around my shoulders and I pulled in a tight breath.

"Damn, that's almost too pretty to take off," he said, looking at my pale pink bra laced with tiny flowers. "Almost, but not quite." He slid his expert fingers behind my back, released the hook and slipped it from my body.

My gaze was caught by the growing bulge beneath the soft material of his pants. Impatiently I tugged and dropped them to his thighs. He wore nothing beneath and his hard cock sprang out, right in front of my breasts, the engorged head just an inch from my cleavage, highlighted by sunlight spilling in from the open French doors.

"Now that gives me an idea for your first lesson," he said, palming my breasts. "A damn good idea." His voice was so sandpaper rough it had my skin prickling.

He pressed his hips forward so the length of his shaft wedged in between my breasts, flattened his palms, stretched out his fingers and gently angled my soft breasts so they totally surrounded his cock, creating a long, fleshy channel to hold him tight.

His face darkened and his abs, right in front of my face, turned to a wall of bricks. "Fuck, that's nice," he said. His gaze caught mine. His eyes shone a deeper blue than usual, glazed with lust. "You okay with this, sweetie?"

How could I not be? It felt wonderful, the sensation of his hot cock pressed against my sternum. And the delicate inner section of my breasts holding his satiny skin was so erotic my panties were getting wetter and hotter by the second. "Yes," I said, pressing my hands over his and increasing the pressure around his cock. "Yes, Logan, it's good for me. Really good."

He let out a groan and dipped his knees so his cock dropped to the bottom of my squeezed cleavage then shifted upward, dragging his hard shaft through my skin until the scarlet head surfaced.

I let out a moan to match his. My stomach clenched and my pelvis tightened. My nipples were so aroused they'd twisted to hard bullets poking toward him.

His head tipped back as he dipped again, rode back up and then repeated the action. I pressed harder against his hands, giving him permission to tighten the channel he was fucking. I wasn't going to break.

"God, this must be every man's fantasy," he said on a sharp breath. "So fucking hot..." The tips of his thumbs found my nipples and he plucked the stiff peaks.

I let go of his hands, left him to hold my breasts in place, and reached for his bare butt. The skin was so smooth over marble muscle. God, I loved his butt. When I looked up at him, there was a mixture of raw possession and sweet tenderness in his eyes as he stared down at my body taking his.

"Come," I said in a voice so husky I surprised myself. "Like this, come on me."

I didn't need to tell him twice. His nostrils flared and he ducked down and smoothed upward with more force. He shut his eyes tight and bared his teeth, hissing in a breath.

Then he pulled back, grabbed his cock in his hands and began working his shaft, hard and urgent, jerking it in a rapid back-and-forth movement.

"Hold yourself together," he said in a tight voice. "Quick."

I let go of his sweet butt. Lifted my breasts again, squashing them together. Watching him pump himself was hot, *so hot*, and he was so near to climax I could see his slit widening. I trembled with need of my own, I could barely catch my breath.

"Yes, yes, fucking...yes..." he grunted as the first warm, creamy splatter hit my cleavage dead center. He groaned as if in agony and his cock pulsated again. More pearly jets shot from the head, spurting onto my breasts. He directed his cock to the left and the right, covering me in his sticky release.

As the last drip seeped from the end, he stooped and his mouth caught mine, plunging his tongue in as he threaded his hands into my hair and held me tight. "You're something else," he murmured between kisses. "Too damn good to be true."

I was as breathless as he was. "Wait there," he said, releasing me and kicking completely out of his pants. "I'll be right back."

Chapter Seven

I sat on the edge of the bed, heart hammering, dizzy with lust, waiting and wondering.

He appeared back at the door in less than a minute, white washcloth in one hand, white beach bag in the other.

"What's in there?" I asked, pushing my hair from my sweat-damp face and eyeing the bag.

His gaze deepened and he stepped closer, taking up my space and reminding me of his dominating size. His cock had gone to full hardness again already.

"Just something I found in the cupboard in my bedroom." He put the bag on the bed and gently wiped the cloth over my chest. It was warm and damp and he wiped away his semen effortlessly.

"Strip," he said.

I stood on legs weak with anticipation and wriggled out of my sweatpants and pink panties. He pulled open the bag and propped it on the bedside table.

I leaned over to take a look. Straightaway I found myself flushing on my cheeks, my chest and in between my legs. There were a pair of black leather handcuffs, several tubes of lube—some used, some new—a scattering of condoms and two enormous pink vibrators. There was a smaller box, too, sealed with film from the shop, a cellophane window revealed a long, tapered sex toy with a wide base and two folded arms. My blood pressure rocketed. I had no intention of going near someone else's vibrator, but that thing was new and Logan was eyeing it with a decidedly wicked glint.

"What's that?" I asked, a small spurt of concern mixing with my curiosity and desire.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," he replied, cupping my face in his hands. His voice deepened. "I want to take you somewhere exciting and sexy and so damn hot it'll blow both our minds." His lips were almost touching mine, his low voice a hypnotic murmur. "Do you think you can trust me, sweetie, to take you there and bring you back?"

I looked at the naked need in his eyes. He'd just come but he was still hungry for me, not satisfied until I was. "Yes," I said quietly, "Yes, I trust you, Logan."

"Enough to let me have total control over you and even if you think it's not what you want, allow me to carry on?" He licked his lips. "Trust me to show you how good I can make you feel deep, deep inside?" His eyes gleamed with self-assurance as the deep timbre of his voice vibrated through me.

"Yes." I had no idea what I was agreeing to but I trusted him to be in charge of my sexual satisfaction more than I'd ever trusted any other man. "Yes."

I didn't have time to change my mind. Quick as a flash he had my wrists down by my stomach and pressed together in just one of his hands. In a swift movement he wrapped the cool stiff handcuffs around them and clicked them secure. I went to tug them but instead squeaked in surprise as he threw me down on the bed and dropped his bulk on top of me.

His carnal smile ripped a tremor from my guts. I got the feeling he was done with gentle seduction, and the sheer size and strength of him had me delirious with anticipation. "I'm going to fuck you now, Brooke. You ready?" I suddenly got an idea of what it must be like for an opponent facing him on the ice—I was glad he liked me.

"Yes!" I said, spreading my legs and trying to hook my captured wrists over his head. But he shifted, gripped my waist and flipped me onto my hands and knees. Pulses of heat and pleasure tore through me as I looked down at my breasts hanging heavy and aroused. He moved me around as if I was a plaything supplied for his enjoyment.

"Keep still," he said as I wriggled and attempted to face him. "Keep still and let me look at this pretty ass of yours." Big hands wrapped around my hipbones and pulled my butt upward. My elbows dropped on the mattress and I arched my spine. I was open and exposed to his gaze—my pussy and my ass. I trembled with need but was helpless to do anything about it.

Firm hands kneaded my buttocks, palming the soft flesh. I sank my forehead into the mattress, shutting my eyes and breathing through an adrenaline rush that was making me dizzy. I felt so close to coming already. Logan was getting quite kinky. I hadn't expected it but, damn, I had a feeling it was going to be good.

He released my buttocks and set about exploring with his fingers. Down the cleft of my butt, over the tight ring of my anus and into my sopping folds. "Please," I said, bucking away as he touched my most intimate hole and then back for more as he found the entrance of my needy pussy. "Please..."

"All in good time," he said through a chuckle.

I huffed in frustration. Just because he'd already come, he could afford patience. Not fair.

"Is this what you want?" He penetrated me with two fingers, right to the knuckle, stretching me deliciously. I whimpered an agreement as he began a slow, steady pump, stroking the ultrasensitive pad of flesh on my inner wall, which was already pulsating for more. "You like that?" he asked, bending over to nibble my ear.

"Yes, yes." I let out a shuddering breath. "Please, your cock."

"It's not time yet." He sat back up and I missed his body heat on my back. As one hand continued to work my pussy, his other fingers trailed lazily over my buttocks, down my crack and came to rest over my anus again.

I whimpered and shifted sideways at the overtly intimate touch.

"Has anyone taken you here before?" he asked, putting his finger straight back on my anus again. "Tell me, Brooke, would I be the first to penetrate this sweet little hole of yours?"

My neck strained upward and I stared at the wall. His erotic words washed over me like fine wine, yet at the same time my heart pounded at the wicked suggestion. "Yes, no," I gasped. "I mean...no-one has ever touched me there before, Logan, never."

"And does the idea of something so naughty and forbidden turn you on?" he asked in a syrupy voice as the pad of his finger smoothed a circle around the taut wrinkles of my skin.

"No...yes..."

He gave a huff of amusement and pressed his finger against the center of my hole with a little more determination. "Which one is it, Brooke, tell me, yes or no?"

"Yes," I said, I couldn't deny it. Just the idea of him taking me so primitively had me flying precariously near the edge of climax. "Yes, yes it does."

He withdrew his other fingers from my pussy and his naughtiest finger left me for a second. When it returned it was cool with lube. I stilled with a mixture of shock and anticipation, my breath caught in my chest, my vision blurred. Then his fingertip probed my forbidden entrance. I moaned at the fiery sensation, wanting to pull away but needing to stay and feel more.

He let out an approving murmur and ventured higher. The impalement was wicked and I jerked in reflex as tight tissue parted for him.

His other hand, damp with my moisture, wrapped around my hip to hold my ass secure. "Shh, sweetie, you're tight but I won't hurt you, I promise."

I wasn't sure if he could keep that promise, he was so big and where he'd penetrated was virginal. He pulled out, added more lube then was back, prodding at the center of my clenched rosebud with two fingers this time. "Relax," he said. He grated his stubbled chin over my buttocks as he kissed my tingling skin. "Relax and let me in."

Summoning meditation techniques, I concentrated, visualized letting him into the darkest part of my physical being, welcoming him, inviting him, releasing some of the tension. He took full advantage and pushed his two, long, cool fingers until I could feel the rest of his hand butted against my ass cheeks.

I let out a long low groan and clawed at the bed sheet. It shouldn't feel so damn good but it did. It was wrong and beautiful, painful and blissful all at the same time. A confusing soup of sensations.

"God, the way you feel, the way you're stretching around my fingers, Brooke." His voice was full of approval. "But your ass is too tight to take my dick, that will take time to prepare you." He eased his fingers sideways into a V, widening my tight hole with a scissoring action. "We would have to work at that for a while."

I let out a whimper as fire whipped through delicate tissue. The heat traveled right through my pelvis and flooded my clit. I quivered with need, my pussy was so engorged it was as if all the blood had rushed there, causing it to throb and tremble.

Logan pulled his fingers out and I missed his touch like I'd miss my own heartbeat. "But for now, sweetie, you'll have this," he murmured.

I was expecting to feel the wide head of his cock at my sopping vagina. Anticipated him thrusting into my pussy, hard and urgent, sinking to the hilt. But instead I felt the lubed, tapered head of the new sex toy push against my tender anus.

"Oh god," I said, dropping my head low. "I don't know if we should do this, Logan...it's perverted."

"We all have our little perversions, Brooke." He exerted gentle pressure. "Let's find out what's going to work for you, so I can give you the most amazing orgasm of your life."

He'd already given me my top three sexual experiences—I didn't know if even he could beat them. But Logan clearly thought he could. His confidence was awe-inspiring, just like his star sign, the ram, he was ambitious and assertive. He was doing strange fluttery things to every part of my soul and turning everything I'd previously thought I knew about sex on its head.

"Take it," he murmured, pressing the thin toy steadily into me. "Take it all." He made no allowances for my tightness and even as the plug increased in diameter he kept on inserting it, higher and higher, until I was stretched so wide the nip of pain became a sharp stimulant spreading to all the organs in my pelvis. I bucked against it and at the same time pulled it in, hardly knowing what to do with myself and my overpowered, overruled body.

Logan increased his grip on my hips, effortlessly holding me with his big hand. "Easy, baby, you've done the hard part, now take it easy."

I let out a deep groan and, through my erotic haze, prayed the stars hadn't dropped a photographer outside the open door. I could live with the other photo, but this, me with my butt in the air and a long toy sticking out of my ass would displace my rhythms and karmas for all eternity.

"God, you look hot like this," Logan said in a husky voice. "All quivery and stretched. I liked your breasts best but now I'm thinking maybe your ass is my favorite." He pulled the toy out, just an inch, then worked it back in, sending it on a deep, careful stroke, going so high I barely knew where it ended and I began. "But then again your mouth is pretty hot," he went on, "and your pussy, well..." He withdrew to the tip. "That's just the best pussy I've ever had the pleasure of burying myself in."

My hips twitched, I wanted the filling sensation again. He chuckled and rode it back into me. "I guess I'm just falling in love with every tiny inch of you."

My eyes flicked open. He'd said the "L" word. But before my cerebellum could process the information, he popped the thickly flared base of the toy right into my anus. The narrower arms outside kept it from sinking any higher, but my god, it was high

and wide enough. I cried out as my tight ring was pushed to the limit and the full feeling overwhelmed me. "Logan, ahh, I can't stand that...it's too much, please."

"Shh, it's fine. You can take it."

"No, no..." I tried to crawl away from the sensation, but of course it followed me. Logan dragged me back as my upper body collapsed onto the mattress. I fought to accept the heavy invasion filling me so completely but I was at his mercy, my arms were trapped together and he wasn't going to let me move an inch.

I released a long, slow pant, absorbing the pain that was so close to pleasure it was like they were twins. Then, without warning, a deep vibration began to ripple through my rectum. Suddenly the discomfort switched to bliss, bliss so intense the most primitive groan I'd ever produced rumbled up from the base of my chest and got lost in the crumpled sheets. "Oh, oh, oh..." I managed.

"Is that good, sweetie?" He was over me again, I could feel his chest hair tickling my shoulder blades and his hot breath in my ear. "Does that feel good? Even though you didn't think it would?"

"Yesss..." I barely had control over my words, my tongue wasn't obeying my brain. My hips writhed, grinding and rolling in pleasure as my stimulated cavity was massaged and worked to a point where the imminent climax radiated to all my nerves, pooling in my pussy and strumming at my clit.

"Now you just got to wait for me," he said, turning me on my back. He pushed at my inner thighs, spread my legs wide and looked down at my tremor-filled pussy.

"Logan, I..." My neck collapsed back on the bed, my locked wrists settling on my stomach, then I stretched them high onto the pillows, fingers knotted. I didn't know where to put my limbs unless he positioned them—he was so in control, so powerful, that without his dominance my body was helpless.

"I've got you, it's nearly time." He came over me, pressing one hand onto the mattress by my head as the other fisted his sheathed cock.

My fists clenched and my back curled. I looked at his face looming high above mine. His eyes were brighter than sapphires and the sharp angles of his cheeks were taut and flushed.

He pressed the tip of his cock into my pussy. So wide, so big. I struggled to take him in that first inch, the space was already half taken up by the vibrating plug.

"No," I said breathlessly, shaking my head. "Logan, it won't fit."

His jaw tensed. "It will." He gave a heavy, short thrust, forcing the head into me.

I cried out and writhed beneath him. Stretched and invaded so totally, it was like being possessed by my desire, by Logan's desire.

But still he wasn't content. With a grunt he shunted in some more, rubbing up to my G-spot.

My whole body tensed. I couldn't do it. I couldn't be filled any more. That was me, done.

"Look at me, Brooke, damn it, look at me," he growled as he stilled his hips.

When I peeled open my eyes, his face was above mine and I forced myself to focus on the clear blue depths of his irises.

"You can do this, you can take me."

"It's so much."

"But we're nearly there, and I promise you..." He swallowed tightly and placed his other hand up by my head. "I promise you it's gonna start feeling real good in about two seconds." With a grim look of determination he curled under his coccyx, gave one powerful thrust and forged to the hilt.

My mouth opened wide but no sound came out. He'd taken me so fast, so entirely, he'd filled me beyond capacity. Tender tissue and flesh screamed their pain and delight as the confused nerve endings jangled with the mixed sensations. I struggled to catch my breath as electric fingers of edgy pleasure seared through me

"Fuck, yes!" He gritted his teeth and the tendons on his neck strained. "I'm in, sweetie, you did it." He pressed his hips up against my inner thighs, I could feel his balls resting over the external arms of the butt plug. There was no way Logan could get any deeper inside me. He had as much of me as he could ever get.

