

## **Playing the Field**

When Tess Proffit was asked to run a series of team building exercises for a promising group of professional football players, she never imagined how sexy, sweet or obnoxious they would turn out to be. Keeping things professional will be tough, as each man ignites her desires in different ways.

Curt, Mike, Kevin, Marcus and Randy don't want to spend their off season on a secluded ranch working on team building, though they don't mind spending time with the lovely Tess. When a bet between the men goes awry and Tess is hurt, they'll have to become a team to win her back.

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# Sophie Oak Chloe Lang

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# **PLAYING THE FIELD**

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## **Chapter One**

"I have a small announcement before we get started again. The limo won't be coming for you this afternoon, gentlemen."

Tess Proffit took a slight step back in her four-inch Manolo Blahniks, perfectly satisfied that, for once, she had their attention. All five men in the elegantly decorated library stopped. The first session of the morning had proven she was making the right choice in what she was about to do. Earlier they had been reading magazines or talking, one was listening to his iPod, another checked his stats in the newspaper. One simply stood at the bay window and stared out at the Central Texas hills that had been their workplace for the last few weeks. No one had listened to a word she said. Now all five heads turned in her direction, irritation plain on every gorgeous face.

"What the fuck does that mean?" Curt Goff asked, practically jumping up from his seat. It was the most active thing the twentymillion-dollar-a-year quarterback had managed in the three weeks she'd been his therapist. He generally preferred to stare through her or glance at his watch to let her know just how much of his valuable time she was wasting.

"I gotta get home," Mike Cabrerra said, looking around as though hoping for backup. "I gotta party to get to. My brother's not gonna be happy if I miss my nephew's birthday." "Give him a call, then, because not a one of you is leaving here until I'm satisfied." Tess wasn't surprised at the frowns she got from the five men in the room. All together they constituted the majority of the payroll of the San Antonio Bandits. The football team had been seemingly championship bound three years in a row with no luck past the first round of the playoffs. The team owner was at his wits' end, and this little experiment was his final grasp. Tess intended to make it pay off. "Until I decide you've made your breakthroughs, we're all staying here. I don't know about you, gentlemen, but I have all spring. It's months before camp starts. If you want to spend the entire offseason here, that's your business. I get paid the same whether we stay here for another week or the rest of your off-time."

A collective groan creaked through the room.

Marcus Grant, the blond tight end, exchanged glances with Randy Hall, undoubtedly the best wide receiver in the business. According to the reports she'd been given, Randy got butterfingers the minute the regular season ended. Tess had noticed that of all the men in the room, these two seemed the closest. They were the only two who seemed like teammates. Randy shook his head at his friend, a frown on his gorgeous ebony face, and seemed to brace himself for fireworks.

He didn't have to wait long. The attack came from precisely the man Tess had predicted.

"Fuck that." Curt Goff stalked toward her, his long, lean body a testament to athletic grace. His matinee-star face was contorted in rage. Tess had quickly discovered that Curt was the control freak. She'd known he was the one who would take this the hardest. "I agreed to come out to this hippie freak show for one reason and one reason only. We all know what that is."

"Million-dollar bonus, baby." Kevin Best, the fullback, leaned back in his seat, a smirk on his lips. Despite his arrogant expression, Tess believed he was the sweetest of all the men. "That's why we're all here."

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And that was the heart of the problem. Not one of them had come because they felt they needed to work on their team communication. They were here because the owner of the team offered them a million dollars each to be here. Tess stood her ground as Curt stalked close. He was an intimidating man, no doubt about it, but he wasn't getting his way this time.

"The deal was for weekday 'team-building' sessions." Curt used air quotes, making his distaste for the process plain to anyone watching. He came inches from her, his enormous, muscular body so close she could feel the heat rolling off him.

"The deal was that you would really try to get with the program. Not a single one of you has. You've all joked and argued with each other. You've played a couple of practical jokes. Somehow I don't think that rigging Kevin's ketchup bottle to explode is really the definition of teamwork."

"I disagree, Tess," Marcus piped up. "It took three of us to get that to work right."

Curt's lips quirked up. Sometimes his eyes softened, and Tess got lost in them. She'd been surprised that he'd been an accomplice in the practical joke brigade. He seemed so uptight and serious.

"See, we're a team. We can work together when we really want to," Curt said with a sarcastic lilt to his deep voice. He was right back to intimidating asshole. "Now call the limo so we can get out of here. If you like, we can have one of your hand-holding sessions while we wait."

She forced her chin up and stared at Curt. Even in her heels, he towered over her, and she refused to have a discussion with his chest.

"We have tried, *chica*," Mike said, his dark eyes eating her up. She had to force herself not to roll her eyes. Where the quarterback had tried to use his height and overwhelming presence to get what he wanted out of her, the kicker had tried to seduce her. Together with Kevin, they'd made it plain how they would prefer to spend the week—naked and horizontal with her in between them. She wasn't going there, of course, even if they were both damn fine.

"We've tried really hard to get into your panties." The fullback gave the kicker a high five that set her teeth on edge. How could a guy who was so kind when they were alone be such an ass around his teammates?

They didn't take her seriously, not one of them. Oh, sure, when she had them one-on-one, they would talk the talk. She'd persuaded every single one of them, with the exception of Curt, to start to open up, but the minute they got together, the bad behavior began again. She felt her jaw firm stubbornly. For the last few weeks, she'd played nice. She'd tried every strategy she could think of, done everything she could to coax them to communicate about their challenges and opportunities during the post-season. They had shut her down every time she tried to break through their hard shells.

Since the day team owner Frank Boyle had hired her to get into his players' heads, she'd been fighting an uphill battle. They'd done nothing but fight back. First, they'd balked at the idea of an intense twenty-four-seven, two-week program. She'd compromised on a month of eight-hour sessions, five days a week at Boyle's isolated ranch. Then, they'd started pushing against those boundaries almost immediately. Curt had interviews he simply couldn't put off. Marcus and Randy wouldn't ride in the limo, so they were late every day and tried to leave early. Mike's brother needed him, and from what she could tell, Kevin simply couldn't go five minutes without thinking about either sex or food.

Yesterday, she'd put together several trust-building exercises, hoping that a team approach would work better than the individual sessions she'd attempted last week. It had been a disaster. Curt had mentioned that a reporter was doing an article on him as Athlete of the Year. That had gotten Kevin's eyes rolling as he announced that Curt wasn't qualified to be more than Douche Bag of the Year and that he couldn't hit the side of a Mack truck going five miles an hour. Curt had promptly picked up a football and proven Kevin wrong by connecting with his head in a perfect spiral throw.

That had been the highlight of her day.

She was fed up. During the break, she had called Mr. Boyle and requested his support. Given the fact that season ticket sales were down and the talk radio shows were bashing the team even in the offseason, he had agreed to her plan.

Randy stood, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his keys. "If we squeeze in, we should all be able to fit in my car."

Curt smirked down at her, winked, and took a step back. "Guess you lose, princess. Tell you what, I'll be back on Monday. We'll take this up then." He strode across the room to join Randy and Marcus. "And there's no way five of us fit in that Audi of yours. Leave the kicker behind."

"Fuck you, Goff," Mike said, shooting him the bird. "How many times in that last game did you connect in the end zone? Maybe you're the expendable one."

"Oh, yeah, what you do is so hard. You have to kick a ball through an enormous goal post. Face it, asshole, you flunked out of soccer school. That's where we find all you idiots. The only reason you're here at all is Kevin wouldn't come without you."

Kevin stepped between the two, glaring at the quarterback. "What is your problem, Goff? You know he's asked for a trade, right? He had the best ranking of any kicker in the league, and you want to run him off?"

Marcus groaned loudly, his blond hair falling over a face that would look right on the cover of a magazine. His stark blue eyes took in the room. "Randy and I could leave all three of you behind."

Tess sighed, a feeling of pure pleasure humming through her body. "I don't think you gentlemen are going anywhere without a battery. Did I mention that I got an A in auto shop?"

Randy's brown eyes got wide. "Blondie took my car apart?"

Curt was right back in her face. "Tess, you put the battery back in Randy's car this instant, or we're going to have trouble, you and I. Better yet, give me the battery, and I'll put it back in."

God, when his voice got deep and dark like that, it was as though every nerve ending in her body came alive. It took everything she had not to get on her knees in front of him, but she wasn't doing that anymore, not for anyone, and certainly not for him. "We have trouble right now, Mr. Goff. I've done a hell of a lot more than take apart an Audi. Last night, Mr. Boyle decided that I'm now in charge of your bonuses. You don't get your million unless I clear it."

One dark eyebrow ticked up slightly. It was the only indication the quarterback gave that he'd even heard her. "Tell Boyle he can keep his million. I'll call a cab."

"Dude, there aren't any cabs out here." Randy sank back into his seat next to Marcus. "Didn't you notice? We're about a hundred miles from anything."

Curt pulled out his BlackBerry. "Well, it's a good thing I have a little black book filled with women who'll drive a hundred miles to pick me up." He frowned and held his phone up. "No bars."

Mike smirked. "Yeah, that happens out here, too. Guess you're walking."

"I'll find a signal." He started toward the door.

Tess decided the time had come to play her trump card. Either Curt gave a damn about his team, or this was all for nothing. If he said no after this, she would have to pack it up. "Your bonuses are tied together. Either you all get them, or none of you do. If you walk out that door, you're forcing them to give up their bonuses, too."

Curt stopped, his hand on the door.

Mike's face fell. Of all the guys, Tess knew he was the one who would take this the hardest. He ran a frustrated hand through his dark hair. It was almost brutally short, making the rest of his handsome face stand out. Now his dark eyes were narrowed in obvious concern. "Are you serious? I don't have the contract the rest of these guys have. I *need* that money. I can't believe this."

Tess turned to Curt. Everyone was watching him now. His hand

slowly came off the door, and jaw clenched, he stalked back to his seat.

"Excellent." Tess took a deep breath, satisfied that she would have her chance—finally. "Now, let's get this session started."

She handed out the morning's folders. When she passed Curt his, their hands met. Heat sparked across her skin. He looked up and tangled his stare with hers. The banked violence in his eyes let her know he wasn't close to being done with her.

## **Chapter Two**

"Thank you, gentlemen. We'll resume our session after lunch, which the staff has laid out in the dining room. Enjoy. We'll meet back here at one o'clock."

Curt stared as Tess walked away, those fuck-me shoes of hers tapping across the wooden floor in a rhythm that made him think of sex. That was how he would fuck her—in that bold, staccato rhythm. In and out. In and out. He'd fuck her until she couldn't see straight, much less walk away from him. He'd done nothing but think about getting that blonde under him for weeks.

How the hell had he ended up under the thumb of Tess Proffit? This wasn't the way he'd seen the day going. He'd actually intended to start getting close to the little vixen. He'd gone so far as to get a copy of her yet-to-be-released self-help book. He'd called some of his contacts to get his hands on it and intended to use it to bridge the gap between them. He'd found out a lot about little Tess, none of which made her any less attractive to him. She'd had a rough year.

He wondered if she realized that all this time she'd been trying to analyze him, he'd been studying her, too.

Tess turned at the doorway. Curt couldn't help but notice how those magnificent breasts of hers strained the material of her blouse. He yearned to cup those breasts in his hands and listen as he touched her until she moaned and writhed. He'd tie her up and blindfold her. By the time he was done with her, she wouldn't be worried about anything except coming for him.

"Don't be late." Tess sounded like his sixth-grade teacher. He'd had a thing for her, too.

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As Tess left, he couldn't look away. Her perfect ass rocked back and forth, practically begging for the slap of his open hand. It was round and perfectly formed. She would be so beautiful in a whipping chair. When she disappeared into the hallway, the spell broke.

What the hell was he thinking? Tess Proffit was trouble. She called up all those instincts he should be burying. He needed to stay away from her. He just didn't think he could.

"This totally blows. I had plans for the weekend. I had appointments and everything." Randy pulled out his cell and tapped its screen. He held the useless iPhone like it was a lifeline. Too bad he didn't handle a football with the same care, or maybe they wouldn't be in this position. Of course, then he wouldn't have met Tess. Curt didn't like that thought. It wasn't smart to be so attracted to her.

"How many times are you going to look at that thing? Can't you get it through your skull? There's no service out here," Curt barked.

Randy sent him a middle finger salute and then went back to fruitlessly trying to connect a call.

"Randy, you might try out back." Marcus shot a broad smile at the receiver. "I got a bar this morning."

"Thanks, buddy."

"I can't stand another cold sandwich." Kevin stood up and scratched at his stomach. He glared down at the tray of sandwiches Tess had offered up as lunch. "If we're stuck here, I need some real food. Maybe if I ask nice, teacher will send for some provisions. Does anyone know if we can get pizza delivered out here?"

"All you think about is your gut, Best." Curt shook his head. Kevin was like an enormous puppy. Suddenly the thought of food did nothing for him. He needed something physical, and since Tess was out of the question, he had to figure something else out. "Screw lunch. I've gotta blow off some steam."

"How you plan on doing that? You can't go anywhere. She's got all our balls in her hands." Mike held the football that was his constant companion. Curt joked about Mike and his previous no-go soccer career, but he had to admit the asshole was committed to football. Despite the fact that he was just a kicker, he trained as hard as the rest of them and seemed to have a real heart for the game. He was a perpetual presence at the touch games they played from time to time. If he'd had a bit more height, he might have made a decent wideout. Curt didn't really have a problem with the guy. He was nice enough, but he didn't like the way he or Kevin watched Tess. Curt's fingers twitched. Something nasty was building inside, and he had to let it out. He'd prefer to take out his aggression on Tess Proffit's perfect ass. That wasn't happening. He grabbed the football out of Mike's hands. "I'm going to toss the football around outside. Who's in?"

"I'm in." Mike stood up and headed to the front door.

"How about you, Hall? A little practice might do you some good."

Randy glared at him. "I'm not the one who needs the practice, old man."

"Who the fuck you calling *old*?" He wasn't old. He was in his prime.

Marcus got between them. "Cool it, Curt. We've all been shanghaied by Tess. Hell, we're all in the same boat. We have to figure a way out of this, or we might be stuck here until training camp. I, for one, do not want to spend my off-season on this ranch. I don't know about you guys, but I do my best thinking on the field. Let's have a friendly game of touch."

Kevin snorted. "Friendly? I fucking doubt it'll be a friendly game, but what the hell. Beats a cold sandwich."

The idiot actually said that while eating a sandwich. It was a freaking miracle the guy didn't weigh four hundred pounds. Curt shook his head. Maybe Tess was right about a few things. She was constantly telling him he had to take the younger guys in hand. Fine. He'd start now.

"We have a problem." Mike stared at the rest of the men.

"What?" Curt did not want to hear about Mike's problems. They

were numerous and often involved his extensive family.

"There's five of us. An uneven number. How do we choose sides?"

"I'm on Marcus's team," Randy offered, shuffling closer to his buddy.

Curt snorted. He'd heard a lot about how those two liked to play team sports. There were several female members of staff who'd been double-teamed by that duo. The only pair who were freakier than Marcus and Randy were Kevin and Mike. Their predilection for sharing had reportedly started in college and become legendary as they progressed through the pros. Sharing. He didn't understand that at all. "Fine. I'll be quarterback for both teams. You and Marcus versus Mike and Kevin."

"Sweet." Marcus smiled, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

Twenty minutes later, Curt's anger hadn't faded, even as sweat poured down his back. The game had started friendly enough, but it wasn't long before all of them were pushing themselves. Sure, this was supposed to be just touch football, but Mike's elbow was bleeding, and Marcus's pretty face was covered in dirt. Somewhere along the way, they'd given up the illusion of a friendly game and started hitting hard. It went against all the rules and insurance policies the team took out on their players. It was gritty and nasty, just the way Curt liked it.

Kevin grumbled as he checked the fresh cut on his elbow. "If the owner and coach knew what we were doing, they'd have our hides. Their insurance premiums on us would definitely be going up."

Curt snarled. This was what he hated about being a pro. There was always someone watching him. He was nothing but an investment to them. "Fuck them. They're the reason we're in this predicament in the first place. I'm ready to call it quits. Screw it all. I don't need this shit." He especially didn't need little Miss Tess trying to peel back his layers and peer into his psyche. That was usually his role, damn it. Mike stepped up to him. There was an earnest look on his face that had Curt groaning inwardly. He was like something out of a fucking Dickens novel. "Please, Curt. See it through. My family is depending on me. I really need this money."

The growl started low in his throat. Any way he went, he was the asshole. If he stayed, he had to deal with Tess, and he knew that would inevitably end with him in her bed. If he thought he could keep it casual, it might be fine. But he wanted Tess in a way that went beyond sex. She was dangerous.

However, if he left this ranch, Mike's family would get thrown out on the street or some shit. Randy's mom was sick. Marcus just bought his first house. And God only knew how much money it took to feed Kevin. He wanted to walk away, to be the asshole everyone thought he was, but really, that wasn't his speed. He might not show it, but he gave a damn about them. In the end, they were his team. "I know. But I can't take much more of this."

A grateful expression briefly crossed Mike's face, to be immediately replaced with a sarcastic leer. "Don't you mean you can't take much more of Tess?"

Kevin was right beside him. "I'm surprised that you don't want more of that sexy dish."

"In other circumstances, I would." He'd want more. He'd want to *own* her. Curt envisioned Tess on the spanking bench in his play room, working her over with one of his favorite floggers. The image only added to his frustration.