My eyes rolled and my back arched, my shoulders were locked taut over my head. The need inside me was so wild, so tortured, I couldn't make sense of it. My brain tried to sort the information the nerves were supplying. But it was a tangled knot of heated impulses.

"Fuck, I can feel it," he said, ducking and pressing his lips to mine. "I can feel the damn vibrations on my dick, they're coming right through you."

As if I didn't know. The throb of the vibrations had intensified as the thin membrane between pussy and rectum had stretched lean. Now my whole pelvis was buzzing with wicked, relentlessly fast pulses.

"It feels fucking fabulous, Brooke." His tongue probed my mouth as he withdrew and then sank back into me. "Wrap your legs around my waist." As he spoke he hooked my left leg over his forearm.

But my muscles were no longer my own, and without him moving my right leg it stayed stuck on the bed, useless.

He didn't seem to mind. He just hoisted my leg higher, pulled his cock almost completely out and then rode back in with a long, low groan.

Every muscle, every fiber of my being stretched taut. He repeated his thrust then picked up a wild, reckless pace, banging into me over and over. I'd never felt so alive, so connected, so on the edge.

"Is it feeling good yet?" Logan asked in a raspy voice. "Tell me it's good for you, too, Brooke."

"Yes, yes, I think so..." I panted as my hips bucked to meet his thrusts.

"You just think so?"

Beads of sweat had collected on his brow and over his wide top lip. "Let go. Embrace the pleasure," he said.

His eyes held tenderness, but possession and carnal desire burned brighter.

"It's good," I said, and bucked upward again to take him all the way in, finally welcoming him instead of just bearing him. "It's really, really good...don't...don't stop, not now." Pleasure claimed control and I released a long moan of ecstasy.

He grunted, a primitive mating sound that ripped from his chest. He withdrew and steamed back in—so hard, so big, I could feel every swollen vein on his shaft rubbing against my G-spot. He rocked his pelvis up against my clit, sending out darts of bliss to combine with the thrills the rest of my body was harnessing.

"That's it, take me, take all of me," he said. "Let me into your core."

I dragged in a breath infused with fresh male pheromones that sent even more moisture weeping into my pussy. The pressure began to build, faster and faster. It wasn't a slow buildup, it was like an express train hurtling toward the station, an express train that had no intention of stopping.

Suddenly it was there, an almighty explosion that tore liquid fire from the center of my soul. I called out as my body flew apart, but no sound emerged. My breath lodged in my chest, my muscles tensed so tight they nearly ripped from my bones. But still the heat grew, intensified, no longer one climactic bang, the orgasm rolled over in a series of crests as Logan thrust into me, over and over, claiming every nerve ending, every part of my being as his property.

He lowered his head and nipped his teeth against my collarbone. And then he, too, was convulsing, riding through his pleasure. I exploded one last time, a wild shout filling the room as his cock pumped inside me. The climax was as euphoric as it was exhausting. I was lost to all semblance of time and place. There was only Logan and me in the whole universe. Nothing else existed.

"Sweet Jesus," he groaned as a tremble rattled down his body and shivered into mine. "I swear you really are trying to finish me off, all that squeezing and wailing shit."

"I wailed?" I tried to swallow but my mouth was too dry.

"Like a banshee." He lifted his head. "Good thing we don't have neighbors."

"But, I..." I didn't know what to say. I thought I'd been quiet, too overtaken by the experience to utter a sound.

"I'm not complaining, it lets me know I'm getting it right." He pressed a quick kiss to my lips and lifted up so his cock slid from me. "Let's get you sorted." He clicked off the handcuffs, ducked down the bed, turned off the vibrations and with gentle hands slid the butt plug from my rectum. He took it into the bathroom and I heard the toilet flush and splashing in the sink.

"You okay?" he asked, walking back into the bedroom still gloriously naked and heading toward the bag.

I hadn't moved from my sprawled position. "Yes." I smiled lazily. "I've never been better." What we'd just done had definitely overtaken all my bedroom experiences to date. Logan was so in tune with my needs, my desires, the dark side of my sexuality. He'd been sent to me from a path I'd never dreamed I'd cross. A dark, dangerous path with sensuality and forbidden fruits lining the way. Was I complaining? Hell no, he was everything and more a woman could ever want and I thanked whichever ruler had sent him my way.

He lay next to me and urged me onto my stomach. "I'm not quite done with you yet," he said, curling his mouth into an idle grin.

A delayed tremble rippled through my body. What else could he possibly have in store for me? What could beat the orgasm I'd just had? I sighed and turned my cheek into the pillow as my breasts flattened beneath me. Whatever he had in mind, he'd have to do all the work. I was done in, my legs were weak, my arms floppy and I felt tender, swollen and satisfied.

Big, slippery hands smoothed upward from the center of my back. The scent of rose filled the air as he curled his strong fingers over the base of my neck and swept outward over my shoulders. I murmured in appreciation. I'd been wrong. It could get better.

"Feel nice?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"Mmm, lovely." I sagged farther into the mattress as his soothing hands slid over my ribs and his fingertips brushed the outer edge of my breasts.

"Good," he murmured. "'Cause I only want to make you feel good, Brooke, that's all I want to do, make you feel as good as you make me feel." He continued to massage and stroke, his slick hands rubbing away the tension in my muscles and nerves. I'd never felt so deliciously fulfilled, so content with my place in the world. Logan was working his way right into my being. But surely I wouldn't be stupid enough to actually fall for him. Because to fall for a hockey player would be about the dumbest thing I could do. Especially one with eyes that burned with sin and a smile that could look predatory and amused all at the same time. No, I definitely wouldn't let that happen. Whatever that little bubble in my heart was it could just go ahead and pop, disintegrate, because Logan Taylor could break me if I let him in.

Eventually I fell into a contented sleep. Logan must have, too, because when the phone in the hallway trilled to life he barely stirred, but after another three rings he sat and moved to answer it.

"Hello. Oh...hi boss." He paused and cleared his throat. "Yeah, great, yep, all set for Saturday... I know, I'm sorry, I don't know how he got the shot, the trees are real thick up there and it was pretty dark." He paused. "Yeah, Janice has already upped security around the fence and of course I'll speak to her father. I've already told her I will."

I lifted my head, straining to hear the conversation out in the hallway.

"Are you sure?" Another pause. "He must be pretty laid-back if you don't think he'll mind."

I tensed, wondering what Fergal was saying about my fictional father. Would it match my story? I rubbed my fingers over my temples. These lies were going to bite me on my naughty ass if I wasn't careful.

Logan continued. "Great, yeah, and I'm back in top form, mentally as well as physically, they won't stand a chance on Saturday. What about you, you having a good day? Excellent, okay, catch you then... He is...? Tomorrow evening, fine, no problem... No, I don't mind."

I heard the click of the receiver being replaced a second before Logan walked into the bedroom.

"Everything all right?" I swallowed a lump in my throat.

"Perfect." He smiled. "Fergal says he's just about to call your father and smooth things over. Are you sure you don't want to call him first?"

"No, no." I shook my head. "He's best off speaking to Fergal, they're good friends, have been for years." I mashed my lips together, wishing I didn't have to spout such untruths.

Logan shrugged. "Yeah, they must be, 'cause Fergal sounds pretty chilled about everything, he's usually real uptight after a midweek game, his voice high and fast, you know, like he's a rubber band about to snap. Said he'd had a lovely afternoon with a friend."

I nodded and tried to rid myself of the mental image of Fergal's skinny, old body covered in whipped cream and Giselle standing above him with an apron and a wooden spoon.

"Mmm, that's nice." I could just imagine the state of the silk sheets. They'd have to be dry-cleaned.

Logan huffed in amusement and pulled on his shorts. "Probably his girlfriend. Bet he didn't have as much fun as us though," he said through a cheeky grin. "Bet she's nothing on you."

"Mmm," I said, thinking of Giselle and her long, lean body and her glamorous, no-expense-spared style. We were certainly very different, and she probably was the sort of woman Logan would normally go for, apart from the whore bit of course.

I shook the negative thought from my mind and wondered what Giselle would make of what Logan and I had done that afternoon. Would she find it perverted or was anal play part of her repertoire? Maybe it was on her extras list for special customers? I had no idea and I didn't want to know. What Logan and I had experienced together had been so intimate, so trust-based, that to talk about it to anyone else would alter the erotic memory and somehow make it feel dirty when it had been amazing.

"Fergal's upped security on the outer perimeters of the villa," Logan said. "So we shouldn't get any more intrusions from the press, no doubt they're all hotfooting it down here for a shot of their own."

"Good," I said. "That's really good."

"You stay resting." Logan shoved a hand through his messy hair. "I'll make us some food."

"That sounds great. I'm starving." I pulled the cool sheet to my waist and looked out the door at the waves. The breeze tickled over my still-sensitive nipples. "What did he say about tomorrow evening?" I called as he reached the door.

"Brick's coming."

"Brick?"

"Yeah, my teammate, you know the one from the game the other night."

"What, here?" I shifted around to look at Logan, concern creasing my brow.

"Yeah, but don't worry, he won't be here until late. Apparently he's on the next island visiting a sick aunt and he's hitching a ride back."

"Oh."

"He'll stay over and catch the plane with us the next day." Logan shrugged and strolled away.

I looked out the door again. The small yellow bird I'd seen earlier hopped onto the deck, searching out more crumbs. Brick was coming here, to our villa. On our last night. My heart slumped in disappointment. I didn't want to share Logan. I wanted it to be just us...here...forever.

I frowned at the bird, which cocked his head and looked at me with his beady eyes. Who was I kidding? Guys like Logan didn't hook up with girls like me. When we got back to reality it would be all over. Sure he said he wanted me to go to the game, but the chances of tickets turning up were slim to none.

I couldn't beat down the negativity. I pictured him going back to his sportstar lifestyle while I got down to intense study and gritty, hard work. It would've been so much easier with one hundred thousand dollars in the bank, but that was history now. There was no cosmic event in the Universe that could persuade me to take a penny from Fergal Gunner. I would just have to accept the way this was going to end, me not only poor but also with a crack in my heart—but just a crack, because if I didn't fall in love with him then it wouldn't actually break. That was how it worked. Right?

Chapter Eight

The next morning Logan woke me by peppering kisses across my cheek.

"Keep your eyes shut," he whispered as I squinted at the brightness of daylight. "Stay in that dreamy slumber while I worship your beautiful body."

Who was I to argue? If Logan Taylor wanted to worship my body, I was going to savor every single second of it. Record it all in a delicious memory to recall on cold nights and use as a blanket against loneliness.

He kissed down my neck, slowly, leisurely, thoroughly. I sighed in appreciation, curling my hands over his warm, smooth shoulders. He shifted his weight over me, using his knees to nudge mine apart. I spread my legs, inviting him.

"You taste of sleep and sex and candy," he whispered onto my lips as he hovered over me. "All my favorite things."

I kept my eyes shut and ran my palm over his jawline, let the spiky hairs scratch my flesh until my thumb rested on his bottom lip.

"I can't believe I've only woken up with you twice," he said as his cock nudged at my entrance. "I feel like we've known each other forever." My thumb moved as he spoke words that further inflated that annoying bubble in my chest. He was a cruel man, Logan Taylor, ambushing my heart when I was sleepy and vulnerable.

He pushed his cock into my damp folds. I arched my neck, pressing my hands into his shoulders and wrapping my legs around his hips. I groaned, tilting my pelvis for more, encouraging him in to the hilt, until I was sure he was touching my cervix. He was so deep, he felt so good. How could it be wrong? All I could think of was Logan inside me, becoming part of me, becoming part of my world. Nothing could take this memory away and I savored the sensation of flesh on flesh.

"Ah, fuck," he groaned by my ear. "Why is it I want to come as soon as I get inside you, Brooke?"

I squeezed my eyes shut tighter and pressed my cheek to his as his pubic bone woke up my clit.

He pulled out and rode back in, set up a slow, steady pace that rubbed all my sweet spots, inside and out. We had all day but our bodies had other ideas and within minutes I was clambering for an orgasm. My skin was hot, his weight was heavy and I had to drag in quick breaths as I got closer and closer.

"Logan!" I said desperately as bright lights flashed behind my eyelids.

"What, sweetie?" he said in a strained voice.

"Please, I'm gonna come..."

"That's the plan."

"Faster, harder...please." It was what I needed, what I wanted. "Now."

He shifted his weight up onto his hands. "Open your eyes now, Brooke," he said. "Watch me enter you, watch me drive into you hard and fast the way you want it."

I blinked at the harsh light. Logan loomed over me. His biceps balled, the tendons on his neck strained and his shoulders were so wide he was like a building.

"Watch my dick," he said, his eyes flashing before he dipped his head to view our connected bodies.

I followed his line of sight. His wide chest heaved over my jiggling, side-slung breasts and his abs had contracted into neat rows of power. Lower down our pubic hair meshed—his black, wiry curls tangled with my thin blonde strip of hair. He lifted his hips and began to withdraw. The deep scarlet of his shaft came into view, shining with my moisture. The angry purple veins had dilated thickly and as he pulled out completely, I saw the crest flushed to burgundy with arousal and the slit expanding.

"Logan," I cried. "Where's the condom?"

"Fuck," he rolled off me. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

"It doesn't matter, just get one." I sat up and spun to search the bedside table.

"I'm really sorry," he said. I heard the tearing of foil. Already he was rolling one down his shaft. "I'm really sorry, Brooke, you make me lose my head, you make me forget everything."

"It's okay," I said, lying down and holding out my arms. "Just get back to where you were." I smiled. "Exactly where you were."

He repositioned and we both watched as his sheathed cock disappeared into my pussy. With each inch that went from view, the sensations in my core amplified tenfold. We groaned in synchrony and pleasure rocketed through my abdomen as he began to thrust in and out, watching each movement with his hair hanging over his face and his breath coming in long, controlled breaths.

He stilled at the hilt with his hips pressed against my inner thighs, held himself as hard and deep as he could possibly go.

"I could stay here forever," he murmured.

I tried to answer but coherent words wouldn't form. My orgasm was there, blossoming, growing, there was only one conclusion now—release. I shivered and shook. He was pressing so hard on my clit with all his weight, that combined with the fullness tipped me over the edge. He didn't need to move a muscle and I was climaxing.

"Oh god, Logan," I wailed as I flew apart at the seams. My pussy clenched his cock as my stomach flooded with red-hot release.

"Lord, give me the strength to survive this," Logan muttered then withdrew and forged back in, pounding deep and fast. I cried out, consumed by waves of explosive pleasure crashing through me.

I gripped his shoulders as he steamed into me with uncontrolled lust. When his cock hardened to steel, I felt his muscles shudder beneath the surface of his skin. He buried deep one last time, threw back his head and bared his teeth. "Ahh, mother fuck...ahh, good god..." His cock pulsed and pumped deep within me as he poured into the condom. His arms gave way and he collapsed, shifting just enough so that I was cradled in his arms without being flattened.

He pressed his mouth to my hair. "One hell of a start to the day," he panted on a jagged breath.

* * * * *

We dressed, drank coffee and decided on a stroll to the beach cafe. The air was still, the sun hot and the small beach village held an air of calm laziness. Logan glanced around and, happy we weren't being watched by press, picked a table under a blue umbrella. A terra-cotta pot of white jasmine sat next to us, flooding the air with sugary summer scents and reminding me of Aunt Belinda's yard.

We received a welcome from the waitress as if we were old friends, and since it was now lunchtime, ordered the catch of the day, salad and a bottle of white wine.

"Cheers," Logan said, clinking his glass to mine.

"Cheers." I smiled. "What are we celebrating?"

"Meeting," he said before taking a sip. "Us meeting is definitely something to celebrate. We've made some fabulous memories to take home."

I took a sip of the crisp wine and glanced out to sea. Memories to take home, that's all this was. But I'd known it from the start. Logan was destined for the "holiday romance" file in my brain—I just hoped my heart knew that too.

"What?" He set down his drink. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is." He tipped his head to the side. "What did I say wrong?"