"In other circumstances we all would," Randy said with a sigh. "She's one gorgeous lady, but she's holding all the cards in this game we're playing."

"True, but what if we turned the tables on her?" Kevin rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" Marcus asked.

"I think I know what he means, and I'm definitely in." Mike highfived Kevin.

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Mike and Kevin had shared the bed of more than one fan last season, he knew. Hell, almost everyone knew. Those guys were insatiable. They had been lucky, though. Their kink hadn't been talked about in the tabloids. Curt wished he could say the same.

"Look, let's face facts. We're all crazy about Tess. Don't try to deny it. All our tongues hang out the minute she walks in the room. I'm just saying that it's best for all of us if we pick a couple of guys to make sure she's happy. Maybe if we take care of her, she'll go easier on us." Kevin grinned, his eyes going back to the house where Tess was surely hiding.

Randy shook his head. "Guys, I don't want to be here any more than the rest of you, but Tess is a person. I want her as much as the rest of you, but she's going to get hurt if you go about it like this. She's just doing her job."

Kevin shrugged. "And I'm just a person doing my job. I consider it my personal responsibility to fuck anything that hot. If, by pleasing her on a level most women never achieve, I also happen to get us out of this mess, hey, that's just a bonus."

"Listen to yourself. You sound like a moron. She's not going to fall for your shit. She's smart and stuff," Marcus said. "I'm with Randy on this."

Mike rolled his eyes. "No one asked you, my friend."

Randy continued. "Let's all suck it up, finish whatever Tess wants us to do, then we can all go home a cool million richer. After we get out of here, she's fair game. I know Marcus and I intend to ask her out."

"I'm not giving you the chance to do that. You guys can wait, but me and Mike are going for the prize." Kevin smirked. "Believe me, you will thank us when we get out of this place. And Tess will, too. When we're done, she'll be crazy about us. We're going to treat her right."

Randy wasn't having it. "You have no idea what Tess will respond to."

Curt did. He'd sensed it from the moment he'd met her. He would even bet that she'd frequented some BDSM clubs in the past. He'd been a Dom for a very long time, and when an experienced sub came around, he knew it. Maybe that was what was bothering him the most about this situation. She was pushing him with every look, every word. She'd made it painfully clear that she'd done her homework before their sessions had begun, so she must've seen the YouTube video. It had been posted by the ex-girlfriend of the owner of Curt's favorite BDSM haunt. It showed Curt disciplining a sub. He'd caught hell for that damn video. If he didn't get his shit together this season, he might never make the Hall of Fame, and his greatest achievement would be getting the nickname the Spanking QB.

"Just leave it to me and Mike, big shot. We'll figure out what she will respond to." An arrogant grin split Kevin's face.

"No. You won't. Randy is right," Curt said. "You two should leave her alone and let her do her job."

But Kevin's plan had Curt thinking. Maybe he should throw caution to the wind and make his move on Tess. He'd planned a longdrawn-out seduction, but maybe a quick strike was called for. Earning her submission would be a flat-out thrill. And, they just might be right that sex was the way to get to her. They were simply planning to use the wrong bait. If he got Tess to submit to him, he could surely get her to let up on this idiotic therapy shit. He would get them all out of here and get the girl.

Kevin frowned and ran a hand through his hair. "I can't stay here until she gives the word I can leave. Sorry. Not happening. I'm going stir crazy in here."

Weren't they all? Curt briefly thought about hammering the side of Kevin's head with the football. It had briefly shut him up the day before. It also could have given him a mild concussion, but that was none of Curt's concern. "Can you think straight for two minutes? Mike needs the money for his family. Hell, we all need something. Kevin, are you willing to risk that with some fumbling attempt at

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#### seduction?"

There was that wide, arrogant grin again. "Believe me, Curt, when I set my mind to something, I don't fail. You'll see. It's going to work. Mike and I will have her humming sweetly in the morning. Besides, I don't mind taking one for the team. I really like her. And not just because she's hot. I like the non-hot parts of her, too."

"I like her, too." Mike and Kevin exchanged a quick glance, some sort of shorthand only the two of them knew.

Damn it, Kevin wouldn't let go of his plan. He was like a bulldog with a bone. It made him a great fullback, though his performance last season had been less than stellar, but it didn't make him easy to convince. And with Mike just as ready as Kevin to take Tess to bed, Curt felt his blood pressure rise. If anyone was bedding Tess, it was going to be him. From the moment he saw her, he'd wanted to strip her, bind her, and get her hot and writhing until she begged him to fuck her. It was more than just her delectable curves. There was a softness underneath that tough façade that just begged to be released. She fascinated him.

Randy's dark gaze narrowed on Kevin. "If you really like her, you need to think about what you're doing. You're acting like an asshole, and she's going to find out."

Kevin moved toward the wide receiver. "What are you trying to say, Randy? You going to rat us out to Tess?"

Marcus bristled. "He's not saying that. We just don't want her to get hurt."

Curt quickly moved between them. The last thing he needed was a fistfight. He had a photo shoot in a couple of days, damn it. "Cool it, guys. If the boss found out one of us made a move on Ms. Proffit, we'd all be toast. Mike, are you willing to risk the bonus for a long shot at sleeping with Tess?"

"She might be worth the risk." Mike's arms crossed stubbornly over his chest.

Curt knew he would take whatever risk to get a chance to nip,

lick, and bite her soft flesh. He'd make her scream his name over and over. Once he had her submission, maybe he'd be free of her. Maybe he could get her out of his head and move on. Or keep her. That thought was beyond tantalizing. God, she confused him. "Use your heads. She's on the boss's payroll because of our losing post-season. He wants to go to the championship, just like we do. If we fuck this up, he can make all our lives hell."

"Not yours." Mike stared at him. "Your twenty-million-dollar contract assures that."

"You need money. I get it. We all get it. I'm willing to stay to make sure you get the million for your family. Don't fuck this up, Mike." He willed Mike to agree and fucking back off.

Mike shrugged. "I got it."

Curt looked at Kevin. "What about you?"

"Whatever. We should go. I'm starving, and teacher doesn't like us being late. Here she comes now." Kevin nodded toward the wide patio door where Tess was waving them in.

Kevin took off running after her. She immediately gasped and started checking him for wounds. Her hands brushed across Kevin's skin, seeking out the places he was hurt. Kevin took it all in like a sponge soaking up affection.

Curt swallowed back a groan of frustration. He had to believe that Mike would rein the guy in. Randy and Marcus, he didn't have to worry about. They were reasonable.

Tess concerned him more. The restlessness eating away at him had her name all over it. He had to get her under him, or he might never get her out from under his skin.

## **Chapter Three**

Tess poured the golden liquid into the shot glass, pleased that she only spilled a little. She licked the salt off her wrist and slammed back the purloined tequila. It burned as it went down her throat and into her belly, where it would do the most good.

God, she needed it.

She thought about the vibrator sitting in the drawer of her nightstand. She needed that, too.

Tess flicked off the television. She couldn't concentrate on it. Her brain was working overtime, thinking about the events of the day. The morning had been more of the same. Sullen glances, snarky comments, absolutely no interest in participating. She'd gone to eat her crappy microwavable lunch without much hope.

But the afternoon session was like walking onto the set of a completely different movie. When she went to look for her charges, she'd found them tossing a football around and speaking civilly to one another. They'd even exchanged some form of male congratulatory communication in the form of chest bumping and hand slapping.

And they had all taken their shirts off.

Tess slammed another shot, thinking about all those muscles glistening with sweat. She'd been grateful when the shirts went back on and all she had to worry about were gorgeous faces and broad shoulders. All through the afternoon session, the atmosphere had been strange. The men actually seemed to listen.

Tess didn't believe it for a second. Those assholes were up to something.

She sat down on the edge of her bed. How had her life come to

this? She stared down at the book on the nightstand. *Finding Your Inner Strength* by Tess Proffit. Her hand caressed the book's jacket. It had been her baby. It had been her "skip the line and move to the front" ticket to fame. It was a self-help book about finding love and staying true to oneself in the process. Her agent had been thrilled and planned a ton of publicity around the book's release, coinciding with Tess's wedding day. It would have been a made-for-TV success story. Together, they'd planned the headline, "Self-help Guru Takes Own Advice and Finds True Love."

How had her reality turned out to be "Self-Help Guru Loses Fiancé to Bimbo Sister"?

Now her book release and the tour were on hold. Her whole damn life was on hold, unless she could turn the Bandits around and they won the next championship. From where she sat? Fat chance of that now.

Tess felt a tear slip from her eyes and roll down her cheeks. What the hell was she doing here, except setting herself up to fail again?

Tess took a deep breath. No, she was starting over. That's what she was doing here. She was jump-starting her career. She was taking her own damn advice and not allowing the world and its opinions to get in the way of her success. To make it in this world, you had to be a little ruthless. That's why she'd cut those boys off at the knees. They were going to work together as a team. There was no other option.

Her eyes caught sight of the cream-colored envelope that had found its way to her earlier today. She hadn't opened it. She didn't need to. It was the invitation to her sister's wedding. From what Tess understood, they hadn't bothered to change much about the wedding—just the bride.

Another tear slipped down her cheek. Tess wiped it away. She couldn't change the past. She couldn't change the fact that Roger had preferred pretty, slender Janie over her. She could hear his complaints. She was too ambitious in the outside world and not aggressive enough in bed. Janie was the opposite, he'd explained. She didn't question him in public, but she actively sought out her own pleasure.

Tess felt her heart sink. The men here probably thought the same. They saw her as a ballbuster. They couldn't possibly know how hard it was for her to walk in there and force her will on them. It should be easier than this, but it never fucking was. No one wanted her the way she was, so she'd been forced to pretend.

But she didn't want to. Especially with these guys. They were each special in their own way. Each one called to her. Curt was the Dom. If she ever broke through that rough exterior of his, she knew he would be a caring Dom. He would shelter and protect his lover. Mike was committed to everything he loved. If Mike loved a person, there wasn't anything he wouldn't do. And Kevin. She laughed as she thought about Kevin. He was so sweet when they were alone. He turned into a different person. He was thoughtful and kind. He was a gentleman. Marcus and Randy were a strangely matched set. Even when she talked to them alone, they echoed each other as though they were truly halves of a whole.

Each of the men was so beautiful to her it made her heart ache a little. Spending time with them just made her understand how her relationship with Roger had been one big void.

A knock at the door broke into her thoughts. Tess started. She pulled the edges of her robe together. It was probably one of the Bandits, coming to complain. They didn't feel the same way about her. She cherished her alone time with each of them, and they saw her as a problem. She thought about ignoring it. Surely they would go away. It was late.

Another knock.

"Hey, Tess, I need to talk to you."

Mike's husky voice came through the door. Tess had to catch her breath. He was a hell of a good-looking man. Mike wasn't as powerfully built as Curt or Randy or Kevin, but his face was past heavenly. He had gorgeous olive skin and sensual lips. When he got angry, he went off in rapid-fire Spanish. Tess found it infinitely sexy. It was funny just how much she'd learned about each man over the weeks they'd worked together.

She cracked open the door. "What do you need, Mike?"

Mike stared back at her, and so did Kevin. The Bandit's fullback was six feet one inch of pure power. He had short blond hair, hazel eyes, and lethal dimples. Those dimples were on full display as he grinned at her.

"Can we come in?" Kevin asked.

He didn't wait for an answer. He simply pressed back on the door and walked through. Mike was right behind him.

"Uhm, guys, I don't think this is such a great idea," Tess stuttered as they muscled past her. Damn, she shouldn't have wallowed in selfpity with so much tequila. They were walking into her room, and her mind was going to all sorts of dirty places. Her room was small and intimate. They were big and broad. It seemed like they took up all the space. And the air. She was having trouble breathing.

"We have a few questions," Mike said, settling into the only chair in the room.

Kevin took a seat on her bed. He was sitting on her bed. In her mind, she could see him as he was this afternoon. He'd run up to her with his shirt off. His every muscle had rippled as he claimed with a grin that the other boys had beaten up on him and he needed a kiss to make it better. She hadn't done that, but she'd wanted to.

"Okay." She could handle a question or two. She would just keep it professional. She would never let them know she was thinking about what they had looked like without their shirts on. She would definitely never let them know she'd spent the afternoon wondering what they would look like without their pants. It was ridiculous anyway. She caught sight of that cream-colored envelope.

"We noticed tonight that you seemed sad, Tess. What's wrong? Is there anything we can do?"

#### Playing the Field

Tess felt her heart take a long dive off a short slope. Keeping it professional was getting really hard while looking into his dark eyes. He seemed genuinely worried about her. "There's nothing wrong with me. I'm great."

"Sweetie, that's just not true." Kevin's low rumble rolled across her skin. His big hand came out and pulled her down to sit beside him. "You think we haven't been watching? We've been working together for weeks now. We know when something's up with you. You haven't had one genuine smile all day."

Yes, these two worked together. In more ways than one, from what she'd heard. The individual sessions with the men had revealed a shocking amount of gossip. Apparently, even manly men talked about each other. She had to remember that. If she had some fun with Kevin and Mike, there was no way the other guys wouldn't find out. Tess stopped herself. What the hell was she thinking? Was it really running through her head that these two gorgeous men had come into her room to jump her bones? That was ridiculous. She wasn't exactly a hard-bodied cheerleader. She wasn't sexy. Her ex-fiancé had made that plain. They were just looking for extra credit.

"I'm fine." She shrugged them off even though the desire to confide in them welled up in her. "Thank you for asking, but I'm great."

Mike looked around the room, his dark eyes targeting the tequila bottle. "I don't think so. You're not the type to just sit and drink alone. Tess, tell us what's wrong. You listened to us all afternoon. Hell, you've listened to us for weeks now. Let us listen to you. You said this teamwork thing had to be a two-way street. We're on the same team, aren't we?"

It made a strange sort of sense. She thought about her lectures to executives. Managers had to be able to trust their employees and vice versa. She'd had intense sessions with these men where they shared more than she'd expected. Mike had opened up about how much responsibility he felt for his large extended family. His brother's kids were so important to him.

Kevin had talked about what it had been like to grow up without parents. He'd lived with an aunt who had only tolerated him. And yet he'd still managed to make the most of his talent. Maybe it was only fair to share with them. Maybe it wouldn't hurt anything.

"I'm just feeling a little blue about my sister's wedding," she admitted.

Kevin shifted closer to her. His weight pushed the mattress down, causing her to almost fall against his big body. His muscular arms steadied her. He smiled down at her, making her heart skip a beat. He was all-American gorgeous. "Are you upset that you don't have a date? Look no further. There's me and Mike."

That would certainly give her sister pause if she showed up with a superhot professional athlete. "Yeah, I bet that would be interesting, but how would I choose between the two of you?"

Mike leaned forward, and his dark eyes moved over her body. "Why would you choose? Why not have both of us?"

Tess laughed long and hard. Yeah, sure. Why not just show up at her sister's wedding with two gorgeous millionaire football players on her arm? There was no way anyone would believe she'd actually snared them. But, it might be worth it just to see the look on Roger's face. She sighed. It was a nice little daydream, but she was dealing in reality now. It was hard to believe she once thought she could take on the world. Now, she just wanted to make it through the week. "It's a nice thought, guys, but I'll have to pass. I just have to hope my sister doesn't expect me to be happy for her."

Mike stood up, towering over her. Kevin's thigh brushed against hers. Tess breathed in. They smelled good. Mike smelled like he'd just gotten out of the shower, and Kevin was wearing some masculine-smelling aftershave. Wow. She needed another drink. Tess turned and reached for the tequila bottle.

"No, I think you've had enough, Tess." Mike's hand reached the bottle first and whisked it away. He knelt down in front of her. His hands came up and smoothed back her hair. "Whatever is bothering you about your sister, you're not making things better by drinking. You'll feel like hell in the morning, and you'll still have to deal with Curt."

Tess groaned. Curt Goff was going to kill her. She hadn't missed the way he'd stared in her direction. She wasn't an idiot. She knew his story. He used to frequent BDSM clubs. He'd probably already guessed she was somewhat submissive. A woman like her exerting control was virtually waving a red flag in front of a bull. Tess remembered the tabloid reports of his kinky sex life. Oh, sure, he'd come out saying he was just out with friends, but Tess knew he was massaging the truth, if not outright lying. His commanding presence was what attracted her to him in the first place. It was precisely the reason why she had to stay in control around him. She shook her head and reached around Mike. Tequila vs. Curt. Tequila was kinder. "Nope. I'll take the headache."

Mike's hand came out, catching hers. "Tell me why your sister getting married makes you cry. Don't try to lie. I can see you've been crying."

Kevin took her other hand, but he rubbed it between his own. The warm feeling started to spread. How long had it been since she had a man's hands on her body? "Come on, Tess. It's okay. You can tell us. We want to help. Your sister can't be any prettier. You're gorgeous."

God, he said that like he meant it. What the hell was happening here? They were both looking at her like they could eat her up, and damn if she wasn't interested in that. Her brain whirled. She tried to get her mind off the way their hands were stroking and clutching hers. Her skin was starting to sing. Her heart was starting to pound. How long? How long since she'd been held and kissed and loved? Maybe never. Roger had never looked at her the way these two were. "That's not what my ex-fiancé thought. He totally preferred Janie. That's why he's marrying her."