"Nothing."

His hand reached for mine. "I might be a bit slow sometimes but I know when I've put my big foot in my mouth."

I took a deep breath and pasted a smile onto my lips. "We've made fabulous memories," I said. "Ones that will stay with me for a long time so yes, we should celebrate."

He studied me with narrowed eyes. "Are you still coming to the game on Saturday?"

I swallowed and shrugged. "If you want me to?"

"Of course I do." His brow creased.

"You don't have to say that, Logan."

"What do you mean?"

"If you don't want me to come you can take the invite back. I'm a big girl, I can handle it."

"Why on earth would I do that?"

I looked down at the delicate jasmine flowers and watched a tiny bee examining them. "I don't want you to feel like you have to get me tickets. Perhaps you just said it to be polite... We had, after all, just had sex."

His jaw dropped and he stared at me for a long moment. "Did you suck my dick to be polite?" he asked incredulously.

"No, of course not and that's not what I meant."

He shook his head. "I don't understand where this has come from? I thought we were all good."

I pushed a hand through my hair. I felt hot and flustered, prickles of heat spiked at the flesh on my back and between my breasts.

His voice dropped low. "I offered because I want you to be there. I want to see you after the game. I want to see you the next morning too, in my bed, all sleepy and sexy like you were today."

"But where will it go Logan? Where will *we* go?"

His jaw tensed and his eyes darkened.

I took a deep breath. I couldn't keep it in any longer. "You're a highly trained, highly paid, successful athlete and I'm a chubby girl who wants to be a nurse." I glanced out to sea. "And I know I'm a bit kooky, everyone is always telling me that."

"Don't say all that stuff about yourself like it's a bad thing, Brooke." He brushed his thumb over my knuckles.

I shrugged.

He gave a huff of amusement but there was no humor in the sound. "You've got it all wrong. I love the fact you want to be a nurse, it's a more commendable career than flicking pucks into a net and checking opponents into boards." He lifted his hand from mine, crooked his finger beneath my chin and turned my face to his. "And as for being a bit...kooky." He smiled. "I just happen to think kooky is cute, hell, I'm even getting used to it." He licked his lips and his gaze dropped to my cleavage. "And your curves, well, they're the best damn shapes I've ever had the privilege of seeing naked, bar none, like...ever."

I raised my brows. He was such a skilful liar. So damn persuasive that I almost believed him.

"Don't fight it, Brooke." His face creased into a smile that went right up to his eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't fight it, I'm not." He paused and dropped his finger as the waitress set down plates of barbequed fish and bowls of vibrant salad glazed with a honey and mustard dressing.

"Anything else?" she asked, rubbing her hands on her floral apron.

"No, this is perfect," Logan said, his gaze not leaving mine. "Absolutely perfect."

I spread out my napkin and picked up my cutlery but I didn't feel hungry. My emotions were spiraling and threatening to spin out of control. Logan was just digging a deeper hole for me to bury myself in with all his compliments and smiles.

"What color is my aura today?" Logan asked, spooning a mountain of salad onto his plate.

"Pardon?"

"What color is my aura? Any streaks of black?"

I concentrated through the blue haze the umbrella cast over us. It was hard to see his aura but from what I could make out it was a perfectly clear scarlet. Unblocked and unstreaked, it shone from him in a powerful but controlled way.

"It's just red, a deep, vivid red," I said.

"See." He popped a sliver of flaked white fish into his mouth.

"See what?"

He swallowed and shrugged. "You're good for me, Brooke. Why the hell would I give that up just 'cause we're going back to the mainland?"

I took another sip of wine, let the liquid coat every inch of the inside of my dry mouth. "But—"

"There's only one variable in all of this," he said, suddenly clattering down his knife and fork and resting clenched fists on the table by his plate. "And that is do you want to get involved with 'Phoenix' and all the crap that entails?" His brow creased into three neat lines and the muscle in his cheek jumped. "The lies the press write and the hockey management's grip on my life. The relentless rink bunnies who even if we're together will try to drape themselves over me. Could you stand to get involved in that media circus? Could a woman like you really consider giving up normality for me?"

I looked into his blue eyes, sparkling the same way the sun was hitting the sea behind him.

"A woman like me?" My brain was spinning, my heart melting. There was no question about it, Logan Taylor was a dangerous guy. He should come with a big yellow warning—hazardous to the health of your heart.

"A woman like you," he said, reaching for my hand. "A beautiful, intelligent, caring woman who could have a normal life with a normal guy, white picket fence on an ordinary street, two point five kids." He frowned and tugged at his bottom lip. "Could you, would you give us a go?"

"Well, I think we've made a pretty good start," I said hesitantly, wondering if I'd see a retreat in his face if I started going along with his suggestion.

"Hell, yeah." He grinned. "But what I'm suggesting is more than a fling in the sun. I've always been a selfish guy when I see something I want and, Brooke, I want you." He shrugged. "I want you here and now and I want you back home, when I'm on the

ice, when I'm off the ice." His voice lowered. "What do you say? I know you've been hurt before, lied to, but can you find enough trust to give us a shot?"

I looked at the new pink scar on his forehead and the muscle flexing in his cheek. Against my better judgment, I itched to touch him, kiss him, I couldn't wait to have him inside me again and feel his body shudder as he took pleasure from mine. But there was so much at stake now, it wasn't just sexual satisfaction, it was my heart, still tender and bruised from Sam. Was I ready to put it up for another pounding? One that would be more obliterating than that last, since pounding was Logan's profession and he'd managed to get much deeper into my core than Sam ever had.

But looking into his face my common sense fled, my stomach twisted and my heart spilled over. "Yes," I said on a breath that threatened to judder with both fear and joy. "Yes, I do trust you and I will give us a shot."

He pressed his knuckles into the table and stood, leaning over our lunch to brush his lips to mine. "Good," he said onto my mouth. "Just don't go making me feel like I've had another damn stick to the head."

"What do you mean?" I sucked the taste of him from my lips.

"When you say one thing and mean another it confuses dumbass hockey players like me, so just tell me straight, sweetie, whatever you want say it straight and I'll give it to you." His lips curled into a devilish smile as he sat back down. "Whatever it is, if you're worried about something, if you need something, just let me know in real, simple language from now on, okay?"

"I don't think you're a dumb hockey player." I took another sip of wine to dampen the excited fluttering in my stomach.

"That's so nice of you to say so." He grinned. "But unlike you, I don't have any mind-reading powers."

I laughed. "I can't read minds."

"Mmm, when it comes to guessing what I want I think you've been pretty damn accurate so far." His brow twitched. "And I'm looking forward to much more testing of the mind-reading theory later on." He held up his wine and waited for me to do the same. He tapped the rims together. "To us," he said with steely determination in his voice.

"To us," I said, matching his smile and wallowing in the bright glow of hope that had ignited deep within me. The beautiful glow that burned vibrant and strong whenever yin and yang collided. Maybe, just maybe, Logan was the yang to my yin, my soul mate. There was only one way to find out, and it seemed he was as keen to discover our potential as I was.

* * * * *

The rest of our lunch conversation was lazy and unemotive, and with a lighter mood I relaxed and settled into Logan's company. He was far from dumb, his mind was

sharp, his sense of humor keen and he was current on all sorts of issues from politics to Hollywood movies. He was also well traveled, having played hockey in Canada, Europe and Alaska, and it seemed he made a point of being a cultured visitor as well as a sportsman when he took a trip.

When we arrived back at the villa I was sleepy with wine and tired from the long, hot walk. The roller-coaster emotions of the last few days had caught up with me and the four-poster, nestled in the shade, looked very inviting as I stepped onto the deck.

"I think I'll lie down for a while," I said, kicking off my flip-flops. "I'm tired."

"Good plan," Logan said. "I'll join you." He held up his palms when he saw my doubtful face. "It's okay, I'll let you rest." He grinned. "For a while, at least, because you'll need your energy for later." He grinned and disappeared into the villa.

I stretched out with my head propped up on the luxurious pillows and my toes pointed toward the sea. My body felt relaxed but at the same time achy, as though I'd indulged in a rigorous workout at the gym or strenuous swimming—which of course I rarely did. A smile tipped my mouth. It suited me to exercise by having sex with Logan. I'd found my perfect workout after years of trying all manner of deadly dull classes. Classes that promised toned thighs and a flat stomach but quickly sent me scampering for a cappuccino and a doughnut.

"What are you smirking about?" Logan asked, joining me on the bed with a copy of *Hockey Today*.

"I was just thinking how good you are for me," I said, looking up at him.

"I like thoughts like those." He linked his fingers with mine, drawing my hand to his mouth. "Do you think I've cleansed your aura?"

"Mmm. Trouble is, some of the thoughts you've put in my head are downright dirty." I twitched my brows.

"Is that how it works?" He looked confused.

I laughed. "No, not at all."

His eyes drifted to my breasts, jiggling in my t-shirt. The low, scooped neck showed off my cleavage and I wondered if he was remembering how he'd come all over me yesterday. My breath caught at the memory. It had been so hot to see him so turned-on by my plus-sized breasts. Breasts that had always been such a nuisance for clothes shopping and exercising.

"You're beautiful," he said, his gaze coming back up to my face. "Every last inch of you." He licked his lips and his fingers traced the line of my t-shirt, coming to rest in my cleavage. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

"No, not really," I said, watching his finger dip into the cushion of my warm flesh.

"Well, somebody should have every single day, because you really are exquisite. I could look at you all day and all night."

Reaching up, I curled my fingers into the softly mussed hair at his nape, pulled his head to mine and kissed him gently. I heard his magazine slide to the floor as he leaned farther in and opened up.

I pressed my tongue into his mouth, he tasted of wine and the sea. I delved deeper, exploring, drinking him up. I could kiss him all day and all night.

"I thought you needed your rest?" he murmured, taking his hand from my chest.

"I can rest later," I said, pulling back to look into his eyes. My body was tingling for his touch, my nipples straining against my bra. I reached for his hand, spread out his fingers and pressed it over my breast. Just feeling him through clothing had me catching my breath.

He looked at my face. I couldn't hide my desire, my lust, it was like another living, breathing part of me. I wanted Logan Taylor, now, and I was helpless to disguise the fact.

The side of his mouth twitched. "You're gonna tire me out," he said. "I'll need another holiday to recover."

"I'm sure you can handle it."

He slipped his hand down, tucking it underneath my top. He smoothed up over my warm skin until his palm cradled my breast through thin satin. "Mmm, I think I can handle you perfectly." His lips hovered over mine.

The heat from his touch sent sparks of arousal flying through my body. I pushed a lock of hair from his eye and let the blood pool deliciously between my legs. I knew Logan could satisfy me. I knew he had what I needed and so much more.

A musical chime tinkled from the open doors of the villa. "What was that?" I asked, frowning.

"I'm not sure."

The high-pitched sound echoed out again.

"Maybe it's the doorbell," Logan said. "Perhaps Brick is early."

I squeezed my legs together in disappointment. "Let's pretend we're not home," I said, pressing my palm over Logan's hand encouragingly.

His gaze narrowed and he sucked in one side of his cheek. "Tempting," he said, shifting his hips. "But not very hospitable of us."

"Who cares?" I let my hand drift to the front of his shorts. His erection was there waiting for me, marble-hard and straining his zipper. "We'll say we were walking on the beach or something."

Logan let out a tight moan and his eyelids fluttered shut as he pushed himself into my hand. "I don't think we'll get away with that."

"Why not?" I gave his shaft a long, hard squeeze.

His breath caught and his jaw tensed. "Brick's not known for his patience or subtlety."

"Hey, is that you, Phoenix?" A sudden, deep voice boomed from the other side of the deck. "I've been ringing the damn bell for ages, couldn't you hear me?"

Logan's eyes flicked open and he snapped his hand from inside my top. He sat, spun and perched on the edge of the bed.

I looked around his shoulder to see a giant of a man stepping onto the deck through a gap in the foliage.

I straightened my t-shirt, pushed a hand through my hair and shifted so I was sitting higher up against the pillows. Dragging in a deep, calming breath, I tried to beat down the irritation bristling the hairs on my neck. Brick wasn't supposed to arrive until later. He'd encroached on our precious time together when it was just about to get real good again.

"Hey, Brick," Logan said, remaining seated with his shoulders hunched forward and his forearms resting on his knees.

Brick banged across the deck, his big sneakers loud on the softly worn wood. "I had to use the side path, I thought you weren't in." He grinned, flashing neat, white teeth, and held out his hand to Logan. "But here you are, lounging around."

Logan shook his teammate's hand then turned to me. "This is Brooke," he said. I could hear the discomfort in his voice.

"Hey, great to meet you, Brooke." Brick held out a hand to me.

I studied him as he lifted my hand to his mouth and pressed a kiss to my knuckles. He had tightly curled, blond hair, like a cherub, which looked odd on such a testosterone-overdosed man with a thick neck, almost thicker than his head, and a small golden soul patch under his bottom lip. His green eyes flashed and his brows twitched as he dropped his gaze down my body, settling on my cleavage and my erect nipples.

I pulled my hand away. I knew when I was being ogled and I didn't like it. Brick's look was very different from the one Logan gave me. Logan's was full of gentle admiration, he caressed me with his gaze, stroked my flesh with his eyes. But Brick just stared, licking his lips, and I imagined he'd be a kneader when it came to touching a woman's breasts.

"It's lovely to meet you," I said, getting up from the bed and trying hard to sound sincere. "Would you like a drink? We were just going to get one."

Brick raised his brow even farther and looked at Logan. "Yeah," he said with a smirk. "If that's what you were just gonna do then I guess I'll join you."

"Beer?" I asked, ducking into the villa.

"Perfect," Logan said, clearing his throat.

"Make it two," Brick called.

Chapter Nine

I left the men on the deck catching up over a drink as I busied myself around the kitchen. Logan and I had lingered so long over lunch and ambled back so slowly it was getting near dinnertime. I'd had plans of building up our appetite further but Brick had put paid to that, much to my intense irritation.

I took three steaks from the fridge, prepared a hickory marinade the way Aunt Belinda had taught me when I was eight and set about scrubbing baking potatoes and mixing up a cheesy, sour cream dressing to pour over them.

"Hey, sweetie." I felt Logan's arms wind around my waist as he pulled my back against his chest.

I tipped my head into the crook of his shoulder so he could kiss my neck.

"You all right in here?" he asked, his hot breath trickling down my skin like honey.

"Yeah, I guess."

"I'm sorry he arrived so early."

"It's not your fault."

"I know, but I'm still sorry." He gave a little groan. "But I think it hurt me more than it hurt you."

"Are you okay now?"

"Well I was until I just smelled that delicious coconut stuff you use in your hair. Mixed with your sweeter-than-sweet perfume, it's like the best cocktail ever and I can honestly say I'm in considerable discomfort again."

I spun in his arms and hooked my hands behind his neck, glancing out the door. Brick was draining his bottle and staring out to sea. "Is it really bad?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's really bad. So don't expect me to have much stamina later on, not after I've been this hard for you all afternoon." His lips connected with mine and as the malt of beer seeped onto my tongue, he pressed his erection into my stomach.

"I may have to make love to you twice, or even three times to get it out of my system," he said into my mouth.

My knees weakened and I clung to him as sexy flutters spread in waves over my skin. "Only three times?" I asked, surprised by how husky my own voice sounded.

"Well that's just tonight, it doesn't include the morning before we catch the plane. Maybe we ought to consider joining the mile-high club too."

"Got any more of these?" Brick appeared by Logan's shoulder with a broad grin on his face.

"Sure, help yourself." Logan said, releasing me.

"Want one?" Brick stooped to the fridge.

"Nah, I've had my fill," Logan said. "I'm gonna take off for a run."

"I'm making you a steak," I said.

"Perfect," he smiled and winked. "I'll only be half an hour or so, is that okay?"

"Sure." I matched his smile, I couldn't help it, it was how he made me feel. Happy.

* * * * *

I put the steaks into the marinade and wiped the outside table, set out napkins and cutlery, three tall glasses and a jug of water crammed with ice, lemons and lime. The potatoes were in the oven, crisping up nicely, and I had no intention of cooking the steak until Logan had returned and showered.