Kevin stopped and sat back. "You're kidding, right? Your fiancé

left you for your sister? What the hell does your sister look like? Is she a lingerie model or something?"

Nothing on his gorgeous face hinted that he was joking. He really seemed shocked that a man wouldn't want her. "No, she's a dental hygienist, but she's really tall and thin. She takes after our dad. She probably could be a model."

Kevin's eyes glazed over. "Does she have your ti-breasts?"

Tess laughed. "God, no. She doesn't have these things." She glanced up, and Mike was looking down, his mouth wide in seeming surprise. Tess gasped. Her robe had come open, and her breasts were hanging out for all to see. She quickly slapped the sides of the robe together, mortification flooding her every nerve. Her breasts were far from perfect. They were too large and already sagged a bit, though she was only twenty-eight. It was far past time to end this crazy evening.

"Okay, I think I've said quite enough." Tess tried to stand and show them out the door.

"Don't," Mike said huskily as he held her firmly beside him. "*Eres guapa*. So beautiful."

Kevin's voice was warm against her ear. "You're in for it now, babe. He's gone into Spanish. No way you're getting away from him now." Kevin's big hand came out and pushed back the edge of her robe. His fingers brushed against her breast. Tess felt her nipple immediately contract and lengthen, like a flower turning up toward the sun, begging for its attention.

"We really shouldn't do this." Tess heard the way her voice shook. Her voice wasn't the only thing that had a problem with stability. Every inch of her skin seemed to be electrified. Sex hadn't been on the agenda for a really long time. It had been seven months since Roger walked out and probably a lot longer since he'd bothered to make love to her. Kevin was moving behind her, his legs sliding into place around hers. She felt the heat of his chest against her back. She felt...oh, she could feel his erection against her spine. So fucking long since anyone had wanted her. Desire crashed through her veins.

Kevin's hands slid over her robe, stripping it down her arms, capturing them so she couldn't move. He couldn't know what that did for her. She was exposed, and there was nothing she could do about it. Her pussy ached. It pounded and pulsed with demand. This was a bad idea, her brain insisted, but when Kevin cupped her breasts and offered them up to his teammate, she stopped thinking altogether. Bad idea? Hell, yeah. But she couldn't think of anything else right now.

"You want to suck on these gorgeous tits, man?" Kevin's warm breath pressed against her cheek.

*"Si. Tengo ganas de estar contigo."* His voice was husky. He gave one nipple a long lick before sucking it into his mouth.

"*Queremos a nuestro, amigo*," Kevin said, correcting him. "He said he wants you, but I want you, too. God, Tess, we both want you so fucking much. Ever since the day the boss man introduced us."

She remembered the day. They hadn't seemed to want her. They'd all been pissed. She shuddered as Mike suckled. His hands were on her waist, one more manacle holding her down for their pleasure. "You're lying. You couldn't stand me," she managed.

Please let her remember that. It was one thing to risk her job, another to put her idiotic heart out there again. She wasn't going to do that.

Mike growled, and she felt the sharp edge of his teeth. "Don't call him a liar, *querida*. We've been crazy about you since that first day. We're going to enjoy tonight." That talented tongue of his came back out, soothing the little sting his bite had caused. "*Quiero comer tu coño*."

Kevin hissed behind her. "Damn, we all want to do that, man. You think she's ready?"

"What did he say?" she asked with a gasp as Mike moved to her other breast, sucking deeply. Damn, Tess wished she'd paid more attention in Spanish class.

"I can smell her." Mike came off her breasts and forced her knees

apart. He leaned back and growled. "This is in our way."

He pulled at her panties, tugging them down her legs and tossing them away without another thought. Instead, his stare seemed glued to something he found more interesting.

Her pussy. God, he was staring at her pussy.

"Look how pretty you are, baby," Kevin whispered, staring over her shoulder. "That's a gorgeous pussy. You shave. You keep that plump little thing all ripe and ready for a feast. Damn, I want a taste of that."

Mike slowly slid a big finger into her pussy, making Tess gasp. He slid in deeply and pulled out, drawing out the copious amounts of the cream her pussy had been seeping since the minute the men walked into the room. There wasn't time for Tess to fully embrace the embarrassment that flooded her because Mike brought his soaked finger up and offered it to Kevin. His hand went right by Tess's cheek, and she felt the moment when Kevin sucked that finger into his mouth, groaning as the taste hit him.

"Que no es dulce?" Mike asked.

Kevin groaned. "You've exhausted my Spanish, man. All I know is how good she tastes."

Mike chuckled and settled between her legs. Tess could feel his hot breath against her pussy. She squirmed, unable to remain still.

"I'll have to taste for myself."

Tess gasped as she felt the first slow slide of his tongue. He started low and stroked up her slit all the way to her clit.

"Stay still, babe," Kevin ordered softly in her ear. She was enveloped by his big body. Strong arms wrapped around her, making her feel oddly petite against him. His legs tangled in hers, holding her open, vulnerable to Mike's hunger.

"Oh, it feels *so* good." Tess moaned. Her heart raced as Kevin tightened around her. His hands caressed her breasts. His tongue traced the shell of her ear. So much sensation swirled inside her that she was drowning in it.

"Yeah, you feel good, too, babe. You're so fucking hot. Every day since that first one, we've wanted to do this. We've wanted to get you in between us."

"You guys do this a lot." She knew their history. It set off some distant alarm bells in her head, but Mike was torturing her. His tongue stabbed deep inside as he devoured her pussy. He sucked and laved until she thought she was going to go insane.

She felt Kevin shrug behind her. "We like to share."

"God, that's hot." Sharing sounded really good.

Kevin's fingers plucked at her nipples. "Yeah, well, don't think we play with each other. That little bit with the fingers is about all the interaction you'll get from us. We're all about the girl, if you know what I mean. If you want some boy-on-boy action you'll have to go somewhere else."

Mike's head came up. Tess wanted to shriek. She'd been so close. "She doesn't have to go anywhere. She's not going anywhere. She's ours. We got here first." Mike went off, growling in a litany of Spanish that she didn't understand but sounded awfully possessive and caveman-like.

"Screw talking," Kevin said with a frustrated groan. "Show her."

Mike's gorgeous face was hard with desire. His hands moved quickly, tearing at his clothes. In mere seconds, he stood before her completely, gloriously naked.

Wow. He worked out. A lot. Tess hoped she wasn't actually drooling. His body was a hard slab of muscle covered with perfect olive skin. His cock was thick and stood out boldly. He stroked himself while he watched Kevin palm her breasts. After a moment, he reached into his discarded jeans and came back with a condom in his hand. He rolled it over his dick with practiced ease.

"You going to watch or participate? I want her pussy." Mike seemed to grind the words out of his mouth.

Kevin's arms relaxed, and he was suddenly pushing and pulling at her. He pulled the useless robe off her body and tossed it aside. "On your knees, babe. I want your mouth. Damn, I want your mouth."

Tess found herself completely naked and on her hands and knees in the middle of the bed. She felt the bed dip as Mike got behind her.

"Ella es tan hermosa."

Tess let her head fall forward on a moan as he spread her knees further apart and invaded her space.

"You're going to feel so good. Do you know how much I've wanted to shove my cock in this little cunt? Every single time we sit down in a session together, this is what I'm thinking about. I'm thinking about shoving your skirt up, pulling your panties off, and fucking you until you can't talk anymore, *querida*. You make me crazy."

Kevin was suddenly in front of her on his knees. She looked up and stared into a huge, erect cock. Kevin was just as big as Mike. His dick was thick and had a purple cast to it. Creamy pre-cum seeped from the slit. His balls were large and heavy.

"And I think about forcing my way into your tight little mouth, babe. I dream about your mouth. It's small, but I'm going to fit just fine. I'll take it easy, inch by inch, until you eat my dick up and I come straight down your soft throat."

Tess's whole body was primed for pleasure, but something else was working here, she realized. It was more than just the orgasm she was going to get. They wanted her. They really wanted her. These were men who could have virtually any woman, and they thought about her. As Mike's hands explored her curves and Kevin stroked himself, it struck her that she really had a connection with these men. Mike was the family man, so heaped with responsibilities that he forgot about himself half the time. And Kevin was sweet, so sweet, even though he didn't want people to know. He tried to play the big, dumb tough guy, but he'd been the one to hold the door open for her, and more than once she caught him reading books that had nothing to do with sports. They weren't strangers, and this wasn't random sex to her. It meant something to her, but they never had to know that. "I want a yes, *querida*. Tell us to make love to you," Mike said. His dick teased at the edge of her pussy.

"Say yes, babe." Kevin's hands tangled in her hair, drawing her ever closer to that tasty treat on the slit of his cock.

She could say no. She could pull her dignity around her like a mantle and walk away and stay the professional she wanted to be. Or she could prove to herself that she was the sensual woman she wanted to be, the one Roger said she wasn't. "Yes. Oh, yes."

She heard Mike groan, and then he held her steady as he fit that big cock to her pussy and started fucking into her. He used slow, teasing strokes to open her up.

"You're tight." Mike groaned. "So tight."

Oh, yeah, she felt tight. She wiggled a little. Mike's big cock stretched her wide. She opened her mouth to moan, and Kevin took advantage.

"Fuck, yeah. Open those lips up." Kevin's hips thrust forward. He had one hand securely in her hair, and with the other he brought his thick cock to her lips. "Take me inside, babe. Eat me up."

"Oh, you've got a death grip on my cock. *Querida*, how long has it been since you had a man?" Mike shoved his dick deeper inside, finally sliding home with a grunt.

Tess felt so full. She wiggled her ass, trying to keep that hot cock inside her cunt. She couldn't answer his question because Kevin was slowly working his way inside her mouth.

"Oh, yeah, that's it, babe. Just like that. Run that hot tongue all over me." Kevin began thrusting deep inside.

Tess rode the wave. Between the cock plunging into her mouth and the one plundering her cunt, she was so full. She ran her tongue all over Kevin, loving the taste of him. Mike's thrusts picked up steam, slamming over and over into her. It was the first time in so long she'd felt like a woman.

"You're so beautiful, babe. So fucking beautiful." Kevin's hands smoothed her hair back as he pressed into her mouth. He was the gorgeous one. She let the push and pull of their lovemaking take over. She pushed back against Mike while she dragged her tongue and lips down Kevin's cock. She pulled away from Mike as she sucked the big cock all the way to her throat.

Pleasure. She was surrounded by it. It enveloped her in warmth and took her out of herself. She was pushed and pulled by warm, demanding hands. Tess gave herself over to the sweet rhythm of their thrusting cocks. Mike found that perfect place, and he dragged his dick in and out, pushing her to explode. Kevin swelled in her mouth, his balls hitting her chin.

Mike's fingers came around from her waist, and when he pinched her clit, she moaned around the cock in her mouth and went off like a rocket. The orgasm started in her cunt but quickly flared out to roll over her whole body. Kevin finally hit the back of her throat just as she swallowed the scream that threatened.

"Holy fuck." Kevin held her head in a death grip as cum spurted from his cock.

Mike grunted, and Tess could feel him holding himself steady as he came.

They landed in a tangled, intimate heap. Tess found herself buried in Kevin's chest with Mike's arms around her waist, his lips on her neck.

Kevin's eyes were heavy and languid as he looked down at her. He tilted her head up and brushed his lips against hers. After the brutal pleasure she'd just experienced, that kiss was sweet and almost innocent. "Don't fall asleep, babe. We aren't through yet."

Mike sighed behind her. "Not anywhere close."

Tess snuggled in, warm and safe between their bodies. They didn't know it yet, but she wasn't finished, either.

\* \* \* \*

Kevin stared down at the woman in between him and Mike. Tess

lay pressed against Mike, her chest rising and falling gently. Her blonde hair wisped across her face, and his heart did a funny flip-flop in his chest.

What the hell had just happened?

He and Mike had shared women for years. It had started on a drunken night. It had been fun and strangely intense. Sharing a woman with his best friend had really done it for him. He was happy. Mike was happy. The women were happy. He knew it was weird, but it felt right.

Tess felt right.

She turned in her sleep, her face catching the soft light from the bedside table lamp. She was so beautiful. He reached out, unable to stop himself. He pushed a strand of hair away from her cheek. Her lips curled up as though she was having a sweet dream.

What was he doing? Sure this had been fun and all, but something different had happened with Tess. Mike was asleep, one arm curled under Tess's body. They never slept with the women they shared. They did what they did, and then they left. He thought it would be that way with Tess.

He'd been fooling himself. He'd been falling for her slowly but surely ever since the day he'd met her. She'd walked into the training room with her designer briefcase and her bright eyes, and he'd been a goner. He'd wanted to strip her out of the little business suit she'd worn and have his way with her on the massage table. Then he'd gone into one of her sessions. It was mostly talk. He didn't get why it bugged the other guys. The truth was he liked talking to her. She was smart and funny and seemed to really get him.

Of course, he bitched with the rest of them. He didn't want to look like he was sweet on her. He had an image to uphold.

And why? Why did he really care what the other guys thought of him? Tess wasn't the enemy, not even close. She was trying to help. She also made a lot of sense. What did any of their egos matter if they couldn't do the one thing they got paid to do? Tess's eyes opened. There was a sleepy beauty to them. Soft and green and so deep he could lose himself. She was the first woman to talk to him like he had a brain in his head. Maybe it wasn't the biggest brain out there, but damn, he wanted to be smarter when Tess looked at him.

"Go back to sleep, babe." Kevin tried to keep his voice low. He was surprised at the emotion he heard in it.

She patted the pillow beside her. "You, too, Kevin."

He lay back down, unwilling to disappoint her. The bed was a queen. When they got back home, he would get a bigger bed. A king. Yeah, a king would fit them all. What the hell was he thinking?

"Why so upset?"

He shook his head. The last thing he needed was to give Tess a clue that anything was wrong. After everything she'd been through with her asshole fiancé, he wasn't willing to let anything spoil the night they'd just shared. He leaned in a little and kissed her. Just pressing his lips against hers did strange things to his heart. "I'm not, babe. I'm practically perfect. Now go back to sleep."

"Both of you go to sleep." Mike growled. He reached over and turned off the lamp, sending the room into darkness. "You're both *loco*. It's almost morning. Get some sleep while we can. Tess will have a million things for us to do tomorrow."

"I have the schedule ready to post first thing."

Kevin could hear the smile in her voice. He felt Mike shift and figured he was getting closer to Tess. Mike was in deep, too.

What were they going to do?

As Tess and Mike settled back into sleep, a thought played at the edges of Kevin's mind. Would it be so horrible to share her with Mike permanently? Could they even make something like that work? They could be a little family.

When dawn came, and sleep still eluded him, he rolled quietly out of bed and grabbed his sneakers and clothes. As the sun came up, he did what he always did when he couldn't sleep. He ran. Even as the miles passed, he couldn't get the idea out of his head. A family with Mike and Tess. He began to wonder if he could be happy without it.

# **Chapter Four**

Mike's slumber moved into that middle place between sleep and consciousness. He sighed, not willing to let go just yet. Last night had been incredible, and he didn't want it to end. This morning there would be all sorts of questions and crap to work out. Mike just wanted to stay in this peaceful place where Tess's body still spooned into his. He breathed in her scent of jasmine and cherries. What a night. Hell, what a morning.

He opened one eye to find Kevin missing. Not unusual. They'd shared several women, and leaving before dawn was standard operating procedure. Their night with Tess wasn't like the other times, though. Mike knew it, and he was sure that Kevin did, too. He'd seen it in Kevin's eyes when he'd made love to Tess. Kevin was just as far gone as Mike was. *Chicken shit*. When had he left? Mike had no idea.

He propped himself up on his elbow, careful not to wake Tess. He gazed down at her. She was gorgeous. Full lips, soft skin, a body he could bang for days, but there was so much more to her. She wasn't like any woman he'd ever known. Not by a long shot. When she'd opened up to them, she'd opened up completely, unselfconsciously. And God, Tess got to him in ways he'd not known possible. He wanted her. Not for just a night. Not just for sex. For forever. It made sense to him. When you knew—you knew. *I'm totally fucked, but this feels so right. It is right.* His job would be to convince her. Well, he actually had a lot of people to convince.

Grinning, he thought about how Mama would react when he brought Tess home to meet *la familia*. Mama would warm up to Tess,

just like she did with his older sister's husband, Trevor. Of course, his sister hadn't brought home a friend and introduced her ménage to Mama. He wondered if his elderly mother even knew what a ménage was.

It would just take a little time to get to know Tess. They already liked Kevin. Ever since they met in college, Kevin had been his best friend. He'd come to every family dinner and holiday. They'd accepted him. They would accept Tess.

He wanted to know everything about her. What were her dreams? Her hopes? Her favorite food? Her desires? Whatever she wanted, he would make sure she got it.

He considered kissing her lips, swollen from their hours of lovemaking, but didn't. She looked too peaceful and beautiful to disturb her. He hoped that she would feel the same way he did, but he doubted it. Tess was very professional, very ambitious. She would see this as a horrible breach of protocol. It was probably best to give her a little bit of time to process. This evening, after he'd talked to Kevin, he would be back in this room. He would make it very clear to Tess that he was in it for the long haul, for all the right reasons.

Careful not to wake her, he unwrapped himself from her silky body. Her steady breathing let him know he'd succeeded in not rousing her. He pulled on his jeans, grabbed up his socks and shoes, threw his shirt over his shoulder, and allowed himself one last look at the woman who'd changed everything.

\* \* \* \*

Curt strode to the hall where Tess's room was, a man on a mission. He had a coffee mug in his hand and a plan running through his head. It was a good day. He'd felt strangely energized once he decided to really go after Tess. He realized he hadn't felt quite so good in a long time. All of his predatory instincts were on high alert, and that felt fantastic. After the pickup game yesterday, he'd realized

he needed to make his move, or he might lose the prize. He'd also realized the prize meant more to him than he'd thought.

He was falling for Tess Proffit. He'd asked himself what he was doing, and suddenly he didn't care. All of his life he'd made the right choices. He'd been careful about everything. He was done with that. He was going after what he wanted now.

His strategy to get under her skin had been working perfectly. He'd been very helpful all yesterday afternoon. He'd only just begun to show her what she could expect if she belonged to him. She could expect protection and a high level of care for her person. He would treat her like the princess she was. He had enough money that she wouldn't have to work if she didn't want to, and if she did, he would bully her boss until she had the job she wanted. He could handle a publishing company. If he needed to, he would pay people to buy her book. He took care of his submissives. He hadn't had one for a very long time, but Tess was worth the risk.

This morning, he would raise the ante. He would knock once, step into her room, and then he would claim the space and its occupant as his own. Oh, he wouldn't just jump her. He intended to give her the coffee he'd made just for her then they would talk. Before long, she would kneel at his feet. He could already feel his hand in her silky hair. A perfect submissive. That's what she would be.

He'd always prided himself in his execution of a plan, but this had been flawless. Last night at dinner, he'd begun his seduction. She'd attempted to eat in the kitchen while the men ate in the dining room, but Curt had waylaid her. He'd gone a step further by actually cooking the meal himself. The staff was going to make something healthy, but Curt had found the ingredients he needed for a lasagna, and he'd seen the way Tess's eyes had widened at the first taste. She wouldn't be able to resist a man who could cook.

Of course, he'd also had Kevin's undying admiration, but he discounted that. He'd ignored the puppy fullback and concentrated on making Tess blush with his innuendo.

#### Playing the Field

He'd spent the majority of the night before thinking about her. If he was honest with himself, he'd spent most of the last several weeks thinking about her, but it wouldn't do to let Tess know he mooned over her like some freaking teenage girl with a crush on a pop star. He needed to stay in control, and the way to do that was to take advantage of her submissive nature. She would submit, give up this ridiculous plan to get inside his head, and they would all go home. More practice. That was what they needed. And maybe a better wide receiver.

He rounded the corner and took the first step to his prize at the end of the hall. He stopped in front of the mirror on the wall. Damn, he was actually a little nervous. Curt checked himself. His hair needed a cut, but he'd showered and shaved. Curt stared at the lines just starting to crease his eyes. He was getting older. He was thirty-three in a business that worshipped twenty-three-year-olds. A familiar ache started in his gut. It was the same ache he got every time the regular season was done and the play-offs began. It was always accompanied by that voice that told him he wasn't good enough. But this time, another voice joined in. The new voice was feminine and cajoling. How could he succeed if he allowed others to define his success? His life didn't have to end when his career was over. It could start again.

Damn woman was even taking over his brain now. He'd spent too much time reading that book of hers. If he didn't watch it, he'd be the one kneeling at her feet. Wasn't going to happen. Especially since he had a bad knee. Curt laughed at that thought. He turned from the mirror, certain he looked good, and froze when he saw Mike. The twenty-something kicker looked disheveled. His perfectly unlined face wore a sloppy grin as he slipped out of Tess's bedroom, closing the door softly behind him, carrying half his clothes. *Fuck!* 

Rage bubbled like liquid lava in Curt's veins.

"What the hell, Cabrerra!" She's mine, not yours.

"Shh. She's asleep."

"I can't fucking believe this. We discussed this yesterday. You

and Kevin were supposed to back off." He went straight to the plan because Curt was damn uncomfortable admitting that seeing Mike sneak out of Tess's bed was like a punch in the gut.

Walking closer, Mike glared. "I never agreed to anything, Curt. And what's going on now has nothing to do with any of your plans. This is between me and Tess."

Curt seriously doubted that. Though he wasn't around, Curt would bet Kevin had played last night, too.

"So, you thought you could get the warden to let us go by screwing her all night. How'd it work out?" Curt's hands curled into fists. The intensity of his possessive rage surprised him, but he couldn't deny it. Mike had taken something he wanted. The asshole would pay.

"You want to do this, old man? You sure you want to risk your last season in a fight with me? I don't think so. Move out of my way, and go fuck yourself."

Curt saw red. He reared back and was ready to put his fist straight through Mike's face when he felt a hand on his arm. He whirled around, expecting that Kevin had come to save his buddy.

Randy stood there, eyelids narrowed as he watched them. "Guys, if you insist on fucking each other up, have the decency to take it outside."

"Not happening." Mike moved to push past Curt.

Curt placed his hand on the wall, creating a barrier. "You don't get to decide that."

Randy stepped in between him and Mike. "Seriously, guys. Not here."

Curt didn't like his lack of self-control. Why was he so hot to pound the kicker into the ground? Tess. She was why. He'd been imagining her writhing naked, moaning softly, coming at his command for weeks. A powerful possessiveness took the driver's seat, kicking his rational mind to the curb. What was happening here?

"Fine. Clearly, Randy can't take a little violence, but we're not

done, Mike. Got it?" Curt lowered his hand from the wall.

"Whatever."

Mike pushed past him and headed into the kitchen.

Randy stared at him, his dark eyes taking on a sympathetic gleam that set Curt's teeth on edge. "Man, I get it. I really do. Seeing how Mike is dressed, it's easy to guess what's got you boiling. Still, a little out of character for the player you are—and I don't mean on the field."

"Shut the fuck up, Randy." Curt followed Mike into the kitchen. What the hell did Randy know about him and women? Just because he'd invited Randy and Marcus to a couple of play parties at his house before the YouTube incident didn't mean the man knew how he felt about Tess. Come to think of it, what the hell did anyone know about his private life? They knew what Curt wanted them to know. Since the incident with the tabloid and the BDSM club, he'd been very careful. In public, he'd dated the "right" women. They were all beautiful, successful, and paid to be on his arm. Sure, he'd slept with a couple of them but never the way he wanted to. Not a single one had gotten to him. Not until Tess...

Curt charged into the kitchen. Mike had apparently gotten into his clothes. Their wrinkles were a red flag. Mike went to the fridge and got a bottle of water. Marcus sat at the table, eating a bagel. Kevin walked in and oddly didn't make a jab or joke at everyone's expense. He simply grabbed a bowl and sat down. Of all five of them, Kevin was the lighthearted one. Now, he looked like his dick was in the dirt, totally sullen, closed off, as though he was trying not to give away a thing.

What the hell was that about?

Curt stared at Kevin. Though he knew what had happened, seeing the damn proof staring him in the face started an ache he didn't want to acknowledge. "You enjoy double-teaming Tess with Mike last night, asshole? What's wrong, you can't get it up without your buddy there?" Marcus looked up from his meal. "They did what?"

Randy sighed and sank into a chair. "Apparently, Mike and Kevin went through with their ridiculous plan of seducing Tess to try to get an early release."

Curt's blood pounded in his veins. That had been his plan, but his anger came from more than being beat to the finish line. They'd moved in on his territory. "Kevin, what the fuck happened last night?"

"I don't want to talk about it." He stared down at his cereal but didn't take a bite.

Marcus snorted. "That's a first. Hell, you're always giving us the blow-by-blow about your conquests, with and without Mike's participation. And when have you ever hesitated over food?"

Kevin glared at the tight end. "Did you not hear me? I don't want to talk about it."

Marcus shrugged. "Weird. Mike, what about you? Your lips sealed, too?"

"Yeah. Let it go, Marcus."

Curt wanted to deck them both. Instead, he decided to push their buttons. Doing that felt a hell of a lot better than sitting idly in pain, thinking about Tess. "I bet you two couldn't get her off. That's why you're both acting so weird. Leave it to me, boys. I know what she really needs."

Kevin was suddenly on his feet. Mike moved to his side, a glare darkening his face. Before they could speak, Tess walked into the kitchen. She was soft and warm this morning, wearing a pretty green blouse, a yellow scarf, and a skirt that hit right at her knees. She'd pulled her hair back in a ponytail and perfected her makeup, but there was a look about her that told Curt he was wrong about Kevin's and Mike's prowess. They'd gotten her off just fine.

Everyone shut up as she entered and crossed the kitchen. A blush stained her cheeks, and she muttered a good morning, obviously unwilling to look anyone in the eyes.

Curt wasn't about to drop it. She'd been pushing him in every

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session. She'd pushed him about opening up and sharing his true feelings—and not just about his career. Clearly, she wanted to flip his switches. She wanted to peel back his layers and examine him like a bug on a pin. Well, if she wanted to know the real Curt Goff, she was about to get a big dose. She wanted his true feelings? He really felt like beating her ass for sleeping with two other men. Even that didn't quell his desire to have her. He craved her like no one before. Tess was *his*. She'd soon learn that.

Tess walked to the coffee pot and poured a cup.

"You sleep well last night, princess?" Curt made sure his voice was silky smooth as he moved in. He saw her tense as he came up behind her. He also saw Mike and Kevin ready to pounce if he got any closer. "Any discomfort? Soreness? I know a new bed can be hell on your...back."

"Chingate, pendejo." Mike growled.

Tess's cheeks brightened, but she didn't take the bait. She moved quickly to stop the scene. Fuck, the woman was so impressive.

She sipped her coffee and seemed to remain calm in the midst of all that testosterone. "Everyone ready for our morning rounds? I left the schedule on the board outside. Remember, these are the one-onone sessions. Each of you gets an hour alone with me. Don't think I'll be easy on you. I won't."

Curt bristled. "That's a lot of sessions for one day. Maybe you should reassess your schedule."

"What do you mean? I have an hour with each of you and a break for lunch."

Curt pointed to Mike and Kevin. "Don't you like to do those two together?"

Her jaw dropped and then snapped shut. She slammed the cup on the granite countertop. "I'll see you at eleven, Mr. Goff. You can apologize then." She stormed out of the kitchen, deeper into the cavernous ranch house.

"You're an asshole, Curt. I swear, if you talk to her like that again,

I don't give a shit what you mean to this team, I'll waste you myself." Kevin slammed out the door into the expansive backyard.

"You're a real winner, Goff." Mike shook his head and followed Kevin.

Marcus sighed. "Well, I think this whole team-building exercise is going really well."

"Are you out of your mind?" Randy asked.

"Absolutely not," Marcus replied. "We've all finally agreed on something. Curt's an asshole."

Randy laughed and slapped his teammate on the back.

Curt stalked off, unable to stop wondering if they were right.

# **Chapter Five**

Tess stared at Curt as he sank into the chair opposite from her and wondered how she would make it through the next hour. She'd spent the morning with Randy and then Marcus. That had been the easy part of her day. Now, she had a session with Mr. Prick, as she'd decided to call him mentally, and then a break for lunch before she had to face her previous night's big mistake.

How was she going to get through that? What should she say to them? She'd been debating it all morning. She'd gone from a very polite, "thank you for the orgasms, let's all behave professionally now," to just sneaking out and maybe taking a plane to some far-off place where no one would ever know what an ass she'd made of herself.

"Want to talk about it, princess?"

There was a smirk on Curt Goff's ridiculously handsome face. It was further proof that God must be a man. Otherwise, no guy that hot would be such a dick. She carefully schooled her face, hoping for a professional placidness. "I would much rather talk about you, Mr. Goff."

"Mr. Goff." He tsk-tsked her. "I thought we moved past that, Tess. You were calling me Curt yesterday."

Yes, she had called him that yesterday. Yesterday, she'd thought they were making progress. He'd been surprisingly sweet after lunch. He'd been almost protective of her. When she'd tripped walking into the kitchen, he'd been right there to catch her. It had made her feel soft and feminine. Thinking about Curt had set her up for a fall. By the time Mike and Kevin had gotten to her, she needed something to make her feel good. Yeah. She could blame this all on Curt. That thought brightened her day a bit.

"I think Mr. Goff is better, don't you?" Tess was determined to get back on track.

He leaned forward. His tight T-shirt didn't hide the way his muscles moved. He was like a sleek panther stalking its prey. "I think I would prefer Sir, Tess."

Tess fought to breathe evenly. The way he said it made her think of her college days. Long days of study and nights of submission. She'd loved the crack of a whip back then. She'd given it up because submission didn't go with her career plans. Sometimes she felt like she'd given up far too much of herself for what she thought was the ideal life. First to Roger and then to her own strict views of success. Why had last night been wrong when it felt so right?

She shook off the thought. These thoughts didn't do her any good now. She needed to concentrate on the problem at hand.

"Mr. Goff, I'm not here for my health. I'm here to help you. There is no reason this team shouldn't work. The Bandits have one of the highest payrolls in the league. You have brilliant regular seasons. Why does it fall apart in the postseason? What is keeping you from succeeding?"

"Randy's slippery hands are what's keeping me from succeeding, princess. Talk to Kevin, who can't block to save his life. He's an awesome fullback when it comes to the run, but he tends to forget that he has to protect me, too."

"You're very good at blaming other people, Mr. Goff." She winced inwardly because that had been exactly what she was doing. Blaming him for her behavior. She was talking the talk, but she wasn't very good at the walking part lately. "Your quarterback rating is much lower in the postseason."

He sat back. Only a light stain on his cheeks betrayed that the conversation bothered him at all. "Your QB rating is only as good as the people you're throwing to."

"And your rate of interceptions? I saw your last game. You threw three."

His jaw hardened. "We all have off days, princess. We all have days where we make decisions we probably shouldn't."

She got his point. She felt a blush race across her skin. "Yes, we do. But not many of us make mistakes that cost others millions of dollars. Don't you feel like you owe Mr. Boyle something?"

A nasty grimace tightened Curt's face, and he sat back up. "Don't talk to me about what I owe Frank. I owe him plenty. He should have cut me when that tabloid story came out. My contract was almost up. Instead, he protected me, gave me a ridiculous amount of money, and treated me more like a son than my own father ever did."

Finally, a spark of real emotion. "Was it hard? When the story came out?"

"Fuck yeah, it was hard. How would you like your most private self paraded around for the tabloids? How would you like something that means a lot to you to become a joke to everyone around you?"

She heard the anguish in his words even though they were hidden behind a wall of anger. It made her want to reach out to him. She did it in the only way she could. "Did the girl mean a lot to you or the club?"

He was silent for a moment. She thought he might bolt, but he settled back. "The girl was just another sub. She wasn't mine. The club was a little like a second home to me, but beyond that I was talking about the lifestyle. The lifestyle means something to me."

Now they were getting somewhere. It was the first time he sounded genuine. "BDSM? Is that the lifestyle you're talking about?"

His eyes narrowed, and Tess had the strangest feeling she'd just opened a door and walked into a trap. "Yes, princess. I'm talking about BDSM, but mostly I'm on the dominance and submission side of things. I like to have a woman submit to me. Do you know what it means to submit?"

She was not going there, even if her panties were turning

dangerously damp. God, what kind of a person was she? She'd spent the entire night before with two men, and now she couldn't get her mind off Curt.

Pointedly, she crossed her legs. "What I know or don't know isn't going to help you or the team. This time is to focus on you. Do you feel out of control when the regular season ends? Like your life and career are in other people's hands and you don't trust them? Is that why you push? I've seen the game films, and you push during the postseason when you're extraordinarily patient otherwise."

He stopped, his handsome face a complete blank for a moment. "I don't push."

She looked up from her notepad. There was absolutely nothing written on it, just little doodles, but she felt like she needed this little bit of armor this morning. "Have you watched the films, Mr. Goff? I have the stats in your file. You take significantly less time to throw a pass in the play-offs than in the regular season. Maybe the reason Randy struggles is that you don't give him enough time to run his routes correctly."

Curt's face turned bright red. "Think you know a lot about football, do you?"

The tension just kept notching up. It was there, a palpable fission running across her skin. She knew she should tone it down, but she just couldn't. He'd been baiting her for days, first with his sarcasm and then with a sweetness she'd been unable to deny. This morning he'd really rubbed her raw.

"I know enough, Mr. Goff, but more importantly, I know a lot about people, though you surprise me a bit. I suppose I thought you were the type to take responsibility for your actions. Instead, you come up with a whole lot of ways to excuse your poor behavior."

She'd expected him to explode, secretly wanted it so she'd know she could get to him the way he got to her, but instead a slow smile slid across his handsome face.

"Are you owning up to yours, princess? Because I don't think

we're talking about football anymore. Were you upset that I caught you with your legs spread? It certainly upset me."

Heat flashed through her. Did he really have to be so crude? "My personal life is none of your business."

"Oh, I disagree. You've made my personal life your business. You've decided you can top me, haven't you? You think you can breeze in with your psych degree and all those idiotic ideals of perfect teamwork and change everything? You don't know shit, princess. You want to peel me apart like an onion, you should get ready for the acid in my soul to burn your eyes."

"Don't you think that's a bit dramatic?" She felt her left leg start to bounce, a sure sign that she was stressed. "You came from a privileged family. Your father was a Hall of Fame quarterback. You went to all the right schools."