I picked up a small pair of scissors from the kitchen and wandered onto the deck. Brick was lounging on the bed reading *Hockey Today* and I walked past him and around the dense patch of shrubbery where I'd seen orange flowers. They had long stems and would be perfect in a vase at the center of the table.

I snipped three, pleased with their scent, studying the delicate fanned petals and long stamen heavy with globs of pollen.

I felt a presence behind me and turned, half expecting Logan back from his run.

It was Brick.

He stood, silhouetted by the sinking sun, feet apart and arms crossed. "Looks like you've done a great job with Phoenix," he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked, turning to the flowers again and wondering why his voice gave me a chill when the evening was so sultry.

"He looks back in control, really relaxed." I sensed Brick stepping closer, felt his shadow cool the backs of my legs.

"We've had a good week. I think he is really relaxed." I snipped another stem.

"You've worked hard then."

"I beg your pardon." I turned and was surprised to see Brick much closer than I thought he'd be. My nose nearly touched his t-shirt.

"Fergal said there was a woman here taking his mind off things. Cheering him up. Getting him back in the zone."

I stepped hastily backward into the flowers.

His gaze dropped to my breasts again. "You've worked hard, Brooke."

"I haven't worked at anything, we've hit it off. Logan is a great guy."

"Logan, eh? Everyone else calls him Phoenix, you know."

"Well, he asked me to call him Logan." I paused. "He's more than just a dumb jock, you know." I gave Brick the kind of look that suggested that was exactly what I thought of him.

"I would have thought dumb jocks were right up your street, especially ones with six-figure salaries." His brow twitched. "Ones who pay for services."

My fingers squeezed so tight around the flower stems I felt them crush then weep their sticky sap into my palm. "What are you talking about?" Brick was rapidly becoming my least favorite person in the Universe. His vague but unnervingly accurate suggestion about my initial financial reason for being there was too close for comfort. Far too close.

"I'm just saying it's nice work if you can get it. There must be a lot of job satisfaction for you." He smirked and stepped even closer. "Satisfaction in every sense of the word." Suddenly he wound his hand around my waist and snapped me up against his huge, hard body.

I dropped the scissors and the flowers. "Get off me!" I squirmed, looking up at his boyish face. It was set hard as stone and his green eyes flashed dangerously. "You have no idea about my relationship with Logan, or what you're talking about." I put my hands on his chest and tried to shove him away. But he didn't move, it was like trying to shift a mountain.

"I think I do, Brooke, I think I know exactly why you're here."

"No, get off me, I'm not interested in you. I'm with Logan."

"Oh, don't be shy." His brow twitched as one hand snaked up my spine, cradled my skull and his head dropped lower. "I'm sure he'll share you." I could smell beer on his breath. It wasn't sweet like Logan's, it was sour and ugly.

"No." I banged clenched fists onto his chest and pushed harder, twisting my head to get away from his face, his smell, his words.

"Let me have a bit of what's on offer," he murmured a second before he pressed his mouth down on mine. Hard and strong, his tongue flat and wet.

I squeezed my lips tight and squealed deep in my throat, wriggling my body against his embrace and twisting my neck. But Brick was so strong and so solid it was no good. Even when I tried to drop my entire body weight he just held me up in the air.

"Come on, Brooke," he said, lifting his head a fraction. "There might even be a little extra something in it for you."

"Get the hell off me, you moron," I shouted, drawing back my foot to ram into his shin. I was going to make him wish fate had never brought him my way, even if it did cost me my toes.

But before I could release my anger, a sudden flash of movement roared from my left. Brick's arms released me and he went flying sideways with a deep grunt as I tumbled to the ground with a yelp of surprise.

My knees and palms slapped onto the sand and the breath was banged from my chest. I pushed hair from my face and looked up. Logan and Brick were tumbling in a lock of limbs and big bodies in the deepest, driest sand.

"Logan," I shouted, jumping to my feet.

Like a giant, dusty whirlwind they toppled across the beach away from me. Arms and legs flailing and flying. Shouts, grunts and curses filling the air. I heard the sickening thud of flesh on flesh and air being forced from someone's lungs.

"Logan." I ran toward them, my feet stumbling in craters of powdery sand. "Logan, stop."

The movements came to a halt as quickly as they'd started. Logan was on top of Brick. Brick was splayed on his stomach with his face pressed into the sand and Logan had twisted one of his arms right up his back in a very unnatural-looking position.

"Get the fuck off me," Brick seethed, squirming and twisting like a captured animal. "You fucking idiot, Phoenix, get off me."

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't break your shoulder blade and then do the other one just for fun you ignorant piece of—" Logan snarled into his ear.

"Logan, please." I ran over and sank to my knees. I looked at Brick's face, contorted in agony. His eyes were screwed tight and bubbles of spit sat around the corners of his mouth. His nostrils flared as he breathed hard and fast and hundreds of grains of sand clung to his cheek. I didn't like the guy one bit but I didn't want to see him physically harmed—that would be really bad for everyone's karmas. "Logan, let him go."

Logan looked at me through narrowed eyes, his face red and hot. "From where I stood it looked like he was trying to kiss you, trying to kiss you against your will."

"That's exactly what happened but let him go, he's got the message now."

"Yeah, let go, Phoenix, it's not fucking funny anymore." Brick grunted as he writhed again under Logan's weight. He yelped as his shoulder stayed fixed and Logan dropped even more weight on it.

"There's something you gotta do first," Logan said through gritted teeth.

"What, for fuck's sake, what?" Brick whimpered as Logan pushed a hand on his head and squashed his face farther into the beach.

"Apologize to Brooke."

"What?" Brick opened his eyes then blinked rapidly as sand avalanched toward his face.

"Apologize to Brooke for thinking she'd be interested in a sorry dumbass like you."

Brick clenched his teeth. "Sorry," he said. "Now get the hell off me, Phoenix."

"No, I'm not done with you yet."

Brick squirmed in anger and kicked his feet. Sand flew upward and sprayed over Logan's back.

"Apologize to me now."

"What the hell for?"

Logan dropped his head down to Brick's ear. "For kissing my woman."

"What?"

"You heard. Brooke's with me, get used to it." He shoved at Brick's arm, creating a little more tension and getting another yelp out of Brick. "Now apologize to me for trying to take what's mine before I whoop your sorry ass into next year and you have to miss the rest of this season and all of next."

"Sorry, I'm fucking sorry, okay."

"Say it nicely."

Brick dragged in a breath. "Sorry," he said, quieter. "I'm sorry, okay? I didn't realize you'd hooked up."

Logan sprang to his feet, releasing Brick as quickly as he'd pinned him down.

Brick groaned and rolled to his back, grasping his tormented left shoulder. He squinted at Logan through the low sun. "What did you have to fucking do that for, you know my shoulder's been giving me grief."

Logan shrugged. "I forgot." He put his arm around my waist and helped me to my feet. "But don't forget, Brooke's with me so keep your hands, your mouth, your eyes and every other part of your anatomy under control when you're in her company."

"Yeah, okay." Brick pushed to his feet with a grimace and started brushing sand from his clothes. "Shit man, these are new."

"And she doesn't like cursing either," Logan said. "So keep your mouth clean."

Brick swiped his hands together then ran his fingers through his tight nest of sand-filled curls.

"Got it?" Logan said.

"Yeah, got it," Brick muttered and looked me in the eyes. "She's yours and she don't like cursing."

I studied his green eyes and pulled in an apprehensive breath. I thought I might see hate, or anger, or even revenge in their depths. But to my relief I didn't, they were resigned, surrendered. I sought out his aura. It was a startling shade of bottle green, a few flecks of hazelnut brown, but nothing major. I hoped that would be the last of the matter. Logan and I were together, that's what he'd said, and I wouldn't be taking any money for having spent the week in his bed, no way, so whatever the heck Brick had insinuated, it was all wrong.

* * * * *

Brick had a swelling on his left cheekbone and I gave him a bag of ice to press against it as I cooked the steaks. Logan had reopened part of the gash on his forehead and I angled a bandage over it to hold the skin together. He didn't want me to, but the small tear wouldn't stop dripping blood into his eye so in the end, to eat his steak without the irritation of bleeding, he had no choice but to let me have a go at patching it up.

By the time we'd finished the meal, Logan and Brick were chatting as if nothing had happened. As though they hadn't just pummeled each other on the beach, had a good

go at breaking limbs, dislocating joints and drawing blood. They laughed about a pounding Yusof took midweek, scoffed at the ineptitude of refs and trash-talked every other team in the league.

Brick was very complimentary of the food and kept his eye-line at a respectable level. When everyone had finished he went so far as collecting up the plates and loading the dishwasher.

"You okay?" Logan asked when we were alone in the moonlight.

"Yes, fine," I said, looking into his shadowed face.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that earlier." He reached for my hand across the table. "Really I am."

I shrugged. "It's okay."

"No, it's not okay. But he's just a kid. He lets his hormones rule his head but he's decent underneath as long as I keep him in check."

"You have a very novel way of doing that."

"It's the language he speaks." Logan shrugged.

I raised my brows. I was glad it wasn't my language. It looked painful.

"He won't bother you again, though, none of them will."

"Who do you mean?"

"The other players, when you meet them. Brick's got a big mouth, bigger than his brain, and he'll whine for days that I slapped his sorry butt just for talking to you."

"But you know it was more than talking, don't you?"

"Of course, I know what I saw and believe me, Brick got off lightly 'cause I just happen to be fond of the little twerp. I've been like a big brother to him since he joined the team." His face darkened. "But anyone else wouldn't have walked away. Anyone else who tried to touch you against your will would need an ambulance at the very least."

He clenched his fist over my hand and I reached to uncurl his fingers. "Does that mean none of your teammates will ever speak to me?"

Logan smiled and relaxed his fingers. "No, not at all, they'll know Brick was up to no good, they'll figure there's more to the story than what he says."

"Good, 'cause I wouldn't want to feel like a total outcast." I tapped at a mosquito that had been hassling my calf for ten minutes. "Missed again," I said with a sigh. "I think I'll head to bed. I'm tired."

"Not too tired, I hope." Logan tilted my chin with his finger and rubbed his thumb into the crease below my bottom lip.

"No," I smiled. "Not too tired."

* * * * *

I didn't have to wait long for Logan to come to me. When he did he flicked the lock on my bedroom door and stepped out of his shorts as he walked across the room. He grinned and sat his long naked body on the bed with his back braced against the padded headboard.

"Hey," I said, happily abandoning my anatomy book and turning to face him on the soft pillow.

"Hey, yourself." His blue eyes twinkled down at me through the dim, buttery light spreading from my bedside table.

"You gonna snuggle down?" I asked, eyeing the thick erection only inches from my face.

"Mmm, there's a thought," he said, wrapping a hand around my entire upper arm. "But how about you come up here?" He licked his lips and tugged me. "Come up and sit on me."

I crawled onto hands and knees, shucking off the sheet to expose my own nakedness.

"You got a condom this time?"

His gaze drifted down my body, lingering on my swaying breasts and hardening nipples. "Yeah," he husked, reaching one from the bedside table.

Taking the red wrapped condom from his hand, I angled the corner into my teeth and tore at the wrapper. Blowing out the tiny piece of foil that remained in my mouth, I slowly licked the rubbery, artificial taste of strawberry from my top lip.

His mouth slackened. "That was so sexy," he said, shaking his head.

"Mmm." I straddled his legs just below his knees. "Then I think you'll like this even more." I took hold of his shaft and treated him to a long, slow stroke right up to the velvet head and back down to the base. His stomach tensed and his cock twitched in my hand. I took out the condom and placed it over his flushed head. Pinched the end of the latex and rolled it over the crest of his cock until it rounded into the deep ridge. I smiled up at him, then tipped forward, tensed my mouth and used my taut lips to roll it the rest of the way down his engorged shaft.

"Ahh, sweetie, I think you've just invented the best way ever to put one of these damn things on." He scooped my hair onto the top of my head, his fingers gentle and tickling.

I kept on gliding downward, my fingers helping unfurl the condom as his thick head slid over my tongue, over my palate and finally hit the back of my throat. I dragged in ribbons of air as my nose settled in his coarse pubic hair. I adored the feeling of him in my mouth, I felt so full, so in control, and as he invaded my senses with his smell, his taste and his texture it was like a wild ride to heaven.

"Come here," he said, wrapping his hands around my shoulders and physically lifting me. I had no choice but to let him slip from my mouth as he tugged my body up. "I'm supposed to be working on stamina and you're going to undo all that hard work."

My eyes came level with his and I rested my hands on the tight strips of muscle between his neck and shoulders, then shuffled up his legs to straddle his wide hips. His shaft pressed against my pubic hair and my body clenched in anticipation of having him inside me, soon, real soon.

"You feel so good sitting on me," he said.

"You feel so good in me," I murmured, pressing my lips to his. His tongue probed for mine as he dipped his fingers down between my legs.

I gasped into his mouth as he parted my folds and pushed in.

"God, you're so wet, so wet and hot," he whispered.

"I've been lying here...thinking."

"What were you thinking about?"

"You doing stuff to me." I'd also been thinking about Brick and what he'd implied about my being in the villa. The way he'd grabbed me and thought I would be up for a little extra business with him. But those worries left me now as Logan added another finger, hooked the tips forward and rubbed that little pad of flesh in a way that always dragged a groan from my stomach whether I wanted it to or not.

"You been thinking about me doing this to you?" he asked, ducking his head to kiss my collarbone.

"Yes, and other stuff."

"Mmm, you'll have to be more specific," he said.

"And I was thinking about how you make me feel." I wondered if maybe I should tell him the truth about my deal with Fergal.

"And how is that, Brooke. How do I make you feel?"

How was it he always seemed to ask me questions at the same time as he was distracting me? "You make me feel good."

"Just good?"

I tipped my pelvis forward as the heel of his hand caught my clit. "More than good," I confessed. "Amazing." I pulled my head back and focused on his face. "I want to make you feel amazing too."

His eyes shot blue flames of desire from their depths. "Just a smile from you makes me feel amazing."

I slid my hand up his neck and cupped his cheeks with my palms. I lifted upward and his hand slid from my pussy. "So in theory this should blow your mind," I whispered as I positioned myself over his cock.

"Promise me you'll pick up the pieces."

"I promise," I said, dropping down just an inch. At that moment I would have promised him anything, from my favorite set of crystals to my soul.

I slowly sat the rest of the way until he was buried as deep inside me as he could go. The hot flesh of his cock burned right through me, sending a shiver up my spine

and over my scalp. Every cell in my body was focused on him and how he made me feel so sexy and so hungry for more.

"Oh god," Logan groaned as he settled his hands in the dips of my waist. "You're so tight, so tight and wet, like you were made just for me."

I couldn't answer so instead I stared into his eyes. Having Logan inside me was the most beautiful sensation I'd ever experienced. I wanted to tell him but words escaped me. I began a steady rhythm, part moving upward and part rocking forward on him. He slid his hands to my butt and held me, supporting my rhythm, murmuring approvingly.

My breathing got shallow and my head became almost too heavy to hold up. But I wanted to look at Logan's eyes when he came and I wanted him to look into my eyes as I came, so I mustered my strength and pressed my forehead to his.

He let go of my butt and cupped my swinging breasts. "Keep fucking me like that, Brooke, don't stop, keep fucking me, I like you fucking me, fuck me more."

My hips were alive, this is what they had been designed for. I picked up the pace as the tightness of a growing orgasm twisted my insides. My breaths were jagged, my skin damp with perspiration. I was feverish for more friction and pressure and I accelerated more, ignoring the creaking of the bedsprings and the rattling of the headboard.

He rolled my nipples, tugging them long and taut, tweaking and pulling. The edgy, nipping sensation tipped me over the precipice. Staring into his eyes, totally unblinking, I climbed the last few seconds to the point of no return. Every nerve in my pussy filled to the max until I reached a crescendo and came hard, fast and breathlessly, moaning deep in my belly, squeezing him tight and pulsing in a barrage of contractions, gripping his cock. My hands held on to his face like it was the edge of a cliff. "Logan. Oh god, Logan," I whimpered on to his lips. My hips continued to jerk against him, repeatedly crushing my clit against his pubic bone. Another spasm zigzagged up my spine and ended in my teeth. I was fucking him so hard. His body was perfectly still and I was riding him like a rodeo champion. Taking my pleasure from his beautiful solid body in a way I never had before. It was liberating, overwhelmingly fulfilling and I was letting him witness every tiny fraction of my climax—there were no barriers, no walls—he was seeing me experience my most basic pleasure.

"Take what you need from me, sweetie," he said, releasing my breasts and trapping my face in his hands the same way I was holding his. "I'm all yours."

I carried on thrusting as the last pulses of exquisite sensation tore from my body and finally slowed. My spine sagged, my heart was trying to burst from my chest.

His hips jerked and I felt his cock twitch inside me. So thick, so engorged.

"What did you mean?" I asked, my lips a hairsbreadth from his. "In the cafe, when you said don't fight it?"

His eyes held my steady focus as he slid his hands to my butt again. "Exactly that, don't fight it."

"Don't fight what?" I dropped my hands to his shoulders as his palms urged me to start rocking again.

"Ahh, fuck, that's nice," he said. "Especially after I've just watched you orgasm so spectacularly."

"Logan, don't fight what?" I pulled back to look at his face contorting with pleasure as I resumed my fast, wild hip rolls.

"Don't fight falling in love." He took complete control of my movements, lifting me up and ramming me down as if I were a light little thing. His cock turned to steel and he impaled me over and over. "I'm...not..." he panted. "I'm not going to fight something that feels so right." His head tipped back on the headboard and the cords in his neck jutted. His eyes squeezed shut and his jaw tensed so tight I feared for his teeth.

Then he lifted his head and opened his eyes. "I've fallen in love with you, Brooke."

With a shuddering final upward blast of his hips and a slamming down of my body he erupted high inside me. I got to see right to his beautiful core, to the very bottom of his soul.

And I saw that he was, indeed, in love with me.

Chapter Ten

The plane ride back the next morning was uneventful. Though the way Logan kept looking at me and leaning over and kissing my neck, it made me think he was right, we would have made our entry into the mile-high club if Brick hadn't been there chattering about the coming match against the New York Islanders.

Clifford dropped me back at Giselle's apartment, which was en route to the ice arena. The team's coaches had planned an afternoon of hard practice and Brick and Logan were expected there within the hour.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Logan said just before I stepped out of the limo. "I'll get a ticket sent over and have you escorted to the players' quarters after the game."

"Do you think I could have two? My roommate might come, it will be better than sitting alone."

"Sure thing, sweetie." He pressed a lingering kiss to my lips. "You can have as many as you want."

Clifford helped me with my case and as I put my key in the door to Giselle's flat, I licked Logan's lingering taste off my bottom lip. I was in love, there were no two ways about it. Without him at my side I felt empty. We'd spent the whole week together, spent every second we could worshipping each other's bodies. He was my destiny, the yang to my yin, the north to my south, the night to my day, and tomorrow evening stretched into the distance like a light-year.

It was the last thing I'd planned for myself, to fall in love. My plan had been to get my head down and work, study and make a career for myself. But with the complication of a man around, dates and sex, who knew how much I'd be able to concentrate. Logan had more than proved he was a delightful distraction to studying. I'd hardly gotten anything done I'd planned to.

But I wasn't going to complain. The fluttery feeling in my chest, the clenching of my stomach and the tingling of my skin combined into the most delicious, delirious state to be in. I just regretted I hadn't whispered those three words back to Logan last night. But I reckoned he knew how I felt, he must have been able to see the love brimming in my eyes, heard it in my moans of satisfaction and felt it in every single one of my caresses.

* * * * *

Giselle and I sat two rows up from the boards. We were close to the action and I was glad, I didn't want to miss a thing. I'd slipped an earpiece into my right ear and tuned into the sports channel so I could hear the commentary. I wanted to try to understand the game as best I could. In gloved hands I clutched the stubs of our tickets,

which had arrived with two dozen red roses within an hour of my arrival back in Orlando.

I didn't really know what to expect from the night other than I would end up with Logan and that was all that really mattered. I just hoped the Vipers won, because that way, his aura would be dazzling and his mood would be buzzing.

I grinned at Giselle as the crowd chanted "why are we waiting?" two seconds after the team should have arrived on the ice. She'd driven us to the rink in her new convertible. We'd felt silly packing gloves and scarves on such a hot day, but now, with our breath misting in front of our faces and the rink air nipping our cheeks, we were glad of our extra layers.

"You're going to recognize him in all his gear?" Giselle asked.

"He's number fourteen," I said. "He told me to look out for that."

Giselle suddenly smiled and pointed down to the entrance of the tunnel. "Fergal's over there, look."

Standing at the end of the tunnel rubbing his hands together stood an older guy. He was tall and broad shouldered with silvery-white hair and was chatting to what looked like a coach. Fergal wore a beautifully cut suit and a red and white striped tie—the team colors. He was nodding and frowning, then all of a sudden grinned broadly at something the other man said. He wasn't at all what I'd imagined when I'd pictured Giselle on their cream date.

"He looks nice," I said, for want of a better word.

"He is nice, real nice." I saw an unfamiliar sparkle in Giselle's eyes. "And real generous in every way."

He glanced our way and Giselle fluttered her fingers in a girly wave.

He nodded slightly and his mouth twitched. He was tanned, no doubt from villa weekends, and his teeth flashed white. He was a good-looking guy, chiseled jaw, straight nose, a few lines around his eyes but they only added to his appeal. Part of me gave a little sigh of relief that Giselle kept her standards high as well as her rates.

Suddenly the crowd erupted and the Orlando Vipers shot from the tunnel like a machine gun firing human bullets. Enormous speakers hanging from the ceiling blasted music into the cold air. Flags waved, fists punched upward and a giant screen on the scoreboard hanging down over the middle of the ice filled up with excited faces as a camera swung over the audience.

The home team wore predominantly white with red stripes on the legs and arms. Each player had their name and a number on their back. I spotted Brick first, whizzing over the ice, number eight, and then immediately after him came Logan, with fourteen stamped in big red numbers on his back and "Taylor" curved over his shoulder blades. His uniform made him look so big, he was big anyway but now he looked enormous with his shoulders padded out wider and an extra few inches taller because of his skates.

He wielded his stick in the air like a weapon, holding it high and proud as his blades shot over the ice. He hunched forward and did a complete lap in a matter of seconds with what looked like zero effort. The crowd went wild and in my ear the commentator on the radio jabbered excitedly about how good it was for the team to have their best forward back on the ice.

The goal camera zoomed in on Logan's face. I snapped my eyes to the big screen and saw his blue eyes flash through the wire crisscross of his cage. They looked hard as the ice he played on and as determined and focused as when he was making love to me. My heart did a whole new kind of flip. Just over twenty-four hours of not seeing him had felt like a lifetime, and now, watching him get ready for action and hearing the crowd chanting, "Phoenix, Phoenix, Phoenix," in time with a beating drum had my stomach somersaulting. I was flying on a mixture of pride, desperation and the desire for them all to disappear, vanish into thin air, so I could have him all to myself again.

But of course that wasn't going to happen, at least not until war on ice had been waged.

The opposition skated out of another tunnel. Boos and hisses filled the arena. The away fans cheered and clapped for their team but the Orlando mob had numbers on their side and the New York Islanders kept their heads down and their faces fixed as they skated to their bench.

Within minutes, positions had been taken and the puck dropped. A frantic scramble ensued. The whiz of skates, the scraping of sticks and shouts from the crowd filled the nacho- and beer-flavored air.

Logan raced for the puck as it hit the far corner. A New York Islander went for it too. The other guy was closer, he got there first and hooked it into the curve of his stick, ready to pass it but Logan arrived a split second later, traveling full speed. Shoulders squared, he rammed the Islander into the board and stole the puck. The crowd roared and the boards shook as if a herd of elephants had collided with them. Three more blue shirts frantically chased toward Logan. But he was quick-witted as well as quick-moving. He looked up, spotted an opening toward Brick and slid the puck over the ice in a perfectly straight line.

Brick caught the small disk, spun and took a shot. He missed. The crowd groaned and held their heads in their hands, but no sooner had the goalie shot the puck back into play than Logan hit it home with one devastating slice of his stick.

The arena went wild as the back of the net punched out. Fans screamed and cheered and the camera once again panned their delighted faces, settling on a kid with "Phoenix" scrawled in black over his cheeks.

I jumped to my feet, clapping wildly. My insides bubbled with excitement as I watched Logan being slapped on the back by his teammates. A goal in the first five minutes of play would be so good for his aura.

"And it seems Phoenix has his mojo back," the commentator shouted in my ear. "Mr. Gunner is going to be glad the week of R&R paid off." He cleared his throat

exaggeratedly and over the din of applause I heard him say, "If you know what I mean, folks."

I stopped mid-clap and turned to Giselle. She was grinning. "Don't worry," she shouted after hearing the same comment through her earpiece. "No one will recognize you with your clothes on."

"Not funny," I shouted back over the frantic cheering. Despite my mortification at the memory of the photo, I couldn't help feeling a little proud that I'd had a teeny tiny bit to do with rediscovering Logan "Phoenix" Taylor's elusive mojo.

The puck hit the ice and once again the fast pace of the game had my head spinning. Things got dirty when five players all dug for the puck right in front of us. Two zipped off, having their own stick battle for the zooming disk, leaving the other three throwing punches and raining blows on one another. The ref didn't notice but one of the linesmen did. He skated over and hovered on the edge of the scrap as if unwilling to dive in. The crowd around us went crazy, as though it was some kind of great treat to witness a glove-off fight.

I left them to it and watched the puck move toward Logan—again, he caught it on his stick effortlessly. A Hercules of a man with a black beard poking through his cage came from nowhere and shoved him against the boards. My fists clenched, worried, but I needn't have been. Logan straightened and, with Brick hot on his tail, they chased after the ogre who'd stolen the puck. Two more New York players were dodged before Logan got to him and reclaimed it. He spun one-eighty but an Islander defender jammed his stick beneath Logan's skates before he could skim back down the wing. Logan flew through the air. I gasped collectively with the crowd as he hit the deck. He skidded five, ten, fifteen feet with his arms outstretched. A man behind me leapt up and shouted over my head, "You hairy-sacked bastard, get the fuck off the ice if you can't tell the difference between a puck and a skate."

Logan came to a stop. A trainer raced across the ice as the ref blew the whistle long and hard. Logan clambered to his feet and the crowd cheered. He circled his left shoulder like a windmill, clutching the joint with his opposite glove and nodded at the trainer, who handed him a bottle of water, which he squirted through his mask into his mouth before tossing it at the bench.

Play resumed.

Immediately Brick rammed an opponent into the boards right in front of the ref. It was an ugly tackle and earned him a spell in the penalty box.

The crowd hurled abuse at the ref. "You suck!" "Are you blind, where's your seeing eye dog?"

Brick banged down on the bench, removed his helmet, spat on the floor, and from what I could read from his lips, the "f" word was the predominant adjective in the conversation he went on to have with himself.

The Plexiglas shook right in front of us and, startled, I spotted Logan's face, red with effort, as he collided with a defender. Then he was gone, chasing after the puck

and dodging Hercules. He zipped it straight to number eighteen and the Vipers scored again. The crowd went wild. The drumbeat pounded in my ears as the players celebrated by almost knocking down their scorer.

At the second break it was 2-0, the Vipers. The atmosphere was jubilant but tense and I could hardly eat the slice of pizza I bought from a nearby stand. I was so worried the opposition would come back and wreck Logan's cleansed aura and rejuvenated mojo. I wanted to celebrate with him later, not commiserate, and I crossed my fingers in my gloves and my toes in my sneakers as I asked the heavens to make this a good, good night.

Luckily the Vipers came out strong for the third period and within minutes their captain, Rick "Ramrod" Lewis, scored a brilliant shot that left the opposition's goalie in a heap of despair on the ice. Three-zip. But the Vipers loosened up, got cocky, and after a particularly violent tussle against the far wall, the Islander shot one right through the Vipers' goalie's legs. The crowd hissed. "Lucky shot, ass face," hollered the man behind me, growing bolder as he downed yet another beer.

"Do you think it's always this wild?" I shouted into Giselle's ear.

"Yes, that's why I don't come when Fergal offers me tickets. I meet him afterward instead, much more civilized."

"Well, thanks for coming with me," I said, linking my arm with hers and squeezing.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything." She smiled and her red-glossed lips shone in the bright lights. "The way you light up every time you say the name 'Logan' has left me dying to meet the guy who's transformed my heartbroken best friend back into a hot-blooded woman."

"He does make me feel good," I said. "Although..." I paused as a posse of players collided in front of us and ended up in a wild scramble of flying limbs and sticks. The whistle blew and the ref and both linesmen had to physically drag the players off one another. I spotted Logan right in the very center of the tussle, his fist flying toward an Islanders player whose knee was in his stomach. "Although I'm not sure how good he's going to feel later," I said worriedly.

"I'm sure you can kiss any hurts better and make him feel real good," Giselle whispered into my ear, wincing as Brick hit Hercules way below the belt. "I'm going to stay overnight here at the hotel, but you can take the car back with Logan, have the apartment to yourself as long as you come and collect me tomorrow afternoon."

"You sure?"

"Yes, of course." She leaned her head farther in, conspiratorially. "And if you want any toys they're in the cupboard in the spare room."

"Giselle!"

"Well, I don't know what you're into." She straightened and nodded at Logan whizzing to the far goal and plowing over a defender as though he were a weed. "But a guy with that much testosterone in his system is bound to have a few kinks lurking beneath the surface."

I thought of our fun in the villa with handcuffs and butt plugs. Giselle was right, as we got more comfortable with each other we were going to experiment with other stuff. The thought sent a hot flush over my cold skin and lust pooled in my belly. I glanced at the huge clock. I could hardly wait for the game to be over.

Finally the last buzzer sounded and the final score was three to one in favor of the home team. The Viper fans celebrated wildly, cheering and clapping and waving flags. An alligator mascot circled the rink as the players lifted off their helmets and shot streams of water into their mouths. I searched out Logan at the same time the camera did and suddenly his flushed face filled the big screen right in front of us.

"And here's the man they needed back in play," the commentator jabbered in my ear. "And not one trip to the sin bin. This must be a record for Phoenix."

Logan's hair was damp and stuck in black locks around his temples. His eyes stared into the crowd unmoving as he nodded and shook hands with a teammate. I glanced back down at the ice. He was looking straight at me from the center circle. My breath hitched in my throat and my heart bounced off my breastbone. Our eyes connected and I was smiling before I even realized my lips had moved. The noise of the arena continued as did the radio chatter, but in my head the vast stadium was silent, there was only Logan and me in the whole place. In a crowd of thousands we still sought each other out as though there was a magnetic force between us, drawing us together.

One corner of his mouth tipped and then Brick slid up, spraying his lower legs with shards of ice and his attention snapped away as he was bear-hugged.

"Come on," Giselle said. "Let's get down to the locker room entrance before it gets crazy with everyone leaving."

Before I had a chance to reply, an enormous, black-suited guy with a stern-looking face and dark shades appeared before us. "Ladies," he said as he held out his arm like a barrier. He looked over our heads as he flicked his fingers toward the stairs.

"Here we go," Giselle said, clutching her Gucci handbag. "Showtime."

I reached for my bag, a small Walmart special, and followed Giselle. She seemed to know where she was going and as we headed down the steps into a brightly lit corridor, I was acutely aware of the huge bulk of muscle breathing down my neck like some sinister bodyguard.

Giselle was oblivious, tottering ahead, chin in air and hips rolling as if she owned the place. She slotted her tiny radio into her handbag and I did the same.

We reached the entrance to the locker room. The scent of sweat-damp bodies and ice mixed with blood hung in the air. My chest tightened as I watched a paramedic rush in with a big blue box and a serious expression. A coach whizzed out, shouting in French down his mobile phone, and then the door opened slowly, controlled, as though whoever was coming out wasn't in a rush to go anywhere.