"Is that what you think? You think I'm some poor little rich boy who can't quite make the cut because my father smoothed the way for me? And now that I'm on my own, I'm floundering and making excuses. Is that how you pegged me?"

*Keep it professional.* The sudden image of tossing her profile of Curt straight at his face was almost impossible to resist. He didn't take her seriously. He was never going to. "Tell me something, Mr. Goff, when was the last time you struggled with money?"

"Not once in my life, princess."

"And obviously you didn't have to struggle for female attention." He shrugged.

"And you wonder why I think your privileged life has led you to this state?"

"Oh, which state is that, wise one?"

She sniffed. "The state where you fumble through your life. You were given a direction and the tools to get to a plane of success most people can only dream about, yet you spend your time baiting your less fortunate teammates and causing scandals. You're going to be the reason Coach Wilde gets fired, you know. Frank has no choice.

Season ticket sales are down. He can't get rid of you. Someone has to take the fall. But that doesn't mean anything to someone like you, does it?"

Curt blanched. "Frank wouldn't do that. He and Jimmy have been friends since they were kids. It would ruin Jimmy."

"What do you care? You'll have your money, and you can go your way." A secret part of her was thrilled she'd finally made contact.

"You don't know anything about it. I would shut up if I were you, princess."

But she couldn't. She had him on the run and for the first time felt a little thrill at the idea that she might be reaching him. "I should think you would be happy. You like to have control over people. Maybe you can get the next one fired, too."

"I'm warning you right now, Tess. You're pushing me too far. If another nasty word comes out of your mouth, we're going to have trouble." He said it with a clenched jaw, but all Tess could hear was the challenge. Weeks of tension were finally coming to a head, and she just couldn't resist.

"You've never had a minute of trouble in your cotton-candy life. You're just a rich boy who doesn't care who he hurts. Not only have you just about ruined your coach's career, you'll take your teammates down at some point. Hell, you'll take me down, too. None of us matter to you."

He stood, and Tess thought he would walk away. She was surprised at the way her heart plunged at the thought of him walking out the door.

He towered over her. "You're right and wrong. You do matter. And I will take you down, princess."

Too late, she realized she'd tugged the tiger's tail, and he was coming for her. Tess darted for the door, but he was on her in an instant. One hand wrapped around her waist, hauling her up against his rock-hard body. The other ruthlessly covered her mouth.

"Bite me, and I'll bite back. I won't hesitate to take my pound of

flesh, princess. You just worry about where I decide to take it from your pretty hide."

He whispered the threat in her ear. Tess struggled against him. He dragged her back to the big chair he'd occupied before.

"Struggle all you like, Tess. It's just getting me harder. We've been building to this. I meant to go slow. I planned everything out. Wine, roses, some gateway bondage. Then I find fucking Mike Cabrerra crawling out of your bed this morning. So, we'll move a little more quickly, I think."

He tugged at the scarf around her neck, and before she could get out of his grasp, he had it wrapped around her wrists, binding her hands neatly in front of her. With his hands on her wrists, Tess was free to scream. She decided to try reason first.

"You asshole, let me go. This is a ridiculously bad idea." She pushed away from him. She pulled at her hands, but they held tight. Damn, he was really good with a knot.

"Not on your life. We're going to work some things out, you and I. Feel free to scream your head off. The staff is working outside. Marcus and Randy took off toward the lake. Mike is out running, and Kevin can't hear anything through those earbuds of his. It's just you and me, and I'll like it when you scream."

"Don't you do this." But she wasn't screaming. She pushed, but a part of her was heating up because he was right. She'd been dreaming about this for weeks.

"Apologize sweetly, and I'll let you go."

She could see that he meant it. All she had to do was say she was sorry. She didn't have to mean it. It was two little perfectly harmless words. I'm sorry. He was giving her a way out of this dangerous little game.

"Fuck you, Goff."

"Oh, we're going to get to that, princess." He sat in the chair and pulled her over his lap.

Tess fought to stay upright, but with her hands bound, she

couldn't balance. She swallowed. Shit. He was going to spank her. It had been so long since she'd felt so deliciously helpless and at a man's mercy. Roger had made her feel perverse for needing this. Curt merely placed a hand on the small of her back, holding her against his knee. She could feel the hard line of his erection against her belly.

"This make you feel like a man? Do you like hurting women?" She couldn't quite stop. Even though she knew damn well she wanted this, it didn't seem right not to fight him. He wanted her to submit, but he was going to have to earn it.

"Yes, I'm a bit of a sadist, but that works well for us, doesn't it? Because you have a masochist deep in there, don't you?" His words were velvety seduction as he pushed up her skirt. When it was at her waist, he roughly pulled the little silk panties she was wearing down, exposing her ass. He dragged them off and tossed them away. Tess wriggled against him, but she couldn't deny this was doing something for her.

"You don't know that. You could just be abusing me. You wouldn't care."

"Princess, I can smell the juice flowing out of your little cunt from here. You're aroused at the thought of what I'm going to do to you. You like the fact that I tied your hands together. Another time, I'll take you to a play party, and I'll put a spreader between your ankles and force those legs wide. Your pussy will be on full display for everyone to see. Everyone's going to stare at you like your pussy is a work of art. They'll all talk about how pretty that pussy I own is. And maybe, I'll lick it so it's wet and ripe and pouty. Or maybe I'll slap it so it swells. I'll make sure your clit pushes past its hood. It'll be a creamy little jewel for everyone to admire."

God, she wished he would just spank her already. The anticipation was killing her. His hand smoothed over her skin, tantalizing and making her want to scream. His fingers ran down the crack of her ass, close, so close to something dark and dirty. He slid a finger down to her pussy. There was no way he could miss that. She was creaming and pretty much had been since he'd walked into the room.

"Oh, you nasty girl. You like the idea. You want the big, bad man to hurt you a little, don't you? You need it."

She wiggled on his lap, trying desperately to get him to spank her. "Screw this, Goff. Let me up now."

He chuckled above her. "Now, how disappointed would you be if I did that? Tess, you're going to have to verbally acknowledge that you want this, or I will let you go. I will let you go, but I won't untie you. I'll march straight to that room of yours, and I'll take every toy I find. You won't be able to take care of the ache yourself. I won't allow it."

"You can't keep me like this forever."

"You'd be surprised what I can do. Your choice, Tess. Verbal acknowledgement that, while this might be fucked up, it's entirely consensual, or I walk away."

It was fucked up, and it felt so right she couldn't deny it. She'd needed Mike and Kevin's sweet affection the night before, but she needed this, too. She needed this deep down in her soul. She'd denied this part of herself for so long that desire poured through her system. "Fine. It's consensual, asshole."

His hand came down with a devastating crack. Tess screamed at the fire that licked across her skin.

"That's what I wanted, princess."

His hand struck over and over. He smacked her cheeks, her thighs, with brutal strength.

"You want some therapy, Tess. I'll give you some therapy. I'll let you in, but we do this my way. Always my way."

Tess cried as she held on to his calves.

"You think my life was so great? My dad might have been a Hall of Famer, but he was also a drunk and a bully. I was his only kid. He barely said a word to me for the first six years of my life, but then he retired. Once his glory days were over, he turned his attention to me."

Tess felt the next smack all the way in her womb. He was slowing

down, placing the slaps carefully and punctuating them with a caress. He seemed calmer now, even his voice had an edge of peace to it, as though the act he'd performed satisfied something deep in his soul. Tess felt it, too. The pain was there, but along with it came a sweet heat invading her veins like a drug.

"I had to win. I was Kent Goff's son. I had to be the best. Do you know how my father ensured I would try my best each and every time?"

Tess had an awful idea, but she didn't say it. She wasn't required to answer. He simply needed to talk. His cock was huge against her belly, but he made no moves to alleviate his condition. He seemed content to stroke her now that the punishment was done. His finger trailed down, pushing between the cheeks of her ass.

"There was nothing at all routine about my father's punishments. He would just beat the shit out of me with whatever was handy. It would come at odd times. He would be all smiles and 'aw, shucks' at the track meets or the football games. He'd shrug and tell me next time we'd get 'em. Then when we got home, I would wait for it. I tried hiding once, but that just made it worse. He pulled me out of bed, and I had to spend the night in the hospital. He claimed I fell out of a tree. The fucking doctor was too busy getting Dad's autograph to check out his facts. Mom had left years before, so I was on my own."

Curt's touch disappeared, and Tess craned her neck to look up. He sucked it into his mouth, wetting it before he pushed it between her cheeks. She felt the pressure on her anus.

"Oh, yeah, that's right, princess. I'm going to fuck this tight little asshole. Are you going to whimper for me?"

"If that's what you need," she managed to say. She held on to him, allowed her hands to run up the lightly haired skin of his legs.

He pressed in, driving his finger past the first guarding muscles into the heat of her anus. Tess whimpered, the pressure almost too much to bear. She wriggled, feeling pinned by him.

He gently began to fuck his finger in and out of her ass. "That's it.

That's exactly what I need. You're awfully tight, Tess. These muscles are going to feel like a vise around my dick. I can't believe no one's ever taken this sweet ass."

"I'm not a virgin."

He slapped her ass with his free hand. "You're not a tourist, either. I can pick a little sub out of a crowd. What do you call me when my finger's halfway up your rectum, princess?"

The authority in his voice made her shiver. "Sir. I'm not a virgin there, Sir."

He added a finger and opened her up. She groaned at the burning sensation and the dark shivers she got when he pulled out.

"I should torture you some more, but I don't think I can wait."

The world shifted as he turned her over. He stood and sat her on the chair. "Stay, Tess. I swear if you've moved an inch when I get back, you're going to be in trouble. The spanking I gave you was just a little play. But if you disobey me now, I'll have to carry you around. How will you explain that to the others? Do you understand? The only answer I want to hear is 'Yes, Sir.'"

"Yes, Sir." She couldn't resist him, especially now that he'd opened himself up and laid out pieces of his own twisted history. So much of him made sense. She sat still in her chair, feeling exquisitely vulnerable with her bare ass on the leather as he strode to the small bathroom inside Mr. Boyle's elegant office. She heard the water running as he undoubtedly washed up, and then he was shuffling through drawers, looking for something.

She felt a deep connection to him. Though her childhood hadn't been the nightmare his was, she had been lonely. He must have felt alone amidst the chaos. This was his way of handling it. He felt the need to control as earnestly as she felt the need to please.

He walked out of the bathroom completely naked. Tess felt her mouth drop open. He was six feet five inches of perfectly ripped sin. Lean muscle covered his body. His cock jutted out, standing nearly flat against his stomach. Long and so thick, his dick was the cherry on the most delicious man cake she'd ever seen. She stared at the perfect notches where his hips began to flow into his legs. She wanted to run her tongue there.

"Stop that, princess." He chuckled. The arrogant smile on his face belied his words. "You'll make a man blush looking at him like you could eat him up."

He had a tube in his hand and a small square. Lubricant and a condom. God, he really was going to fuck her ass. Anticipation made her tremble.

The smile faded on his gorgeous face, replaced with a look of rampant desire. His cock twitched as he came closer. With one hand, he hauled her up. Her skirt was awkwardly bunched around her waist, but he made no move to fix it. He wrapped a hand in her hair, pulling the ponytail out, sending it tumbling around her shoulders. Fisting her hair in his hands, he pulled her up until she was on her tiptoes. He took her mouth in a hungry kiss. His tongue invaded, his lips owned. Tess's heart started to pound ferociously as he ravaged her mouth. His free hand came up to cup her breasts. He slid his hand under her shirt and past the bra she was wearing to pinch at her nipple. He rolled it between his thumb and forefinger then suddenly applied pressure.

Tess groaned into his mouth and writhed against him. She didn't want or need any more foreplay. She needed him.

"Stop it, or I'll clamp these little treats." He twisted her nipple just to the point of pain. "I don't have any proper clamps, but I'll make do. You'll find I am infinitely creative when it comes to this. I don't need expensive toys to torture my pretty sub."

She forced herself to be still, though that little biting pain had her panting and nearly begging. He turned her around, forcing her to face the large mahogany desk that dominated the room. His strong hand pressed down until her breasts brushed the wood of the desk.

"Arms out and spread those legs, Tess."

She forced her bound hands in front of her body. After moving her legs apart, she felt Curt's hands on her ass, cupping her, opening her. She felt the lube hit her skin, and he started to rim her asshole with his finger, massaging the oil into the flesh he was about to take. She heard him tear open the condom.

"God, this is a gorgeous little asshole. Do you understand why I'm fucking your ass before I get to your pussy, princess?"

His cock was there, pressing against her anus. She had to swallow before she answered. "You're showing me who's boss. You want me vulnerable."

"I want you helpless." He pressed forward with ruthless intent.

Tess cried out as she flattened her back. It had been so long since she'd taken a cock up her ass, and never one the size of Curt's. She felt tears sliding down her face. It burned. She ached. He reminded her she was fucking alive.

"Oh, yeah, that's exactly what I want. Press back against me. Take me in." His hands pulled at her hips as his dick drove forward. "Take me all the way in. I want to be balls deep in this hot ass."

Tess bit her lip against the burning sensation. It felt like he was going to split her open, but she knew there was no way out. He would have her. All she could do was push back against him until his thighs were finally flush against hers and his heavy balls swung up to slap at her pussy. Tess groaned. She was so full. He leaned forward to cover her back with his chest. He was everywhere. She was utterly surrounded by his scent, his skin, his breath against her ear.

"You feel perfect. Do you have any idea how long I've waited for you?"

The words calmed her. They were sweet, and his hands softened as they moved along her curves. He allowed her time to adjust as he talked to her.

"You're so beautiful, Tess. Your obedience pleases me greatly." He kissed the back of her neck as he held himself deep inside her ass. "Are you ready to please your Master?"

The burning had eased, and now a different fire lit her as Curt dragged one hand down her body and placed it firmly over her clit.

She vibrated with need. "Yes. Yes, Sir. I want to please you."

"And I want to please you." He dragged his cock back.

Every nerve in her rectum sang a hallelujah chorus. Tess cried out as the crazy pain-pleasure sang through her body. It lit every inch of her skin and made her bite her lip to keep from screaming.

"Oh, yes," Curt moaned from behind her. He slammed into her ass, ramming himself in and dragging back, over and over. Every time he fucked into her ass, his fingers stroked her clit. He thrust in and pulled back. Tess couldn't help it. She pushed back against him.

He smacked her ass, not once letting up on his pounding rhythm. "Yes, princess, fight for it. I want to give it to you."

She pressed her bound hands down, her nails finding the wood of the desk. She shoved her ass against his, unwilling to give up an inch of him. He filled her, his cock becoming her whole world in that moment. The room filled with the sounds of their flesh slapping together and Curt's harsh breathing as he worked.

The relentless fucking built inside Tess until she came. She cried out, completely overwhelmed by the pleasure that was flooding her. Curt shouted hoarsely behind her as he pumped and pumped to give her everything he had.

It had been so long since she'd felt like this, overwhelmed and connected all at once. It was the kind of thing only a Dom could give and a sub could truly appreciate. Curt was dominant beyond anything she'd ever dreamed of. Could he be tender, too? She wanted tenderness from him now.

He finally slumped forward, covering her with his big body. His hands stroked her gently, and he kissed her shoulder. "God, that was amazing. I'm so crazy about you."

She felt the same way about him. He was a complex man, but for the right woman, he would be worth the trouble.

"Thank you, Tess. Thank you for your trust. I promise you won't regret it. I'm going to take such good care of you. You're mine now, princess, and there's no going back."

A sudden vision of Kevin and Mike had her heart thudding again, this time in panic. It hadn't been twenty-four hours since she'd lain in their arms and talked and made love over and over again. Yet, this time with Curt had reopened a piece of her soul she'd been missing for so long. What had she done? Had she really been dumb enough to fall for three men?

Curt kissed her one last time on the nape of her neck then slipped out of her body. He turned her and untied her hands. His eyes were languid and moved over her as though he examined his new prized possession.

"This time I want your arms around me."

She couldn't breathe. Panic threatened to overwhelm her. He was so beautiful. He was so far out of her league it was ridiculous. They all were. Yet her heart was tangled with three gorgeous men who would walk away at some point and leave her in a whimpering, heartbroken ball. What the hell was she doing?

"I can't. I just...I can't." She pushed her skirt down and ran for the door. She turned back briefly and was shocked at the hurt she saw on his face. He was always so closed, but now his vulnerability was right there, naked and raw. He shut it down in an instant, and the Dom was back.

"Tess, don't you walk out that door."

But she did. She ran, and she didn't stop until the main house was far behind her.

### **Chapter Six**

Tess stood by the team owner's private lake. She dragged air into her lungs as she looked back. He hadn't followed her. With shaking hands, Tess fixed her blouse. Her wrists were still slightly red from where he'd bound her. She stared at them and swore she heard Curt whispering in her ear. She could still feel him holding her down, demanding her submission. Why did that have to be the thing that flipped her switch? She'd gone to her first BDSM club when she was in college. It had been a revelation, but when she fell for Roger, she'd given it up. He'd been very vanilla, so she'd hidden away that part of herself. Until she'd taken on this damn job, it had been fairly easy. She'd been obsessed with restarting her career and proving to her family that she wasn't a fuckup.

Tears threatened to choke her. Well, she'd proven something. She'd proven she could sleep with a whole bunch of guys in a very short period of time and develop ridiculously unrequited feelings for them all. In a twenty-four-hour period, she'd managed to double the number of lovers she'd taken in her life.