"Fergal," Giselle simpered, locking her fingers under her chin and smiling demurely.

"Giselle, my dear, how nice of you to have made it." He rested his hands on her shoulders and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Well, I wouldn't have missed it for anything, it was an amazing game." She turned to me. "And I'd like you to meet Brooke Ambrose."

Fergal scanned my face with his keen green eyes. "Of course, Brooke, what a delight to finally meet you."

Giselle glanced over her shoulder then looked back at Fergal. "Would you like me to wait for you?"

He lifted a perfectly plucked brow and his attention was once again captivated by Giselle. "I was expecting you to, I have a late meeting regarding the Stanley Cup playoffs so I told Sheila I'd be staying over."

Giselle tilted her lips and batted her eyelashes. "Excellent, in that case I'll just go and freshen up, please excuse me." She flicked her long auburn hair over her shoulder and turned. For a moment the only sound was her perfectly pitched heels echoing around the corridor.

"May I call you Brooke?" Fergal asked when she slipped from view.

"Yes, of course," I said, tugging at my bottom lip.

"I'm glad to have caught up with you, we have a few matters to discuss."

My heart lurched. My stomach rolled. This was the conversation I needed to have to realign my karmas and iron out my destiny. "Yes, absolutely," I said. "Shall we?" I indicated the opposite end of the corridor to the one Giselle had disappeared down. It appeared deserted and I didn't want to be overheard.

Fergal smiled as he gestured for me to lead the way.

I walked ahead, the corridor led to nothing more than a small recess with a door marked "Domestic Supplies". I ducked into the gap so I was hidden from view, pressed my back against the wall and pulled in a deep breath.

"You've done a great job," Fergal said, shoving his hands into his trouser pockets and rocking back on his leather heels. "Really I can't thank you enough."

I glanced over his shoulder. I wished he'd step in a bit so he wasn't visible from the locker room door. "But there's nothing to thank me—"

"Oh, but there is, my dear. Phoenix is a different man, he's focused, on the ball, or should I say on the puck, and he's in control of his temper. He's back to the guy I spent several million dollars on." Fergal grinned broadly, flashing his dazzlingly white teeth.

"No, but I—"

"I'm very grateful to you, Brooke. Giselle assured me you were up to the job and you've more than proved it. You really are a true professional."

I heard shouts of goodbye and the locker room door slammed. I lowered my voice. "The thing is about the whole job bit—"

"If you give me your bank details I'll make sure your fee is transferred first thing in the morning, my chief accountant will see to it personally."

"But you don't understand, Fergal, about the money, what I really want is—"

"We agreed on a price." His brow furrowed and his jaw set, he folded his arms over his chest. "If you went above and beyond that's not negotiable, when a price is agreed I won't change my mind."

"I don't want anything extra, that's what I'm trying to say."

"Good, because I wasn't going to give you anything more than the agreed one hundred thousand dollars, I think that's perfectly acceptable for a week of services, don't you, no matter how high class you are and how favorable the outcome has been?"

I glanced nervously over his shoulder again. *High class. Services.* "But..." My head was spinning. Where was Giselle when I needed her? "Logan and I, we did, but it wasn't like that, we..." I paused as Fergal glanced at his silver watch. "Really I just want to say no, thanks but no thanks."

He looked at me and frowned. "My dear, like I said, I'm very grateful for what you've done and the picture in the paper was genius, all publicity is good publicity when it comes to the team, boosts merchandise sales." He took a step backward. "Just give your details to Giselle," he said as his mobile phone trilled to life. "Sooner you do the sooner you'll get paid for providing Phoenix with what he needed last week." He plucked the phone from his inside jacket pocket. "Now if you'll excuse me." He stepped into the corridor, glancing toward the locker room. His piercing green eyes shifted back to me and I saw a flash of irritation cross his iris as he pressed the phone to his ear. "Gunner," he barked.

I swallowed a lump of frustration down the tight channel of my throat. I suddenly felt hot in all my winter gear. My scalp prickled and my layers were sticking to my back. He'd hardly let me get a word in edgewise, and anything I had said he hadn't heard.

I stepped past Fergal. He was rubbing his temples as he listened to his phone and paced from one side of the corridor to the other. I tried to think rationally. It didn't matter, I would get Giselle to explain it to him when he wasn't rushing around in work mode. She could tell him I didn't want to be paid for my week with Logan. What had happened between us had been lust, romance, destiny and certainly not a business arrangement.

The door to the locker room swung open and a posse of players tumbled out, slapping each other on the backs and talking over one another. I halted and scanned for Logan. But he wasn't amongst them. My heart sagged in disappointment. I just wanted to see him. I wanted to feel his arms around me. I wanted to snuggle my face into his chest and inhale his familiar scent. I couldn't tell him why I was feeling so anxious and jittery. But being cocooned in his arms was the only thing that was going to make me feel better until my deal had been properly undone.

"Brick," I said, as the door opened yet again and two players strolled out with bags slung over their shoulders.

"Hey, Brooke." Brick's face lit up when he spotted me. I saw his aura, I couldn't help it, it was a beautiful pea green, perfectly clear, no hazelnut specks and really quite dazzling. "Ramrod, this is Brooke, Phoenix's girl." He turned to the huge player beside him who'd actually had to shift sideways to fit through the doorframe.

"Hey, Brooke, guess we have a lot to thank you for." Ramrod held out a dinner plate-sized hand.

"Hi, I er, nice to meet you, um, Ramrod." I rested my hand in his and he brought it to his mouth. Soft lips pressed a warm kiss on my knuckles as his chestnut brown eyes glistened down at me.

"The pleasure is mine," he said, and released my hand. "Call me Rick."

"Watch it." Brick fingered a bruise on the rise of his left cheekbone. "Phoenix gets real possessive over her."

"Well, I can't blame him." Ramrod grinned. "Not one bit."

"Ramrod's our captain," Brick directed at me.

"I know," I said. "Well done, it was a great game."

"Sure was," Ramrod said, shoving his hand through shower-damp black hair. "And Phoenix had a lot to do with it. He played awesome. Best since, well, best since a while. He was real focused and under control."

"No trips to the penalty box," Brick said.

"Yeah, unlike you, squirt." Ramrod gave Brick a good-humored shove on the shoulder.

"Yeah, well, someone's got to take over Phoenix's bad boy reputation." Brick grinned.

"Have you seen Logan, I mean Phoenix?" I asked.

Brick shook his head. "No, not for a while."

"He was first out, a one-line interview in the tunnel and then he was gone," Ramrod added.

"He was in a rush to see you." Brick shrugged.

"So he's not in there?" I pointed at the locker room door.

"No," Ramrod said. "We're nearly the last out."

"Oh." How could I have missed him? I'd been here the whole time.

"He's probably in the players' lobby or something," Ramrod said.

"Yeah, don't sweat it," Brick added.

But sweating was exactly what I was doing. I unzipped my jacket and pulled at my scarf.

"If we see him we'll tell him you're looking for him," Ramrod said, stepping away.

"Thanks." I wished my heart would stop fluttering. I had a bad feeling growing in my stomach.

"Oh, and Brooke," Brick called over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"You've got him by the short and curlies." He hardened his voice. "So be careful with him, okay?"

"Yes, sure, of course," I said.

"Brooke," Giselle said, rounding the corner. She nodded briefly to the two giant players walking past her, then her brow furrowed. "Brooke, you look like you've seen a ghost, what's the matter?"

"I missed Logan," I said, hearing the whine in my voice.

"Don't panic, he'll be around."

"But I tried to talk to Fergal, you know about me not wanting payment for my week with him." I rubbed my fingertips over my lips—the words were hard to say. "But he wouldn't listen to me, he was too preoccupied with other stuff."

Giselle rested her hand on my shoulder. "Hey, stop winding yourself up. I'll talk to him." She glanced at Fergal who was slotting his phone away. "I'll soon have his undivided attention and I'll smooth it all over, don't worry, I know how important this is to you." Her lips stretched into a wide smile as Fergal joined us.

"Ready?" he asked, slipping a hand around her slim waist.

"Sure," she said. "Oh, hang on." She delved into her handbag. "Here you go." She handed me her car keys. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Sure." I nodded.

They turned and walked away. Giselle giggled at something Fergal whispered into her ear. Then they rounded the corner and the sound of her heels clicked into the distance, eventually fading completely.

I began to feel cold again. I yanked up my zipper and reknotted my scarf, plucking my gloves from my pocket and shoving my hands in. There really was no point hanging around the locker room.

I wandered up to the players' lounge, but by the time I got there, there were just a couple of coaches sipping beer and a barman wiping the shiny oak tables.

How could I not find him?

Hadn't he looked for me?

I found myself heading back through the lobby past a group of cleaners sweeping up great waves of litter. I didn't even have his cell number or address so I couldn't contact him. I felt like a groupie or a rink bunny who'd hung around to see the famous Phoenix but missed the chance.

I walked into the hot evening and the air blasted me with its sticky heat. I stripped off my top layers, beeped Giselle's car to life in the parking lot and got in, heart heavy,

stomach nauseous. I felt tears of disappointment prick my eyes. I'd been so looking forward to seeing him. To spending the night with him. To feeling complete again.

The car purred awake and I swung out the lot onto the highway. There was only one thing I could do. Go home. I obviously didn't mean as much to him as he meant to me. Holiday romance. I'd always known that was the file in my heart we were destined for. I had only myself to blame. I should never have let him convince me we could be more.

Chapter Eleven

I poured a glass of white wine, pulled on my favorite baggy Tom and Jerry t-shirt over my underwear and settled on the sofa. I tried not to look at the enormous bunch of red roses on the dining table, but their thick, powdery aroma hung heavy in the air and made them impossible to ignore.

I flicked on the highlights of the hockey game on *Sport Tonight*. Immediately Logan's face filled the screen as the presenter gushed over his performance. It was an old picture, taken before he'd cut his brow, and his hair was shorter. But his eyes were the same, the same penetrating glacial blue that I'd witnessed fill with determination and desire, lust and love. The same eyes I'd fallen into, like diving into the clearest ocean, as I'd made love to him.

I took a deep slug of wine and refused to succumb to a good old cry. Instead I watched as they ran through his goal in slow motion. I studied his big body moving with power and grace, speed and agility. I looked at the way he held his stick as if it was an extension of his body, always exactly where it should be. I re-heard the commentator's remark about Phoenix's mojo and his week away and how Mr. Gunner would be glad, "If you know what I mean folks."

I jumped as the doorbell chimed through the apartment. Unfolding from the sofa, I placed my wine on the coffee table and stepped up to the door to peer through the peephole, and there, standing in the corridor, was Logan "Phoenix" Taylor himself.

My heart flipped at the sight of him looming behind the door with his arms crossed and his jaw set.

My fingers fumbled at the lock as adrenaline shot into my system. I looked down at my scruffy yellow Tom and Jerry t-shirt. Who cared, I wouldn't have it on long anyway.

I pulled open the door, but before I even had time to say hello he slammed his mouth onto mine. The door banged shut. He must have kicked it. I heard him growl, a feral, carnal sound. I had no idea what he'd said, it was as if impatience had made him incapable of coherent speech.

I locked my arms around his neck and hung on as he stepped me back into the apartment. I stumbled and the next thing I knew he'd run his hands to my butt cheeks and lifted me into the air.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, I was consumed with want, need and lust. He was here. He felt the same way I did. I could feel it in his hot, searing, kisses, hear it in his ragged, desperate breaths.

"Logan, I looked for you, I couldn't—" His tongue plundered into my mouth again, sweeping and circling, devouring me, filling me with his hot, male flavor. He paced

forward and I felt his erection shove against the thin silk gusset of my panties. I was greedy for him. I wanted him inside me. I raked my hands through his hair and groaned at the intensity of my urges. They were so primitive, so elemental and natural. Nothing could stop us reaching conclusion.

The back of my legs hit a cool, shiny surface. The dining table. Logan moved his hands to my hips and shoved me back so I was sitting with my legs dangling over the edge. He grabbed fistfuls of my t-shirt and dragged it over my head. My hands moved to the belt of his jeans. He looked me straight in the eye, the muscle in his cheek danced and his nostrils flared.

I felt tugging, heard ripping and looked down. My panties had been shredded from my body and hung against my right thigh. He clamped his hands to the balls of my shoulders and forced me flat.

As the chill of the polished table spread over my hot back he ducked his head, unclipped the front fastening of my bra and latched his mouth onto my nipple. I moaned and arched farther into him, seeking more stimulation, more sensation. He increased the pressure and nipped me to the point of pain with small bites while bunching and feeding my flesh into his mouth with his hand.

He'd never taken me so roughly, so urgently, so desperately. I hardly recognized the animalistic way he was ravaging me as being the attentions of the same man I'd fallen so desperately in love with. My body was buzzing with excitement and with the need to feel him inside me. "Logan, please," I whimpered, wrapping my legs around his hips and thrusting my pelvis into his. A groan of pure carnal desire tore from my mouth.

He straightened and stood between my legs, pulled at his belt buckle and the buttons on his Levi's. I lay there naked, ridiculously, dizzily aroused, looking up at him. I wanted flesh on flesh but that would have to wait until later. This was all about immediate satisfaction, taking what we needed on the most primitive level. It didn't matter how we did it so long as we did.

He pulled his cock from his fly and rolled on a condom. His breaths puffed up his wide chest and beads of sweat shone on his top lip. He hooked his elbows under my knees and spread me wide open, stretching the joints of my hips to the extreme. I eyed his formidable erection and forced my trembling pussy to relax.

He spread my lips with the tip of his cock, finding my entrance and dipping in just a fraction. Then he shut his eyes, tipped his head to the ceiling and forged forward. My body was forced to stretch for him and I cried out as he buried to the hilt. A stitch of pain mixed with pleasure as his balls slammed up against my butt cheeks and his hipbones pressed on my inner thighs. I was so full, so possessed by him, he was so damn deep.

"Logan, oh, Logan," I cried as my hands clamped around his wrists. I was pinned to the table. Out of control, under his control.

He pulled back, slipped from me almost completely then pounded back in with a grunt. I thrashed my head from side to side, mindless with sensation as he rocked up against my clit. Moisture wept from me, lubricating his way. He set up a fast, furious pace, thrusting like a jackhammer and putting all his considerable strength and energy into fucking me.

My hands squeezed his wrists like manacles as the first waves of orgasm grew. "Yes, oh god, yes," I shouted. "Don't stop."

He upped the pace. The solid teak table creaked in protest. My heart beat so wildly I didn't know if it could cope. Heat pooled deliciously in my pelvis and my inner muscles clenched, my climax was imminent. I tilted my hips and his full weight rocked against my clit, and then, like a bolt of lightning, completion claimed me.

A deep moan erupted from my core. My sense of reality shattered as my body convulsed in bliss. I ground against him, seeking deeper penetration and gripping at his cock as my clit flew me through spirals of pleasure.

"Logan, ah, Logan," I cried. "That's it, right there."

He slipped his cock from me, wrapped his hands around my waist and flipped me over on the table. Twisting midair, my flailing hands hit the vase of my huge bunch of roses. They toppled to the floor with the smash of glass and a wilting crunch. I barely noticed.

My breasts and stomach flattened against the cool wood and I felt him shove between my thighs. I craned my neck to look at his face. His eyes were dark and possessed as he positioned himself at my swollen, sopping entrance, his hands feeding his cock toward me. I knew he was only moments away from coming, his steely erection hammering into me seconds ago had told me that. But I couldn't keep my neck twisted that way to watch him climax and my cheek fell against my hands as he penetrated me again.

The smooth flare of his cock sped over my G-spot and I gasped at the intensity of the ultra-deep caress. He rode higher and higher. Every muscle in my body went taut and my spine arched. He was filling me to capacity and still he wanted to gain more entry, demanded more of me. I'd always been against rough handling but I couldn't deny that Logan's treatment of me tonight was flying me high.

He dug his fingers into my waist and held me firm. He took what he wanted. I was sure he was jabbing into my diaphragm with his cock.