She knew she should go back, but she just couldn't make her feet move that direction. Instead she started to walk, images running through her mind like a movie. The night before, she'd enjoyed Mike's tenderness and Kevin's wildness. She'd felt like a princess between them. Princess. God, she'd never forget the way Curt growled at her and overwhelmed her. Such different experiences, and yet, she'd been touched by both. Maybe it would be easier to handle if it had just been sex, but neither encounter had felt that way to her. With Mike and Kevin, it had started casual, but sometime during that

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long, languid night, they had bonded. Mike had talked about his family, while Kevin had cuddled her and seemed reluctant to let her go. She'd felt so right in their arms.

And Curt. Despite his growling demeanor, she'd felt an instant connection to him. Something had been between them, like a live wire she should never have touched. How the hell did she walk back into that house?

Or, she could be making way too much of this. She strolled along the path as her brain whirled. Maybe it had been a casual thing for them, and she should take the same tact. Curt couldn't have meant what he'd said about her belonging to him now. It wasn't like a crazy three-way or superhot D/s sex automatically equaled some fairy-tale happily ever after. She could be making herself sick over nothing. She should walk back, take a shower, and get back to work. She was a strong, professional woman in charge of her life. She was perfectly capable of having meaningless sex. How could it be anything more? If she couldn't keep Roger satisfied, she seriously doubted she was woman enough for any one of these men.

But deep inside, she wondered...could she really leave them behind for good? That would be logical. She had a book to get back on track, a plan to execute, and a career to build. There was no time for men in her life. They'd all felt pleasure in the act, but now it was over. No harm, no foul, no punishment. Well, except Curt, who knew exactly what kind of punishment to dish out.

"I've got to get a hold of myself." She closed her eyes and repeated one of her meditation exercises. It was a treatment she'd tried to teach the men, but they'd been terribly disinterested. She focused on her goals. She made a mental picture of where she would be in six months. It worked for a bit to focus her mind. She could see herself on tour, helping clients, doing something good. But then she wasn't alone. They were there. Their arms surrounded her. Their mouths whispered words of encouragement. They would be her strength when she had none. They would be her reason when she couldn't find one.

Meaningless sex? She didn't even know the meaning of the word.

She opened her eyes and gave up. Anytime she closed them from now on and tried to concentrate on what she wanted, they would be there. She sighed and wondered why she couldn't take her own advice.

She began to walk, her mind a storm of indecision. She thought about what she taught. She taught clients that they shouldn't listen to people who wanted to drag them down. They were the key to their own success, but more than that, they had to measure their own success by their standards, no one else's. Hadn't she been doing that all along?

Tess found herself on a dirt road still on the property. She had no idea how many acres the ranch had, probably several thousand. The spread used to be a working ranch, but now it was more like a gorgeous playground for the ultra-wealthy. There was the main house and several cabins strewn across the property. She was about to turn around and head back when a pretty structure caught her eye. The other cabins that she'd seen closer to the main house were made of logs. This one's exterior was white rock. She could just imagine some kindly little soothsayer woman living inside, ready to tell her what her next step should be. If only that were true.

When Frank Boyle had taken her on a mini tour of the place, he'd mentioned he kept every cabin well stocked for the many friends and employees he invited out. This looked like the perfect place to hide out, until she could get her mind back in the game. As she approached, she saw a sign with the name on its quaint little door—"Honeymoon Cottage".

Tess stepped up onto the porch, complete with a swing and two rocking chairs. No one was supposed to be on the ranch but her and the guys, so she grabbed the front door's handle. Thankfully, it was not locked.

Inside, the cottage had a Western theme, with cowboy hats on

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hooks on the wall, lamps made from old boots on wooden side tables, a painting of mustangs running through a river above the fireplace's mantle. The furniture was leather, and there was a large-screen TV that dominated the room. Definitely a man's version of a honeymoon cottage.

Tess walked to the small fridge and cabinets by the stairs at the back wall. Inside was a bottle of white wine. In one of the cabinets she found a glass and a corkscrew. Yep, she was rapidly becoming a lush. It was barely past noon and she was holed up with a bottle. If only she had some sad country music playing, her cliché would be complete.

Tess poured a glass. She would relax for an hour or so, get her head on straight, and then get back to work.

She glanced around the cottage and decided to see what was up the stairs. The stairs led to a loft with a plush bed and a gorgeous dresser and side tables. There was a small desk with a landline phone on top. She was glad the men hadn't found this place. She'd taken out all the landlines at the main house, but this one had been forgotten. She laughed a little as she envisioned the men fighting over the phone. Mike and Curt would probably punch each other in an attempt to see who would call first. Kevin would jump into the middle of it if no one thought to distract him with a slice of pizza. As for Marcus and Randy, they would stand off to the side and shake their heads. They were the good ones. The ones she could count on to obey the rules.

Why couldn't she have fallen for them? Tess sipped her wine and sank onto the bed. No, not Tess. Tess had to fall in love with the hard cases. Now she was past sipping and just took a good long drink. She'd just thought the word love in conjunction with three professional athletes. She'd lost her damn mind.

What had happened with them should be a one-time experience. *Right?* Her mind whirled wildly. She desired more from Curt, more from Mike and Kevin, more from all of them. Crazy, sexy thoughts.

She curled up on the bed and drank her glass of wine while a thousand fantasies played through her head. Time seemed to slow down as she watched the sun filter through the curtains. It was peaceful here. Feeling drowsy, Tess closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

"God, that is so amazing." A deep voice jolted Tess awake. She sat up suddenly and wiped her eyes to get them to focus. Where was she? That's right, the Honeymoon Cottage.

"Yes. Right there, baby."

And she was no longer alone. She could hear a deep, masculine voice. Marcus. Marcus was here. How long had she been out? No idea. The loft was dark, but she could see beyond the half wall that soft light reflected on the ceiling coming from the main room. She looked out the window, worried it was night. Nope. Afternoon. But they had obviously drawn the blinds. Tess felt her breath catch. What was Marcus doing here in the middle of the afternoon with the blinds drawn?

"You like that, don't you? Yeah, you know you do. You take that." Randy's voice was the dominant one now. There was a rough, almost angry edge to it.

Oh, crap. Were they?

"You are going down, motherfucker." Marcus seemed really certain about that.

"Not unless you make me."

Tess couldn't help it. She had to see. If those two were doing what she thought they were doing, she would be forever mortified. And she totally wanted to see it.

It's too late to come clean and announce I'm here. Tess hesitated. That would embarrass them too much, given how far they must be into their secret session. Tess decided to just wait them out. Once they were done and left, then she would come down. They would be none the wiser. She would keep their secret.

"Go for it, go for it, go for it." Randy's voice was a guttural plea.

"Don't you dare," Marcus shot back.

Damn, Tess thought, gay sex sounded awfully rough.

If curiosity killed the cat, Tess prayed she had nine lives. She gave in to the guilty urge to get a look at the two hot men making love, inching quietly to the half wall. She hugged close to the wall and looked down at the scene in front of her.

"Fucking A. Six points! Damn, man, Curt plays so much better in this freaking game than he does on the field."

It took everything Tess had not to laugh out loud. Video games. They were playing video games. Football from the sound of it. They couldn't get their brains off football even when they were relaxing. Those little weasels had snuck an Xbox in. These were her good boys?

"Pass me a beer, man."

Randy reached into a cooler they'd also snuck in and pulled out two longnecks.

Marcus sighed as he put the bottle to his lips. "You have to teach me that play. I'm trying, but I can't get the combo right."

Randy shrugged, his eyes on the screen. "Damn, I look fine in this game. They did a good job with that avatar thing."

Marcus made a vomiting sound. "They fucked me up. I am not that much shorter than you. I look like a hobbit. I'm calling my agent to complain."

"Good luck with that," Randy shot back. "You know not being able to take a freaking phone call has been kind of nice."

"Yeah, it's made it a hell of a lot easier to duck Cindy What's-hername. She keeps calling me."

A long sigh came out of Randy's chest. "Candy. Her name was Candy. Do I need to slap a name tag on the women we date?"

"Where would you put it? We have them naked too fast for me to memorize anything. Maybe you should carry a Sharpie."

She heard the thud of fist hitting flesh.

"Damn, man, I don't know why I'm your friend. You're an

asshole."

"I am not." Marcus went silent for a moment. "I remember the important names."

Tess stood up. It was time to let them know she was here. She wouldn't even take the Xbox away. Maybe she'd just ask them for a beer.

"I remember Tess's name."

And just like that she cowered behind the wall again. What had he said?

"I know, man. I see the way you look at Tess."

If Tess hadn't been paying attention before, she sure as hell was now. She leaned forward.

"Yeah, you look at her, too."

"Can you blame me? She's gorgeous, and she doesn't even know it. Tell me you haven't thought about playing around with her?" Randy asked the question, his voice deepening.

"Oh, I've thought about it. I've thought about it a whole lot since I found out she slept with Kevin and Mike. I mean, we bring more to the table than those two. They don't even know how to tie a girl up."

Her breath hitched. It just went to show, you couldn't judge a book by its cover. She wouldn't have expected that was their kink.

"They didn't learn from a master. Curt can be an asshole at times, but he's a good teacher."

Curt had taught them? Damn. She would love to have been the sub they practiced on. She missed the clubs. She knew that now. She missed practicing BDSM more than she'd imagined. There had been no judgment in a club, just the acknowledgment that sexuality was a beautiful, individual thing.

"And Tess is a sweet sub. She would look gorgeous on a St. Andrew's Cross." There was a hard quality to Randy's voice that had her rethinking the wide receiver.

Despite the fact that she'd had more sex in the last twenty-four hours than she'd had in almost a year, she felt herself heating up.

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What would it be like to submit to all of them? How would she feel in the middle of all those glorious alpha men? Could she please them?

"Well, I think you'll have to fight Curt. He's trying to pretend, but he wants her bad. I thought he was going to beat the shit out of Mike this morning," Randy said. "He was walking down the hall all ready to knock on her door and Mike slips out."

"And where Mike's been, Kevin couldn't be far behind," Marcus replied. "There goes next season."

Tess's heart plunged.

"Yep, Curt will push, and Mike will walk. He's a great kicker and all, but we can find another. That's not the problem."

Marcus sighed. "Kevin will follow him. He's in the middle of contract negotiations."

"And we'll lose the best tight end in the league. See, this is why I didn't make a move on Tess. It's too complicated, and honestly, I don't know that she can handle it. Not everyone can handle ménage." Randy sounded a little defeated. "We haven't found anyone who wants us permanently."

She listened as they talked about the women they had dated and how they always walked away in the end. They were young and not really looking for anything permanent, but they worried about it. It suddenly seemed so silly for Tess to let worry ruin what had been the two most important sexual experiences of her life. She was crazy about those men. They couldn't work anything out if she pretended not to care. Being vulnerable to them terrified her, but she could either go back to the miserable failure her life had been before them or suck up her courage and pride—and go after what she wanted.

Just as soon as she could sneak out of here. She wondered how long she'd have to wait before Randy and Marcus went back to the main house. Didn't matter. She would never let them know she'd been there. Besides, she'd have a little extra time to figure out exactly what to say to Curt, Mike, and Kevin. She could hear it now. *Hey, guys, you all can share me. And maybe we can invite Marcus and*  *Randy in, too.* Yeah, that would go over like gangbusters. She would have to be persuasive, convince them she was worth it.

A small bit of arrogant pride surfaced. She hadn't felt that in forever, but it was still there. She'd get them because she was Tess Proffit. She was damn good at persuasion. Confidence. That was the key. She would make them see that it could work. Hell, they would make a great team.

Marcus sighed. "I want to go home. I get that this is important. I really do, but it can't work when the others won't even try."

Tess smiled at the thought. They would try now. She was pretty sure those boys would be a little more amenable to her methods.

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I can't believe what they did to Tess."

Tess froze then turned back to the railing, peering down.

Marcus was wrapping up the controllers. "They're a bunch of Neanderthals. What else could we expect?"

Randy shook his head. "Tess didn't deserve to be seduced just so they could try to butter her up to let us all leave. If they would just listen to her, maybe they would learn something. She makes sense, you know? You don't have to play football to know how to be a team player. Maybe after this is over and those assholes have selfdestructed, we can ask her out."

"If she'll talk to any of us. Hopefully they aren't stupid enough to let her know what they did. We might need a kicker, a tight end, and a quarterback if she finds out they decided to fuck her so they could get out of here."

A silent buzz deafened her for a long moment, which ended when her heart kicked into overdrive. Tess looked down at her hand. It was shaking. She felt sick to her stomach. How stupid was she? Had she really thought for one second that those men wanted her for her? She hadn't managed to keep dull Roger's attention. Why would gorgeous professional athletes want her when they could have any woman?

The terrible plan Marcus and Randy discussed made perfect sense.

The rest of the guys wanted out of what they considered to be a ridiculous program, and what better way than to take control of the idiot in charge? She'd been a real easy mark, her confidence low, her desperation for affection and approval stupidly high. She hadn't fought them at all. She'd just smiled and done everything they asked her to.

And now she would pay the price.

"We better get back before someone comes looking for us."

Tess turned away as they closed the cooler and started to leave. Where was the rage she should feel? She wanted to get mad, but a deep, aching pain drowned out everything else. She bit her lip to hold in the tears stinging her eyes.

There wouldn't be a triumph out of this assignment. She wouldn't be able to go home and proudly discuss how she'd gotten this team where they needed to be mentally. Her book would rapidly be forgotten in a sea of other meaningless self-help books.

Tess heard the door to the cabin scrape open then close. There was really only one thing to do. She got up and straightened her skirt. She walked across the room and picked up the phone. Before she could talk herself out of it, she dialed Frank Boyle's number. He'd trusted her with his team, and she'd screwed it up. All she had left was her integrity. She wasn't giving it up, no matter what it cost her.

"Hello, Mr. Boyle, it's Tess Proffit. I think we should talk."

\* \* \* \*

Mike paced back and forth feeling like a caged lion. He glanced at the clock on the wall. Every minute that ticked by was one more minute that Tess was late. It wasn't like her. She was always on time, but she'd missed two sessions after lunch. Mike had seen her as she walked into the session with Curt and then, nothing.

Mike looked around the room. Kevin had been there for hours, but Marcus and Randy had only joined them an hour before. The others hadn't seen Tess's lateness as anything to worry about, but now they all looked as agitated as he felt.

If she didn't show up in the next twenty minutes, Mike had decided to start an all-out search party. The ranch didn't have a large staff, but they knew the grounds. He would look through every cabin, every barn, and every inch of property until he found her. A fission of fear kicked him in the gut. What if she was hurt? Needed him?

Curt barged into the room from the hallway to Tess's room. "Where is Tess?"

Anger welled up inside Mike. Had Curt been in her room? Why? Didn't the quarterback realize that Tess belonged to him and Kevin? If he didn't, Mike would be happy to let him know.

"We have no idea where Tess is. Mike has looked all over the house." Randy shook his head. "Curt, you're late, too. Where have you been?"

"Looking for her," Curt snapped back. Then he sat down, placed his head in his hands. That mask of arrogance he wore slipped away, and weariness caused his face to sag. "When was the last time anyone saw her?"

Mike couldn't believe his eyes. He'd never imagined that stony badass Curt could have a soft spot for anyone, much less Tess Proffit. He'd understood plainly that the man wanted her, but caring about her was different. Caring about Tess meant they had something in common.

"Not since this morning." Kevin stared out the window as though waiting for her to return. Mike hadn't been able to get him away from that window for hours. He'd skipped lunch. He just stood by the window.

Marcus frowned. "If she misses this session, that will make three she's bailed on. It's not like her."

Mike's worry took hold of him like a vise. "I've got to find her."

"Gentlemen." Tess walked in from the front door.

Relief poured into Mike at the sight of her but then vanished just

as quickly as he got a better look at her. Her eyes were puffy and red as if she'd been crying. But now the tears had dried, and there was a placid, almost doll-like quality to her pretty face. She'd fixed her hair into a tightly coiled bun. Mike missed the little wisps of blonde hair that usually framed her face. Now she looked brittle and closed off.

Kevin rushed from the window, his face open with relief. He grabbed her hand. "Tess, thank God, you're okay. We were getting really worried. You missed some sessions."

She pulled her hand free. "I apologize if I caused any of you distress."

"Distress?" Curt stared up at her, his eyes stony. "I don't think distress covers it, Tess. You will sit down and explain where you've been for the last several hours. You worried every single one of us."

Her eyes slid away from him, refusing to focus on any of them. It made Mike anxious.

"Again, I apologize for my entirely unprofessional behavior, but I had some things to take care of."

Curt stood and marched toward her. He was inches from her, glaring down. "Like?"

Gone was the softness that Mike had seen earlier in Curt, leaving only a hard edge—and an expression that might as well have shouted that he wanted Tess for his own. Not happening. Mike moved in, ready to get between the two of them.

"Step back, Mr. Goff." Tess's tone was flat and lifeless.

Panic rose up in Mike. He couldn't bear to see Tess this way. What the hell had happened to her? This morning she'd been slightly embarrassed, but she hadn't pulled away. Now, she'd all but shut down.

"Hey, what's wrong? Tell me. I can make it right. Come on, let's go somewhere and talk." He reached for her hand.

Curt elbowed Mike away and invaded her space. "She isn't going anywhere with you."