"Fuck, ah yes, that's it," he said as his hips pounded against my butt and his wiry pubic hair tickled my ass. My body was slick with sweat, dripping with renewed desire. He thrust purposefully in and out, over and over, his breaths hard hisses and his cock a rod of pent-up pressure. A dark bloom began to build and I knew another deeply satisfying G-spot orgasm was about to arrest my body, if only he could last a few more strokes.

I bucked against him, instinctively seeking more, even though I had no more to give. I felt one of his hands leave my waist and palm my butt cheek. His fingers dipped down, stroked into my hot cleft and hovered at my anus.

As the shock wave of my second orgasm rocked through me he rammed two saliva-coated fingers into my clenched hole, hard and fast, sending white-hot electric currents straight into my pussy.

"Oh, god, ah, ah," I panted as stars exploded in my vision. Wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me. I felt him coming too. Pulsing high up inside me. He grunted, a deep Neanderthal sound, and kept on ramming both holes as I spasmed around his cock and his fingers.

He threaded his free arm beneath my stomach. My toes lifted off the floor as he dragged me upward onto his thick, corded forearm. Holding me tight and spread before him he ground through his long, hard release. It was as if he wouldn't be happy until he had gone deeper, higher inside me than ever before.

Eventually his muscles relaxed and my toes tickled against the tiles again. I managed to brush a strand of hair from my mouth as I landed back in the real world.

I curled my torso toward him and with a small squelching noise his cock slipped from me. He pulled his fingers out and my tight band of muscle closed. My pussy felt empty and swollen as I drew my legs together.

"Logan," I said, pushing up from the table on shaky arms and stepping up to him. "That was..." Words escaped me as I cupped his scratchy jaw in my palms. I stretched up to the balls of my feet and pressed my lips to his. Poked out the tip of my tongue and traced the seam of his beautiful mouth. I'd missed kissing him while he'd taken me from behind and I intended to make up for it, more than make up for it. I wanted to kiss him all night long.

I prodded and probed deeper, searching for a mating with his tongue. But his lips were rigid and when I found his tongue it lay flat and thick on the base of his mouth.

I pulled back. "What?" I asked, slipping my hands to the side of his neck and dropping down to the soles of my feet. "What's the matter, didn't that do it for you?" I smiled, I knew full well it had.

A shard of lightning shot across his eyes and his lips tightened into a dead straight line. He sucked in a breath and his nose wrinkled. When he spoke I barely recognized his low, mean voice. "I didn't think whores kissed on the lips."

The world stood still.

Everything stopped moving. From the cosmic orbits in the outer solar system to the rhythmic beating of my heart.

"W-what?" I stammered.

"I didn't think whores kissed on the lips," he said again through gritted teeth. He tipped his chin and his neck moved from under my palms.

His words screamed like a knife in my ears and I shook my head to rid it of the painful ringing. I hadn't heard right. I couldn't have heard right. I dropped my hands to his chest. Heat from his body radiated through his thin t-shirt. I tried to swallow but my tongue had stuck to the roof of my mouth. I felt as though cotton wool had been shoved down my throat and a cobra had wrapped around my ribs.

He reached up and curled his fingers around my hands, peeled them from his chest and took a step back. His features turned blank and his eyes glazed over.

"I'm not a whore!" I said as my arms fell limply to my sides.

He snapped off the condom, tucked in his cock and twisted his jean buttons closed. "I heard everything," he said, stepping into the kitchen area. "Light might not travel around corners, but sound damn well does."

"I don't know what you're talking about." My chest was crushing my heart, my lungs were about to burst. My head pounded as if a balloon had inflated right in the very center of my brain.

"I heard you and Fergal talking," he sneered as he kicked open the kitchen bin and dropped the full condom inside. He walked to the sink and washed his hands. "When you were sorting out the payment details of your 'successful' trip to the island." His face twisted. "I heard the whole fucking conversation, Brooke."

"But —"

"At least now I know where I stand." His eyes narrowed as he scanned me from my bare toes to my tousled hair. "Fergal paid you to come and spend the week with me. And a fucking good wage it was too. Struggling nurse, my ass. You got it all figured out haven't you? Make a few bucks with your body and then laugh all the way to the bank."

I wasn't laughing. I was dying inside. This wasn't my destiny, our destiny. Once two souls became entwined that was it. How could this be happening? How could it be going so wrong?

I crossed my arms over my naked breasts. He dried his hands and walked toward me.

"You don't understand," I pleaded, my vision blurring as I looked at him.

"Oh, I understand perfectly. Everything became very clear when I came out of the changing room to find you." His lips twisted into an ugly snarl. "You let me fuck you, under Fergal's instructions, you let me fuck you to get me back in the swing of my game, it was all just a business deal. Last week I was simply your job."

"But you know that's not what happened, Logan, you were there too." I stepped forward but he retreated as if I had some deadly airborne disease so I ceased all movement. "Please, it was real, it was so much more than sex. You know it was."

"Bullshit," he spat. "That's all it was for you." He turned and strode toward the door. "All your crap about auras and fate, yin and yang, I don't believe a word of it."

You're a hooker, a liar and I wish I'd never met you. I'd have been better off with a fucking rink bunny, at least I'd know what I was damn well getting."

"Logan, wait, you don't mean that. Please, say you don't mean those words."

With his fingers wrapped around the door handle he turned to me, his face stern and stiff. Where was the gentle, caring guy I'd fallen in love with? This was an imposter and I wanted my man back.

"I mean every word," he said. "I'm sick of being treated like a dumb jock, it's happened once too fucking often."

"Logan." This had gone too far. Desperate measures were required. "Logan, I...I've fallen in love with you."

An awkward silence filled the air.

"You really expect me to believe that?" he huffed.

"It's not something I say lightly."

His eyes settled on my breasts, squashed behind my hands, then dropped lower to the damp juncture of my thighs. "And I fell in lust with you," he said in a quiet but hard voice.

"No, there was more, I know there was. The way you touched me, kissed me and held me while you slept. You felt it, too, you even said you did."

"Get fucking real, Brooke. You were fucking me because you were getting paid to. I was fucking you because you were there, available and really damn hot for it."

"No," I stepped toward him but my knees felt watery and weak and it turned into a stagger. "No, that's all wrong, you're making a mistake."

He held up a flattened palm. "There's no mistake. I know what I heard."

"But, Logan," I said on a sob. Tears brimmed on my lower lids. "But what about what we just did? Surely it meant something to you." Standing naked before a giant of a man who was looking at me with ice-cold eyes was becoming more excruciating by the millisecond. I knew I couldn't dig into much more of my pride, it was just about on empty. "It meant something to me. It meant a lot to me," I pleaded. "And I know it did to you too."

He pulled open the door and put one foot over the threshold. "It meant fuck all to me, Brooke."

"So, why?" My knees threatened to fold, my spine had turned to dust. Breathing was getting harder as my airway constricted and I fought not to vomit. "Why come here at all if you feel nothing, if I mean nothing?" I asked on a painful wheeze, clutching a clenched fist to my sternum.

The muscle in his jaw flexed and his eyes narrowed. "Because." He pulled in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Because I just wanted to make sure Fergal got his money's worth."

The door slammed shut.

The frame rattled.

The apartment roared with silence.

My knees gave up the fight and I fell into a crumpled heap by the door, broken and wilted like my tipped roses. Naked and with a shattered heart, I pressed my pounding forehead onto the cold tiles and willed myself to wake up. This was the worst nightmare ever. With each second that passed, the hole in my heart was growing. The vacuum that was my soul was being shredded like tender flesh over coral.

Where had my delicious glow of love and respect gone? The intense belief that I had found the other half of my being, the positive to my negative. My life had been thrown in the air like Chinese sticks and they'd landed all wrong. Tangled and crossed, splintered and unreadable.

I gave in to gut-wrenching sobs. Let the well of hot, salty tears overflow my lower lids. I barely noticed the wetness on my cheeks as my time with Logan flashed before me. Walking on the beach hand in hand. Standing beneath the stars. Him touching me with caresses full of love, me touching his beautiful, powerful body. The way his mellow laugh rumbled through my bones and the sharp way my breath hitched when he settled his lust-filled eyes on me.

I couldn't go on. This pain was just too real. Worse than any physical harm, worse than a million anemones. His voice—words of love and words of hate—echoed in my mind, chasing away sanity, replacing it with madness, anger and burning unjustness. How could he really, in his heart of hearts, think that of me? Where had the respect gone, the consideration, the bond that had sealed us together so intensely in bed only two nights ago? I couldn't imagine us being apart as I'd fallen asleep in his arms. He'd held me as if I was the most precious thing on this earth.

And now.

Now he thought I was a whore and worse than that, he'd fucked me without any tenderness or consideration, as if I was one.

Chapter Twelve

I moved through the next few weeks a zombie, barely registering the passing of time. The cataclysmic event that had torn apart my life had left me worse than broken. I was empty and hollow. My insides were like a gaping black hole, void of any kind of light.

The entrance exam came and went. I did okay. The questions were not as demanding as I'd thought they were going to be and I reached the interview stage. But I was at the mercy of the heavens. Whatever the stars wanted to dole out for me I'd just have to take it. If nursing wasn't meant for me then there was nothing I could do to change that fact.

My relationship with Logan had felt as though it was meant to be. It had been so perfect, so right, yet it had all gone wrong. It had all been my fault. From the very moment I'd agreed to go to the villa I'd knocked my karma off course and now karmic retribution had bitten me on the ass, big-time.

I dragged my no doubt completely blotchy aura and myself to The Grill each day. The first thing I'd done was tear up the photo of Logan and me in the water. Max had it pinned to the notice board in his office alongside his ticket to an Orlando Vipers game signed by Ramrod. I didn't need to say anything to him. He looked at my empty eyes, my pale face and my tight lips and patted my arm like a kindly uncle. It was enough to make my lower lids fill and my throat constrict, even though I didn't think it was possible to shed any more tears over Logan.

Giselle cooked fancy dinners that I pushed around my plate each evening. My senses had dulled, even my taste buds. Nothing had flavor, it all tasted the same. She paid off my credit card bill as she'd promised she would if I didn't get paid. My pride wanted to stop her, but I had little choice and she was too adamant for me to be bothered to put up a fight.

I lay in bed at night, work-weary from hours on my feet but unable to sleep. Logan's face hovered before me every time I shut my lids. His crystal clear blue eyes and long lashes. His dark brows, one scarred not just from hockey but also from the fight he'd had with Brick. I visualized his wide mouth tipping in amusement, pressing kisses to my skin and telling me he loved me.

When eventually I did grab snatches of sleep, I dreamed of him. It was always the same. He was standing on the sand, bare-chested in the sunshine, beer in one hand and shades over his eyes. The dream began with me trying to get him to notice me in front of him. I smiled, waved and eventually shouted his name. But he looked right through me, ignoring me despite my efforts. My temper swelled, fury consumed me, and by the end of the nightmare I was pounding clenched fists against his chest. Screaming and

crying, begging him to listen, to see what was before him. But his face didn't even register my words, his body didn't flinch, and eventually he turned and walked into the sea. I always woke with wet cheeks and the covers thrown off. Twice Giselle had come into my room in the early hours to see if I was all right when she'd heard me crying out. But she'd gotten used to my new nightly routine, and now she left me to my torment.

I didn't know which emotion was the worst so I tried to block them all. It was the only way to get out of bed in the morning. The sadness was so desolate, so vacant that I felt like a planet knocked off course for all eternity. It gouged out a part of me that had never even had a chance to fully grow. The fury was the opposite, it was hot and wild and left my skin prickling when I thought of his words and the last time he laid his hands on me. My body felt as though it was not my own, it had been used by a lover in a way that wasn't loving. Penetrated by a man as full of anger and revenge as he *had* been full of sweetness and love. It had felt so good, so intense, but seconds after the climax the plug had been pulled on my euphoria and now I'd ever be able to trust anyone again.

"Brooke, have you taken those double cheeseburgers to table ten yet?" Max asked, wiping greasy hands down his apron.

"Just doing it," I said, slipping a pencil behind my ear and reaching for the two overloaded plates.

"You need to get a move on, the place is filling up." Max dropped more fries into fat and the air in front of him hissed and spat. "After-work rush."

I glanced out the window at the full parking lot, sidled around another waitress and headed to table ten. I deposited the food with a strained smile and dashed to table six to take an order from a young family.

"Three nuggets and fries, a double bacon burger with two eggs over easy and a medium steak with salad and fries," I called to the kitchen as I hastily scrawled the order.

I reached for a tray with a lone Bud on it.

"Table eighteen," Max said.

"Not mine," I said, reaching for a cloth to go and wipe down a recently vacated table that was mine.

"Just do it," Max said gruffly.

I tutted and straightened my skirt. I was always picking up Shirley's work and she never shared tips. I grabbed the Bud, without the tray, and walked to the far end of the restaurant. At table eighteen, with his back to me, sat a guy in a deep purple t-shirt with a baseball cap pulled low and big legs sticking out from under the table.

I took out a coaster from my pinny pocket, dropped it in front of him, and placed the dew-covered bottle on top of it. "You ordered a Bud?" I asked.

"Yeah." He curled big fingers around the beer and looked up at me.

I froze.

My mind registered what my eyes were seeing but it took a moment for the neurons to fire. When they did my heart melted at the same time as my blood boiled. "What...What the hell are you doing here?"

"I needed to see you."

"Well, I damn well don't need to see you." I snatched back the beer. "You're not getting served here. Go."

"Sit, we need to talk."

"Not a chance." I glanced over at Max, who was busy ordering the junior chef about. "Apart from the fact I'm rushed off my feet, I don't want to hear anything you have to say, Logan."

"Brooke," he said through gritted teeth. "Please."

"No, now get out." I went to point to the door but as I raised my arm he snapped out his hand and his fingers harnessed my wrist.

"If you don't sit your ass on the seat opposite me," he said in a low growl, "right now, I'm going to throw you over my shoulder, march out of here and put you in my truck. Then I'm gonna lock the door and say what I want to say and you *will* listen." He swept his tongue over his bottom lip. "Now it's your choice, you can show the whole place the color of your panties as you no doubt scream and holler over my shoulder or you can sit quietly and civilly and listen to me." The pressure on my wrist tightened. "Now what's it gonna be?"

I jerked my arm, trying to rid his fingers. His touch was sending electric currents up to my shoulder, across my chest and straight into my vulnerable heart. The thought that he could dart straight back in there made my blood pressure rocket with fury. As did the thought that he might actually throw me over his shoulder and flash my underwear to the whole place. "You wouldn't dare."

"You wanna try me?" His eyes flashed dangerously as his fingers squeezed my tendons and bones even tighter.

I glared at his steely, challenging face and knew I had no choice. He was seconds from hauling me into the air like the caveman he was.

I slammed down his beer again and slipped onto the red plastic seat opposite. He finally let go of my arm and reached for his Bud.

"Be quick," I said, averting my eyes from the face of the man who'd made me love him and then broken my heart.

"It will take as long as it takes," he said, resting back as if he had all the time in the world.

"No, it won't," I glanced at my watch. "You've got one minute, starting now."

"That's not long."

"Long enough to drink and go."

"But not long enough for me to apologize to you."

I gave a small huff. "Words are not enough to undo what you did, Logan. It cut too deep."

"I know and I'm really sorry." He leaned forward and reached for my hand again. I snapped it away. I couldn't let him touch me, it weakened the ridiculously fragile armor I'd built around myself.

"You're right, sorry isn't enough," he said, taking a sip of beer. "Words are pathetic, so let me make it up to you in other ways."

My treacherous body was flushing at his proximity, my nose repeatedly pulling in deep breaths of his delicious aftershave and my gaze, like a magnet, was drifting to his face again. Absorbing the angles of his cheeks in the shadow of his cap, the small creases darting from the corners of his eyes to his temples and the way a small drip of froth sat on his top lip. "You've hurt me too much," I said, crossing my arms over my chest and curling my fingers into the thin cotton of my blouse. "It's too late for us." I leaned forward and lowered my voice, anxious not to be overheard by other customers, or worse still, the waitstaff. "You called me a whore, Logan, remember? You called me a whore."

He pressed his lips together and snatched in a breath.

"And..." I whispered. "And you treated me like a whore too." I swallowed tightly. "You touched me like I meant nothing to you when I thought you were being loving and passionate, that we were making love as two equals."

A maddening silence fell between us. He took a draught of his beer as my body trembled, memories from that night flashing through my mind.

"I was mad at you," he said, jutting out his stubbled jaw. "Real mad."

"But you wouldn't even let me explain."

"I understand everything now."

"How, how do you understand now, but you didn't back then?" I unfolded my arms.

"I went to your apartment." He took off his cap, ran a hand through his hair then pulled the peak back down low over his brow. "I spoke to Giselle."

"You went to see Giselle? When?" I placed my fingers on the red-checked tablecloth.

"Today, this afternoon, when I was looking for you." He reached for my hand again but I snapped it away. His arm and chest flinched as though I'd struck him. It was the way I'd wanted him to flinch in my angry dreams.

"I didn't care about the circumstances," he said in a tight voice, "or the situation, I just needed to see you. Because what you said, right before I left that night —"

Prickles of irritation swept through my scalp. "So you thought I'd slept with you for money right up until this morning. Until only few hours ago you still thought I'd done all of that on some sort of business deal?"

"Yes...no...yes." He shook his head and pulled in a deep breath. "Until this morning, yes, I still thought you'd slept with me for the money. But your roommate filled me in on the details and told me in no uncertain terms that if I ever called you a whore again I'd regret it big-time." He rubbed his fingers over his chin. "She's very protective of you, isn't she?"

The image of Giselle, all tiny and perfect, wagging her finger at Logan, sprang to mind. The girl looked sweet but she could bite like a pit bull, I'd seen her do it before. "She's always looked out for me," I said. "She's all I've got."

"No, she isn't."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I frowned.

"You've got me now."

"No, I haven't, Logan, you're not part of my life anymore, you made sure of that, and..." I paused then spoke again in a quiet but firm voice, "If you still think I'm a whore I want you to leave right now."

"I know you're not a...whore. Giselle told me about the deal with Fergal. How you were getting paid for a holiday, to be a companion and that sex wasn't part of it."

"Well of course it wasn't." I rolled my eyes.

One corner of his mouth tilted. "I'm glad it happened though, I'm glad you were there as my companion, like, really damn glad you were."

I pursed my lips and looked at my watch. Tried to ignore the buzzing in my belly at the memory of our naked time in the villa. "I think you've said everything you need to say now, don't you?"

"Not by a long shot."

"I have to work, Logan."

"Take your break."

"I don't get a break." I went to stand.

He reached out. This time I was too slow and he grabbed my hand as it rested on the table, then tugged me back down to the seat. "I'm so, so sorry, Brooke. If you let me I will spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

"You could never make it up to me. No one has ever made me feel so low, dirty and used."

The muscle in his cheek flexed and he tightened his fingers around mine. "What I did was bad," he ground out. "But you're not totally blameless either."

"How do you figure that?"

He shook his head. "You could have just been honest. You could have just said that you were getting paid to stop me, to quote Giselle, 'from drinking myself into a coma every night and watching reruns of old games.' That way we would have both known where we stood from the beginning. All this bull about your dad being a friend of Fergal's, it's just driven me nuts wondering what else you made up."

I stiffened. "I lost both my parents in the car crash I told you my mother died in. So there was only the made-up father and really Fergal started that one, so other than that you got to know the real me at the villa. I didn't tell you any lies about who I am or what I want to do with my life." I paused. Logan had a point. I'd known at the time that I should tell him. The deception had hung over me like an ugly gray cloud, blotching my aura like an oil slick.

"Look at it from my point of view," he went on earnestly. "I thought I'd finally met someone who liked me for me. Someone gorgeous, intelligent and caring. Someone who knew me as Logan and not Phoenix. And then I find out you were paid to like me, paid to be with me. How used and low do you think that made *me* feel? I thought I'd been making love to a beautiful woman who was as into it as me and then I found out it was all an act."

I saw pain pierce his eyes. It stabbed my heart to know I'd put it there.

"I felt dirty and used too," he said quietly.

"Please don't say that. Because it wasn't an act, you have to believe me." A bubble of emotion popped in my chest. "I was as into it as you, and I do like you for you," I said, beating down a thickening in my throat.

"Just like?"

"Oh, Logan." I dropped my head into my free hand and blinked back a tear of regret. "We could have been so perfect together, but this is such a mess now."

"We can sort it out," his voice brightened.

"No we can't, we've messed up our karmas forever."

"Don't say that. You're so good for my karma, you cleanse it, you know you do. You get rid of all those nasty black streaks."

"That's auras not karmas that are cleansed."

"Well, whatever, all I know is yours is good for mine. I played better than I had all season with you in the stands. Did you see that shot in the first period? It was awesome!"

I nodded and one corner of my mouth twitched at the memory.

"I've still been playing well, but jeez, that game really set me back on form."

Glancing at Max I saw him glaring at me with his hands on his hips.

"Please, Brooke," Logan said, leaning in and lowering his voice. "Come with me. Come with me now to my place, move in while you do your nurse training and let me look after you. I've got a huge house to rattle around in, plenty of money —"

"I don't need your money," I said quickly.

He sighed and looked down at the table. "I know you don't, and I didn't mean look after you like that although of course I want to." He smoothed his thumb over my knuckles so softly it was as if butterflies had landed there. "I meant let me rub your feet when they ache after a shift on the ward, let me bring you coffee and cake when you're

studying." He looked up and smiled. "Let me take you to the beach for picnics on your days off so we can swim naked in the sea again."

His gaze lowered to my lips and it took every ounce of self-discipline I possessed to stop myself from leaning over and kissing him. I so wanted to swim naked in the sea with him again. I wanted to let him look after me more than I wanted to do anything else in the world.

"Tell me you haven't missed me touching you, holding you, kissing you and I'll walk away." He looked deep into my eyes and his jaw tensed. "But say it like you mean it, Brooke, 'cause you're the best thing that's happened to me in a very long time and I'm not going to let you go unless I'm sure there's nothing left to repair."

I swallowed. We'd both been wrong, I could see that now. I'd hurt him too. I knew I was softening because when I was with Logan I was happy. It was as if my soul was complete, when I wasn't with Logan I was miserable, I could barely function. I missed his kisses and caresses, but I also missed his smell, his taste and the way he tried so hard not to curse when I was within earshot. I missed the way his gaze followed me as I walked around a room and the sound of hockey on the TV. I missed knowing he was there if I stood on another anemone and needed carrying home.

"Brooke." He reached forward and with the crook of his index finger tilted my chin. His gaze bored into mine and his brows lowered. "I love you so much, sweetie, more than anyone else ever could," he said quietly. "Please, give us another chance to get it right."

A sob erupted from my chest and gurgled up to my throat. I stood and leaned over the table. My arms reached out and my heart swelled as he came toward me and we met over the table. The peak of his cap bumped my head, our lips meshed and I clung to his shoulders as though I was clinging to life itself.

He threaded his fingers into my hair and groaned as his tongue dipped into my mouth. His stubbled chin scratched mine and his hot, malty taste took me back to the villa. "I love you too," I managed to squeak into his mouth. He responded with a kiss so passionate I thought he might pull me over the table and strip me naked right there and then.

"Brooke, what the hell do you think I'm paying you good dollars for?" Max's voice suddenly boomed in my ear.

Our kiss broke. I turned to Max, who was beet faced and hopping on the spot next to our table.

"There's tables to serve for crying out loud," Max bellowed at me. "A stack of drinks to be poured and the kitchen needs..." His gaze swung from me to Logan. His mouth stilled then hung open like a goldfish. "Oh...I...er, Mr. Phoenix." His eyes widened and his body froze, except for his hands, which wrung around the cloth he was holding faster than a spin dryer.

Logan curled his fingers with mine and stepped out of the booth, tugging me with him. I was aware of the din of the restaurant softening as people turned to look at us,

their attention caught at first by Max's outburst and now by the famous hockey player standing in their midst.

"I'm sorry, Mister...?" Logan asked, holding out his hand.

Max tipped his neck back. "Mr. Crowther. Max Crowther. Proprietor of The Grill." He took Logan's hand.

"Pleased to meet you," Logan said, shaking his hand. "Great place."

Max stared up. "Thanks, thanks a lot. Have you eaten yet? You want our special? On the house, of course, gotta keep your strength up for the big game Saturday."

"Very kind of you," Logan said. "Another time perhaps. I've already got what I came for today." He looked down at me and his eyes sparkled. "Brooke is going to be taking some time off."

"But she's one of my best waitresses," Max said, shocked. "Reliable, considerate..."

"Exactly, which is why she's wasted serving up burgers and beers." Logan took off his Vipers cap and dropped it onto Max's head. Then he stooped, tucked one hand behind my knees, the other around my waist and swung me into his arms the way he had on the beach.

"Logan," I gasped, curling my arms around his neck. "I can't just leave."

"Sure you can."

"But..." My gaze swung around the full tables and the wide eyes directed at us.

"You can manage fine, can't you Mr. Crowther?" Logan asked, looking down at Max.

"Er...well." Max touched the cap on his head as though it was treasure.

"Can't you?" Logan said, quieter but with a distinct tone of menace.

"Absolutely, whatever you say, Phoenix. We can manage just fine." Max's mouth stretched into a wide grin and he bobbed his head so much his jowls wobbled like a bulldog's. "Off you go, Brooke, see you soon."

Logan pressed a quick kiss to my lips then strode toward the door.

"Just make sure you hit the back of the net again this week," Max shouted after us.

"I will, now that my aura's gonna be well and truly cleansed," Logan said quietly into my ear.

I giggled, burying my head into his neck and pulling in the divine scent of his skin. Shirley opened the door and as we passed through it the whole place erupted into a riot of applause.

Logan paced across the lot toward a huge, shiny black truck with tinted windows. He tugged open the passenger door and slid me in. Within a minute of leaving the restaurant he'd fired the engine, shoved it into drive and we were pulling onto the highway.

I looked across at his profile as the air-conditioning blew to life. He had a white-knuckle death grip on the steering wheel, his mouth was set hard and tight and he was staring straight ahead, barely blinking.

"Logan, what's the matter?" I asked.

"It's forty minutes to my place," he said, squinting his eyes and gritting his teeth.

"That's okay," I said, loosening my seat belt and moving along the bench so I was pressed against his side.

"No, it's not." I spotted the little muscle in his jaw flexing at supersonic speed.

"Why, what on earth's the matter?" I let my body lean against his and absorbed his heat, stroked my hand along the dark hairs on his thick forearm.

"Because." He shifted on the seat. "All I can think about is getting you naked, getting inside you, holding you, kissing you, never letting you go again, and driving is not enough of a distraction, not by a long shot."

I glanced down at the impressive bulge in his jeans. "Mmm," I said. "Want me to help you out with that dilemma?" I licked my lips and twitched my brows.

"Not a good an idea on the interstate," he said in a strained voice as he stared at my mouth as if he actually wanted to eat it.

I reached for the bottom of his t-shirt and lifted it to expose his fly buttons. "So pull off somewhere if you can't wait." I touched his belly and the muscles tensed. Let my finger tickle from his navel to his waistband and popped the top button as I nuzzled into his neck and kissed and licked his warm skin. He tasted divine, like cinnamon sticks floating in mulled wine, toffee at a bonfire.

He let out a groan and stared at the road.

I undid the next button and let the back of my hand brush his steely erection through the denim.

"Ah, shit," he said then looked at me. "Sorry."

The next thing I knew, the truck took a hard right off the interstate. I clung to his biceps to stop from sliding down the long bench seat.

"Where are we going?" I glanced out the window at a quiet back lane. I could just make out a sparkling stretch of water in the distance.

"Detour."

"A good detour?" I resumed undoing his fly.

"Hell yeah."

I wriggled down the bench, dropped my head into his lap and freed his cock into my palm. It jutted forward from his tangle of dark pubic hair and I wrapped my fist around the thick circumference and gave a firm squeeze.

He snatched in a breath and his thighs tensed to marble. "Be careful with that, sweetie, it's had a few weeks just thinking about you, could go off anytime."

"Perfect," I muttered. My mouth was watering, saliva had pooled in my cheeks, waiting to lubricate his shaft. I stretched open my jaw and in one deep mouthful took him to the back of my throat.

"Ah, yes," he hissed above me.

The truck motored on. When we went over a bump, he thrust his hips upward and the head of his cock butted even harder against my throat. Greedily I sucked in his flavor, musky and spiced with a hint of salt. He tasted so good, even better than I remembered. I slid back up, swirled my tongue around the ridge of the head and grasped his shaft in my fist once again. I dipped into his slit and delighted in the creamy drop I was able to capture on the tip of my tongue.

"Shit, I can't drive while you do this to me," he grunted. I heard the crunch of gravel and my body pressed against the back of the seat as the truck skidded to a halt.

The next thing I knew, my seat belt was off and I was on my back. Logan loomed over me.

"What the hell," he said. "There's no one else in this old parking lot and I've got tinted windows." He kissed me, hard and desperate. His hands were everywhere, as if he didn't know which bit of me to touch first. He ripped at my blouse, sending buttons pinging around the dash. Dragged at the cotton and buried his face in my cleavage, dipping his fingers into the lace edge of my bra. "Oh, how I've missed being here," he muttered, pulling my nipple into his mouth through the thin silk of my bra cup.

I ran my hand through his tousled hair and arched into his suckling, shifting my thighs so he could settle between them and letting out a groan as his hard cock jutted at my mound through my clothes.

His hands roamed down my thighs and he yanked up my skirt, lifting his weight for a second to push it right up around my belly in a ruck of material. I heard ripping, and without looking knew another pair of panties had met their final day.

"You're gonna have to start replacing my underwear," I said breathlessly.

"It's not worth wearing when I'm around," he growled. He reached for the glove box, dropped it open and pulled out a plus-sized box of condoms.

"You were feeling lucky," I said as he flipped the lid and pulled one out.

He looked down at me with heavy-lidded eyes. "I hoped I'd get lucky. I hoped I'd be the luckiest guy on the planet and get you to come home with me, but I wasn't banking on it, and for a moment back there I thought I had no chance." His lips hovered over mine. "I thought I'd never have a moment like this with you again and that thought was just too damn painful to imagine."

He sat up and rolled the condom down his shaft. My heart was bursting with love and my soul ached to be joined with his. He positioned his erection at my entrance and I squirmed impatiently, desperate for the action to start.

He dropped over me and our mouths devoured one another as his hips curled under. He penetrated me until his balls were riding up against my butt cheeks. I

moaned into his mouth as he moaned into mine. The sound was abandoned, wild and extended. Even though he was as high as he could go he kept on rocking his pelvis into me, drawing out my clit from its hood and rubbing at the needy nub.

"Logan, oh, Logan," I cried as he tore his lips from mine and kissed my eyelids, my cheek, a sensitive spot below my left ear. I managed to get my legs around his waist within the confines of the truck and arched toward him as he rocked up against me harder and faster. "I've missed you so much. You feel so good," I panted, feeling the first tug of orgasm. What he was doing with his hips was wicked, unfair. I had no chance of waiting for him.

"So do you, sweetie. So hot, so wet and so damn soft," he whispered into my ear. "I want to stay here forever, it's where I belong."

"Yes, yes," I said. And as I exploded into a swirling mass of ecstasy I felt Logan erupt too. His cock went so hard and rammed so high I felt beyond full. My internal muscles contracted wildly around him, squeezing and spasming, pulsing and throbbing.

He continued with his powerful rocking, eking out our pleasure. Feelings so much more than physical washed through me. Yang had found yin, karmic balance had been restored, and our auras had been well and truly cleansed. Logan "Phoenix" Taylor was everything I needed in my life and then so much more. Thank goodness destiny had hired me for the job of loving him.

The End

About the Author

Lily Harlem lives in the UK with a workaholic hunk and a crazy cat. With a desk overlooking farmland, she allows her imagination to run free and revels in being able to use the written word as an outlet for her creativity. Lily's stories are made up of colorful characters traveling on everyone's favorite journey – falling in love. If the story isn't romantic, sexy and exciting, it won't be written, at least not by this author.

Lily welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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