"She isn't some toy the two of you can fight over," Kevin

protested.

Tess didn't acknowledge any of them. Instead, she turned to Randy. "I fixed the car, so you can leave. If anything is wrong with it, send me a bill. I've called Mr. Boyle. Your bonuses will be paid as promised. The limo will be here for the rest of you soon. You're free to go. Thank you for your time."

No sooner had she pivoted away than Curt grabbed her arm and spun her around to face him. "Tess, you tell me what is wrong right now."

"There's nothing to say, Mr. Goff, except that you're free to go."

Curt's jaw dropped. He turned to Mike as though looking for some answer Mike knew damn well he didn't have. He'd been hoping Curt could illuminate him. Curt's hand merely tightened on Tess's arm as helpless rage tightened his face.

Kevin grabbed Curt's hand. "I don't think pushing her is going to help the situation. Maybe we all need to chill for a minute."

"As I said, thank you, gentlemen, for your time. Goodbye." She tugged her arm free from Curt's grasp then turned on her heels and walked out of the room with slow, measured steps. There was nothing of the sweetly seductive swaying her walk normally had. Her spine was perfectly straight. She didn't look back.

No one followed. The silence was deafening. Foreboding filled him.

Mike's pulse pounded like a hammer in his ears. The last session Tess had been in had been with Curt. "What did you do to her, Curt?"

"I didn't do anything to her that she didn't want. Not that it's any of your business, but Tess and I connected."

"Yeah, I just bet you connected. Did you hit her?" He knew Curt's story. He'd seen that damn video. Mike didn't care what two people did to get off, but if Tess had been scared, he was going to have a problem with Curt.

"I would never do anything Tess didn't agree to. I love her." Shock spread over Curt's face as soon as he blurted out the words, but

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he didn't take it back.

Hearing them was a kick to Mike's gut. But the man was telling the truth. They were in love with the same woman.

Kevin nodded. "I love her, too. I thought it was just a crush, but sleeping with her really brought it home. It wasn't like with other girls. I can't imagine being with anyone but Tess now."

"You, too? She's everything to me. I love her, too." Mike realized that was the first time he'd said it aloud, and it felt right. Tess was the one.

Marcus's eyes were wide as he looked between the three men. "Holy crap. Curt had sex with her. You and Kevin had sex with her. Now you all say you love her. No wonder she's ready to bail on all of us. She probably can't breathe. You can't go caveman on a woman and expect her to remain calm."

"It doesn't make sense." Curt completely ignored Marcus. "She wasn't scared. I know how to read a sub. She was a little overwhelmed when I was done, a little flustered, but nothing that would make her angry and closed like that. She was just processing what had happened. I gave her a little space."

"She didn't seem at all pissed off after her night with us, either," Mike said. "She worked the morning as usual. Something else happened afterward."

Kevin shook his head. "I agree with Mike. Our night together with her was amazing. She wasn't upset at all. We talked a lot that night. She seemed happy if anything. I know she was a little embarrassed the next morning, but she still smiled at me when I passed her in the hall. She told me she'd make some cookies."

"Then what sucked the life out of her?" Marcus's fingers drummed along the chair he sat in.

Marcus had hit the nail on the head. Mike thought about Tess's face. The wind had been taken out of all their sails at the sight of Tess devoid of all emotion.

Mike needed answers. He couldn't leave the woman he loved like

this. There had to be a logical reason why she was in this state. "So, when did you have sex with her, Curt?"

Curt sighed before he answered. For a moment, Mike thought Curt might tell him to mind his own business, but he finally opened up. "During our session this morning. We argued a bit, and it boiled over. It's been building. Her kinks dovetail nicely with mine. She's very submissive."

"Not too much or she'd still be here," Kevin interjected.

"Yeah." Curt seemed weary again. "I don't know why she's shut down. I was hard on her, but I told her how I felt, too."

Mike was ready to change the topic. He was beginning to understand that Curt had a claim on her, too. He didn't like it, but he had to deal with it. "Okay. I haven't seen her since breakfast. Did anyone see her after that?"

Kevin nodded. "I talked to her after her session with Randy, and then I saw her right around lunch. I was fixing a sandwich and saw her out the window. She was walking around the lake."

Made sense to Mike. She probably needed time to think. She had two very intense experiences with three different men. It would be a lot for any woman to process. "I bet she went to one of the cottages. According to the map we all got on day one, there are a bunch of cottages on the opposite side of the lake."

Randy stood up. His dark eyes immediately went to Marcus. "We were at one of the cottages this afternoon."

Curt's left eyebrow climbed his forehead. "Did you sneak in a girl, you assholes?"

Marcus shook his head. "No, man. We snuck in an Xbox."

"Damn it, and you didn't invite me!" Kevin looked like the last kid picked for the team.

Randy didn't seem at all ashamed. "Damn straight. You hog the controllers."

"Dude, I don't give a fuck," Curt replied. "None of this explains what happened with Tess. I seriously doubt that she was so hurt by your video game that she quit on us."

"That cottage you were in, there's no way Tess was there, too?" Mike asked, logic bringing him to the only conclusion that made sense.

Marcus groaned. "The wine bottle. Damn it. There was a wine bottle on the countertop. Shit. She must have been upstairs the whole time."

Kevin placed a hand on Randy's shoulder. "Did anything happen that could've gotten Tess so upset?"

"We talked about how hot she was," Marcus said.

Randy scowled. "We said way more than that, man. I think she must've heard us talking about your plan to seduce her for our getout-of-jail-free card."

"Oh fuck!" Curt yelled. "Are you kidding me?"

As dread slid through his gut, Mike plowed a fist into the nearest wall. Of all the things she could have overheard, she had to find out about that? None of them had really meant it. It had just been a way to get close to her. Once they'd touched her, everything had changed.

"No wonder she's so hollow." Kevin's face darkened. "We did this to her. We're all to blame. After the way her fiancé left her for her sister, she'll believe the worst. She doesn't think she's beautiful."

Curt nodded. "You're right. Given the crap that's happened to her, she's going to think we used her. We fucked everything up. Now, *we* have to fix it. I've got a plan, but you guys might not like the play I want to run."

Mike was ready to try anything. "What's the idea?"

They huddled around Curt. It was natural, Mike realized. Almost comforting.

The quarterback looked each of them in the eye. "Since we all contributed to the problem, we'll work together to fix it. She doesn't think she's hot enough to get one guy, much less five? To convince her otherwise, we've got to strip her and share her."

"Wait a second." Marcus held a hand up. "I care about her. Hell, I

even love her in a way. But not like you, Mike, and Kevin do. I haven't been as close to her yet. She might not want me."

"I think she will. I think she's wanted all of us at one time or another. I know Tess. She's interested in this. It will be a fantasy for her. You care about her. We have to do this as a team, or it won't work."

"He's right, Marcus. We owe her this for knowing the plan and not coming clean." Randy turned to Curt. "I'm in."

Marcus nodded. "Me, too."

"I think it might work. It has to." Kevin shook Curt's hand.

Mike wasn't sure about following his quarterback on this one. "How can I trust you not to have a plan that nudges me and Kevin out of the way so you can have Tess all to yourself?"

"That's not my plan. I have no idea where any of this is going, but none of us is going to get the girl if she quits the game and walks off the field. I know Tess. If we go to her one on one and try to explain that we love her and didn't mean anything with that fucked-up plan, she'll be polite, but she won't believe. Only a complete blitz on her senses is going to do the job. Tonight has to be about Tess. It has to be about her fantasy, not our egos. We have to show her who her Masters are. And that we've learned something about playing as a team."

For the first time ever, Curt sounded like the leader Mike had always wanted him to be.

"I'm in, Curt. Tell us the play."

### **Chapter Seven**

Tess stared at herself in the mirror. She looked the way she felt, older, harder. There were lines around her mouth that she didn't remember seeing before and a coldness to her eyes. She tried to get the look on Curt's face out of her head. He'd done a damn fine job of playing the wounded male. But she wouldn't buy his attempt to placate her any more than she bought Mike's protestations of love or Kevin's sad puppy eyes.

Why had they even tried? They were getting what they wanted. She'd expected them to start slapping high fives. It looked like they had some sense of shame, for all the good it did her. Her career was in utter shambles. She could count on Mr. Boyle to be discreet. He wouldn't mention the reason for her resignation, though she'd been brutally honest. She'd explained exactly how she'd compromised herself and her program. She'd held nothing back. Frank Boyle had listened and then tried to apologize for his players. He was a gentleman, but Tess couldn't see how he could recommend her in good conscience. She'd compromised her principles for sex.

Her sister's wedding was three weeks away. She'd intended to go in as a successful writer-therapist, and now she would have to attend as an unemployed twenty-eight-year-old with very little future.

With a long sigh, Tess forced herself to get up. It was getting late, and she needed to hit the road. Her bags were packed. By now, the men would all be gone. Despite their shame, they would have left in the limo or Randy's Audi. They would be well on their way back to their former lives with their choices of women. Despite their protestation, Tess was pretty damn sure none of them would sleep with a plump, intellectual blonde anytime soon.

With that realization, resentment started to bubble up. How dare they treat her so badly and use her just to gain their freedom. They'd thought nothing about her feelings. Maybe she'd been stupid, but she hadn't been cruel. Everything she'd done had been for pleasure and because she'd been so attracted to them. She'd let herself care. She'd fallen for them. Her heart had been fully engaged, while they had just been playing games to avoid addressing their problems.

She picked up her suitcase. There was nothing to do except go home to her lonely apartment in Fort Worth, where she'd try to put her life back together.

Tess was just about to open the door when it flew back. Her vision was filled with Curt, Mike, and Kevin. Not one of them wore a shirt. Curt and Mike were in low-slung jeans that showed off their cut torsos and ridiculously ripped abs. Kevin wore a pair of cutoff sweats. There was such magnificent strength to each of them.

Tess didn't need a mirror to know what they were seeing when they looked at her. She was wearing a prim, dowdy khaki skirt and a black blouse that was a size too big but hid her breasts well. She'd picked the clothes she thought made her look the least like an idiot. Now she realized no set of clothes, no matter how concealing, was going to make her feel like anything but an out-of-shape, graceless mortal among gods.

Tess forced her chin up. She didn't have to let them know how self-conscious they made her feel. It would just feed their egos. She was just about to push a flippant remark past her lips when she looked past the gorgeous bodies and into their eyes. They stood in the doorway, staring down at her like they were hungry predators, and she was a particularly juicy little rabbit. Tess was just about to take a step back when she remembered she was the one in the right.

"Was there something I could help you with, gentlemen?" Tess snarled. She wasn't going to take their crap. She'd given them plenty of time to leave. She'd hidden out so she wouldn't have to deal with this little scene. What more did they want from her?

"Yes, princess, there is something you can help us with. You can come with us peaceably, or we can force you." Curt's deep voice still warmed her up even though he'd ripped out her heart. She was never going to learn.

"Get out of my way, Goff. I'm going home. You three have all had your fun with me. I'm done playing your little games."

An unholy grin tugged Curt's lips up, and Tess finally took that step back.

"Oh, princess, we're not playing with you anymore."

He was on her before she could run. His big hands grabbed her arm and hauled her up to his chest.

"Scream all you like. There's no one left to hear you. We sent the staff away."

A strange thrill of fear coursed through her. Curt's hands tightened on her arms almost to the point of pain.

"Let me go." Tess refused to be fooled by him. He'd played her like a fiddle once he'd realized her kink. She wouldn't give him the same opportunity again.

"No." Curt twisted her around to face Mike and Kevin. Neither looked like he had any intention of helping her get away.

"We can't do that, *querida*." Mike had a length of rope in his hands. He looked at Kevin, and they nodded to each other before Mike came toward her.

Tess's eyes widened, her heart pounded. She began to struggle in Curt's grip, but he was about as immovable as a mountain. Mike wound the rope around her wrists.

"Not too tight," Curt muttered.

"I did it like you taught me. She won't lose circulation. She's fine," Mike replied, testing his knot.

"She is *not* fine," Tess practically shouted. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Curt whirled her around. "We're doing exactly what you taught

us, what you wanted all along, you manipulative little sub. We're playing as a team."

She felt her cheeks go up in flames. She pulled against the ropes Mike had tied her with. "Manipulative? How dare you call me manipulative! You're the liar, asshole."

The Dom was back. Curt's eyes hardened, and his shoulders seemed broader than before. He towered over her. "Watch that mouth with me, sub. I never once lied to you. Now, let's get a few things straight. Your safe word is bandit. I want you to think very hard before using that word, Tess. If you use that word, you never find out if we mean what we say. If you use that word, everything stops, and you go on the same way you were before. Is that really what you want?"

"It's not what you want. I know it isn't, Tess. You're brave and strong. You're brave enough to take a chance. I just know it." Kevin practically pleaded with her.

The word was right there on the tip of her tongue. All she had to do was say bandit, and she could be done. She pushed at Curt, but that word didn't come out of her mouth. How stupid did that make her? He'd lied when he'd claimed to care about her. Everything they'd done together had been a steaming pile of BS.

She watched the faces all around her. Curt practically snarled at her defiance. Kevin's eyes were steady on her face. His jaw was clenched, and everything about him seemed resolute.

"Tess, please give us another chance." Mike's words were soft. He was behind her, his hands cupping her shoulders.

Tess couldn't stand it. She couldn't stand the way he was touching her. It felt sweet and soft when she knew it was false. She kicked back, catching him somewhere on the leg. He groaned behind her, but Curt took control. He grabbed her bound hands, hauled her to the bed, and shoved her onto the comforter. His palm flattened her cheek down, not letting her move, but ensuring that she could breathe. A little thrill of fear ran through her system, lighting up her nerves. What were they doing? Why were they doing it?

"Rip that fucking skirt off her," Curt demanded.

"Don't you dare," she warned whoever was about to follow Curt's orders. It didn't matter. She felt hands on her body before she heard the sound of material giving way to superior force.

"The underwear, too. She is not going to need it." Curt's face was close to hers. She could feel the heat rolling off his body. "If you attempt to harm one of my teammates again, you're going to be sorry. Here's the way this is going to go. You're going to behave and take everything we give you. If you're a very good girl, we'll be soft and sweet. We'll treat you with all the care a beloved female deserves. If you decide to play the brat, well, a brat earns some pain, doesn't she? A brat who defies her Masters deserves a little torture. I'll enjoy it, princess. I'll torture those gorgeous breasts. I'll bite them and pinch them and clamp them down hard. I'll lash you to a St. Andrew's Cross and show you just how good I can be with a single tail."

"Idiot, there's no St. Andrew's Cross here." She didn't discount the fact that Curt, the sadist, might just keep a single tail whip in his luggage, but a cross was pure BDSM club equipment.

His chuckle ended on a groan that let Tess know just how much her helplessness aroused him. "You're wrong. Frank has some kinks himself. Do you remember the tour he gave you when you first got here?"

She did. Frank had shown her around the beautiful home himself. He'd been so excited about what she could do for his team. That day, she'd been full of hope, taking it all in, promising herself that one day she'd be this successful. One day she'd have a house with so many rooms she'd keep a couple locked because she couldn't use them. Damn it. "The ballroom."

"Yes. The ballroom. He likes to call it that. It's nice and vanilla sounding. It's so much friendlier sounding than saying, 'Welcome to my dungeon.' Do you know what kind of things a billionaire can buy for a dungeon, princess? Give in now, and you won't have to find out. Accept your place and kneel at my feet, and I'll forgive the little defiance against Mike. Otherwise, we'll begin the discipline now."

She felt the cool air on her exposed backside. Someone bound her ankles together and forced her ass high in the air.

"You were right, Curt. She's completely exposed," Kevin said. "Her ass and her pussy are so pretty like this."

"Yes," Curt agreed. "And later, when she's been a good girl, you can fuck her like this. It works particularly well when you bend her over and shove a plug up that hot little ass of hers. It will be so fucking tight. You'll have so much control."

Two sets of hands stroked along her skin. She was getting wet and antsy. It would be so easy to do what Curt said. She could kneel at his feet, and he would give her what she wanted. And what about tomorrow? Would they laugh and high-five because they'd gotten the dumbass sub to bow down again? She was caught between what she wanted and what she knew was smart. She wouldn't say her safe word, but she wasn't going down easy.

"Please, Tess, I'm so crazy about you. I'm sorry about before. It was stupid. I just want a second chance." Kevin sounded sincere, but how could she trust any of them?

"If you don't let me up now, there will be hell to pay later. Do you understand, Goff? Do you honestly think I'll let you get away with this? I can go to the press. Hell, I can go to the police."

A hand smoothed up the small of her back. "Don't say that, *querida*. We love you. We just want to show you. Don't you see that if we let you go, we'd regret it the rest of our lives, and you would, too?"

His plea tugged at her, but the ache was too fresh. What if they were simply telling her what she wanted to hear? "Screw all of you."

"Ten swats," Curt said.

Tess tensed, expecting the slap, but nothing happened.

"Gentleman, I explained this to you. She will not go down easy. We have to break through the wall she's got around her. You can spank her, or switch places with me, and I'll do it myself."

A hand cracked against her ass. Tess bit her lip to stop the cry that threatened to overtake her. Her poor ass still ached from Curt's earlier spanking, and yet it felt so good as the heat spread.

Another slap, this one on the opposite cheek.

"That's right, alternate. That's four more from Kevin and four more from Mike." Curt leaned over again, pressing his weight on her until she couldn't move at all. She groaned as another hand landed on her ass.

"It's so hot. Her cheeks have turned pink." Kevin's voice had gone guttural.

"And look at all that cream. Oh, this is getting her so hot." Mike went into a flurry of Spanish as he smacked her again.

She heard Curt's voice in her ear. "You're not the only one who's getting hot. I'm so hard I could pound nails. I want to fuck you, and Mike and Kevin are just discovering the joys of torturing our pretty little sub's ass. I think they're going to take to play, Tess. How does it feel to know there are three hard cocks in this room, and every one of them wants to be buried in some soft part of you?"

The slaps came in rapid succession. Mike and Kevin worked in tandem to get her ass sensitive and her pussy throbbing. Tears squeezed out of her eyes. She refused to give in. She wouldn't cry out, wouldn't beg for mercy.

"That's ten, *querida*." She felt something soft now on her ass. Mike's lips.

Another pair joined them. Kevin and Mike kissed the skin they'd just spanked. She felt their mouths, lips, and tongues humming along her sensitive skin.

"Are you ready to concede?" Curt's lips were on the back of her neck, making her shiver with desire.

She felt Kevin's lips getting tantalizingly close to her pussy. Maybe she could get what she wanted without having to give them her surrender. Kevin was the weak link. She just had to break him. She wiggled her backside, shoving as much as she could back on Kevin's face. He groaned, and she felt him shove his face against her pussy. His tongue swirled around, licking and sucking at her.

"Stop that, now!" Curt's weight was off her, and he hauled her up, pulling her away from the orgasm that had been so, so close. "She gets nothing until she gives in. We discussed this."

"We can't give in," Mike concurred. "I know how much you want to make love to her. I want that, too. But, it's too important. Making love to her didn't prove anything. We have to show her we won't give up. Not ever."

Tess struggled in Curt's arms. With her hands and feet bound, there was very little she could do. She tried to kick at him, but his arm was quickly around her waist. She was off balance and helpless.

"It won't work. I won't forgive you." She stared at Mike and Kevin. She couldn't miss the way their cocks poked at the front of their pants. Kevin's sweatpants had a small wet spot where his precum was already seeping through.

"Tess, please. I can't let you go, babe." Kevin started toward her, but Mike got in his way.

"We agreed to do this Curt's way," Mike said. "We have to stay strong, or we're going to lose her."

Lose her? What the hell was going on? "Just stop this, guys. Can't we talk about this like rational, reasonable adults?" She kept the sarcasm out of her voice. It was time to think about the situation she was in. If they kept her, she would give in. She could still feel Kevin's tongue sliding in her cunt. Yes, she would give in, and they would get what they wanted then disappear, taking her heart with them. She needed to avoid that. It all came down to figuring out what, exactly, they wanted.

"Just get me out of this, and we'll sit down and discuss this. I get that you're afraid I might go to the press or write some tell-all book where you guys come out looking bad. Please know that I don't want anyone to know how stupid I was. Maybe we can even call in a lawyer, and we'll all sign a non-disclosure agreement."

She heard Curt sigh behind her. "Do you see what doing things your way is going to get us, Kevin? It's going to get us a pushy little sub who does idiotic things like bring up lawyers when she should be focusing on pleasing her Masters. There aren't going to be any lawyers, princess. It isn't going to be that easy. You're going to surrender today. You're going to surrender tomorrow and all the days after. And we're going to take care of you. You have no idea how much we're going to love you. I get that you're scared, but I'm not going to let your fear ruin our lives. Mike, get her feet."

The world tilted, and Tess suddenly found herself hanging between Curt, who held her bound hands, and Mike, who hoisted her by the rope binding her ankles. She swung slightly as they moved out of her bedroom.

Tess tried twisting. It didn't seem to throw off either of the athletes. "Fuck all of you. You don't think there are going to be lawyers? Let me tell you something. You're all going to need lawyers. You're going to need really good lawyers to keep your asses out of jail."

Kevin walked next to her. His brow furrowed, and his lips curled in a plea. "Please don't talk like that, babe. I never meant to hurt you. The whole plan to seduce you was stupid. I only came up with it because I would have done anything to get in your pants. I wanted you so bad, me and Mike both."

Mike was turned away from her, but she heard the warmth in his voice. "He's right. We're crazy about you. We've done the whole three-way thing a lot, but we never thought we would fall for the same girl. We want you with us. Bring in your lawyers, or even the tabloids, but we'll still say the same thing. We'll still say we love Tess Proffit."

"Stop trying to placate her," Curt said. "She isn't calling in anyone. She's just fighting the inevitable. If she really didn't want this, she would have done the one thing that can stop it." Damn him. He had her there. She should say her safe word and be done with it, but she just couldn't bring herself to do it. What if there was a tiny chance they were being honest?

They continued through the elegant halls, parading her through with her bottom half fully exposed. Her stomach knotted in confusion. She wanted to believe, but she wouldn't be the first woman a man used the love line on to get what he wanted. Despite what Mike said, they had a lot to lose. Curt had already been in trouble with the tabloids. His career was coming to a close. No one would hire him as an analyst if he got embroiled in another sex scandal. Mike's family was large and dependent on him. If he lost his job, they would all suffer. Kevin's career was just taking off. Why would they risk all of that?

"So if dynamic duo here is in love with me, what's your angle, Goff? Am I the only girl who lets you spank her anymore? Have all your playmates grown up and gotten lives of their own?" She was well aware that she sounded bratty. She felt an insane need to push Curt, to dig deep inside his psyche until she found the truth.

"You want me to open up and confess for you? I think I will, eventually. Remember how you got a confession out of me last time? Tell me something, Tess, is your ass still sore from the last confession I made to you?"

Yep. It was sore and still stung from the additional slaps she'd taken from Mike and Kevin. She tried to see Curt's face, but he stared straight ahead.

They came to the hall with the "ballroom." Tess forced her head up to get a good look. The previously locked double doors were standing open. Tess could see that Curt had known what he was talking about. It was a dungeon and not a small one. In the center was a well-lit stage. Heavy chains with manacles swung down from the ceiling. She could see there were hooks in the floor to bind her feet. There was a table to the side, and just to the left of the stage was an enormous bed. "Last chance to give us what we want," Curt offered. "Surrender sweetly or take the consequences."

Tess kept her mouth closed. She couldn't do it. Curt nodded above her, and Tess was marched into the dungeon.

## **Chapter Eight**

"Is everything ready?" Kevin asked as he hurried ahead.

"Yes, I found the small manacles and got them attached," Randy said. "I think it's at the right height..."

Randy's voice trailed off. He was staring at Tess with his mouth open. Tess felt her eyes widen as she realized that Randy and Marcus were in the dungeon. What were they doing here? She thought she'd only have to deal with the three men she had made a terrible mistake with. Damn, they were staring at her ass.

"Holy crap." Marcus stood at his partner's side. "That is so hot."

"I believe I mentioned this would be a particularly hot scene," Curt said. "Gentlemen, our little sub is proving to be a bit difficult this evening. She will have to be subdued and chastised before she'll take her place at her Masters' feet. She will require some torture before she gives in."

"This isn't some BDSM scene, you asshole!" Tess struggled even though she wasn't sure she wanted to struggle anymore. There was a little voice inside whispering to take what they so obviously wanted to give her. Marcus and Randy were staring at her like they could eat her up. It was a fantasy to feed her for the rest of her life. What if she took it but on her terms?

"I beg to differ." Curt nodded at Mike, and they laid her out on the bed. Curt swung his leg over her, straddling her hips. He pressed his heavy erection against her pussy. "You're making a mess of my jeans, princess. Someone's little cunt is begging to be fucked."

"Not by you, jerk. I am a little horny, though. How about Marcus and Randy? I haven't fucked them yet. Bring them on." Tess spat the words out.

He shook his head. "Poor little Tess. She thinks she's been so terribly unprofessional. I believe that is what's bothering you. Such narrow-minded thinking. I won't tolerate it. Tell me something, did you set out to seduce any of us?"

"Of course not."

"So, you simply took the chance because you ride any cock willing to stand up for you?"

She bristled at the question. "No, jerk. I haven't had many lovers at all. It's been a long time."

"None of us can say that, *querida*." Mike sat down beside her, his hand stroking into her hair. "We've all had more than we should have."

Curt continued. "You're very picky when it comes to lovers, princess. I did my homework on you, too. You don't sleep around. Your heart has to be engaged."

Kevin sat down on the other side. He smiled down at her so tenderly, Tess thought she might cry. "Maybe you should have had more sex, babe, because after tonight, it's just the three of us for the rest of your life."

"The three of you? What are you talking about?"

"Haven't you figured it out? We're keeping you. Whether you like it or not." Curt got off the bed. "Let's get her strapped up. Unless you're willing to concede. Tell us you love us and that you'll stay with us, and we'll move on to the part where we fill every hole you have with our cocks."

She kept her mouth closed. She might be willing to concede the sex, but anything else was asking for too much. Mike and Kevin loved her? They all wanted to keep her? Curt hadn't actually confessed his feelings. Why should she spill when he hadn't?

"So be it."

Curt nodded, and the men got moving. Kevin carried her to the stage. He held her upright while they cut through the bindings on her wrists. Mike pulled off her shirt and bra, cupping her breasts as he undressed her. He told her how beautiful she was, how much he wanted her. Despite her misgivings, Tess let her nature take over. She was quiet and still beneath their hands. Each touch, every sweet word made her want them more.

Kevin whispered the same words as he held her while Randy slipped the manacles onto her wrists. She felt the cold press of metal, and everything seemed surreal, almost like a dream. She was naked in front of five men, all of whom claimed to want her. Marcus and Randy joined in on the verbal seduction.

"You're gorgeous, Tess." Marcus ran a single finger down her torso to her pussy. He played with her, drawing cream from her cunt.

"Look at those tits," Randy drawled. "I can't wait to get my mouth on those. I think we're going to have some fun tonight, Tess."

"Get her in the spreader first." Curt passed a long, thick bar to Kevin. It was wrapped in rubber and had straps for her ankles. In no time at all, Tess found herself spread, her ankles surrounded and locked down. She stood straight up, nearly hanging from the manacles. Her pussy and ass were ready for use. The bindings over her head made her breasts thrust out.

"You look like every Dom's wet dream, princess." Curt's hands worked the fly of his jeans. He pushed them over his hips, and his cock bobbed out, long and thick. She remembered how good it had felt to have that dick buried in her ass. Tess bit back the plea that sat on the tip of her tongue. She wanted to come. She needed it.

"Marcus, Randy, this is my pretty little toy. She belongs to me and to her other Masters, Mike and Kevin. We've agreed to share our gorgeous sex toy with you this evening. You see, when she's dressed in her business suit and doing her job, she's going to be our girlfriend. Hell, one day she'll be our wife. But when we get her bound and trussed up for our pleasure, she's a pretty little sex toy, one we love and can't get enough of. We love her enough to try to show her how gorgeous she is. We love her so much, we'll share her so she knows we'll fulfill her every fantasy. This is your chance to live a dream, Tess. Enjoy our toy this evening, gentlemen, because we won't share again." Curt's deep voice had Tess swallowing. She was suddenly thankful for the bindings. If she hadn't had them, she would be on her knees, begging for them to make her come.

"We'd love to play with this little toy," Randy said. He lowered his head, and his tongue laved her nipple.

"I think I'd like to taste her." Marcus got on his knees. He inhaled deeply. "She's so ripe for a fucking. I love the spreader."

"It keeps our little toy ready and ripe for our pleasure. Gentlemen, please feel free to lick and play with the toy, but she doesn't come until we say so. Mike, get up there and make sure she doesn't steal an orgasm." Curt sat down in a chair and leisurely began to stroke his cock.

Mike had ditched his jeans, too. He and Kevin got up on the stage and disappeared from her sight.

Marcus's tongue came out and slid through her soaked pussy. Tess cried at the exquisite feel. His talented tongue danced through her juicy cunt while his friend sucked on her nipples. Randy played and laved at her nipple and pinched the one he wasn't sucking. Tess closed her eyes and rode the wave of sensation. Suddenly, she felt suction on both breasts. She looked down, and Kevin had one nipple in his mouth, while Randy suckled the other. Each tug of their lips pulled her closer to climax. She tugged at the chains, wanting to hold their heads close. She felt Mike move in behind her. His hands parted the cheeks of her ass.

"Look at that. This is pretty. Do you know what I'm going to do to this little asshole?"

Oh, she had a pretty good idea. "Please." She couldn't help the plea now. She was caught by them, and there was no way out. She had to come. She wanted to do it with a cock inside her.

"Oh, no. Not until you give in," Mike said. "Until then, you get nothing. Gentlemen, she's too close. Step back."

Tess screamed her frustration as all of them eased away. Angry tears filled her eyes. She was primed and ready to come. How could they swear that they cared about her and leave her in this state? "Get me out of here. I'll take care of myself."

"Oh, is the torture proving painful?" Curt's voice dripped with sarcasm.

Tess wanted to strangle him. He sat there looking perfectly comfortable. His large hand stroked up and down his cock as though he could do it all day and never break a sweat. She was crazy with lust, and he simply watched.

"If you want to come, babe, all you have to do is give us what we want," Kevin promised.

She could do that. Well, part of it anyway. It was ridiculous to lie when her body so plainly told the truth. "You want me to tell you I want you? Fine. I want you. I think I've made that perfectly plain."

"No, that isn't what we want." Curt stood and came in close. "We want more than that, and you know it. I know you love me, princess. Why won't you say it?"

She shook her head. She wouldn't give him that power. "You can't know it, and I don't believe you."

"You don't believe me? I'm trying to prove it to you. Do you believe me to be a possessive man?"

"Yes." She knew he was.

"And yet I'm willing to share you like this. Ask yourself why I'd be more willing to give you an apology in the form of pleasure than keep you all to myself. I'm putting your desires above my own, because you are my whole world, princess." He turned to Marcus and Randy. "Take her. Give her what she needs."

"Hell, yeah," Marcus exclaimed. He reached over to the small table to the side and grabbed a couple of condoms and some lubricant. He moved to her back while Randy gripped her hips. Anticipation hummed through her even as she stared at Curt.

"I love you, princess. I love you enough to let other men have you

because you need to know how amazing you are."

Mike took a place at Curt's side. "I love you, too, *querida*. I love you enough to share, enough to risk everything."

"I don't mind sharing, babe. In fact, I prefer it," Kevin said. "But I love you. I won't be happy without you."

Randy leaned forward. He smiled at her. "I am happy to be here with you, Tess. I want to say that I'm sorry for not telling you about the plan. Come on, Tess, let us rock your world."

Tess heard the sound of a condom opening and felt Marcus split the cheeks of her ass as he lubed her anus with a gentle touch. Randy slipped a condom on, as well. He leaned in and kissed her tenderly, his lips rubbing softly against hers. She tensed slightly as she felt Marcus's cock pressing against her asshole.

"It's all right, Tess. Let us in. We want you so bad." Randy caressed her breasts. His dark skin was beautiful against her pale flesh. She watched his hands, utterly fascinated at the contrast between them.

"You're beautiful together," Curt said. "Come on, princess, give us a show."

"Enjoy this one, *querida*." Mike's accent seemed to deepen with the level of his arousal. His long, thick cock stood straight up. "After this, you'll serve us."

"And we won't go easy on you, babe." Kevin grinned as he stroked his cock.

The three of them stared at her as Marcus pressed against her anus, trying to work his dick into her ass. They watched as Randy pulled at her nipples and teased her pussy with his dark cock. What she saw was desire in their eyes, and something more, something warm and infinitely comforting. These three men loved her. It was crazy and unbelievable, but if there was even a chance that she could be happy, that her heart could be filled every day with the love she felt now, she would be a fool not to take the chance.

Her men wanted a show? She could give them a show.

"Fuck me," Tess demanded.

"Damn, straight," Randy replied as he shoved his cock into her pussy.

Tess groaned at the feel of that big dick in her cunt. Randy's hands moved around her hips to cup the cheeks of her ass. He spread her wide.

"Oh, yeah, that's what I need. She's so tight." Marcus groaned behind her, and he pushed in.

Tess felt the burn as his cock popped past her anal ring. She groaned.

Curt's eyes were dark as he watched them. "That's right. We want our little sex toy to groan and whimper."

She didn't have to act. Tess moaned as they slid in and out in perfect time. Marcus pumped into her ass, while Randy plundered her pussy. They pushed and pulled her, forcing her to take all the cock they had to give. Tess was utterly helpless. The chains held her arms and legs in place, and their hands did the rest. There was nothing at all for her to do beyond surrender to the feeling. The orgasm built, radiating out from her womb to flood her entire body. She let her head fall back against Marcus's shoulder as the wave spiked. She felt Marcus's hot breath as he groaned and stiffened behind her.

"Fuck, I'm coming. Oh, God, I'm coming," Marcus moaned.

Randy drove into her over and over. He bucked up, and his face contorted as he came. His chest heaved as he pressed his lips against hers sweetly. Marcus slipped from her ass, and she hung limply in her chains. Tess breathed in the scent of sex, intoxicating and musky.

"Thank you, sweetheart." Randy sighed. "Thank you for everything. I learned so much from you."

Marcus kissed the nape of her neck. "Me, too. I'm sorry for not telling you sooner, but I can't help but be happy with the way things turned out. Whatever happens with those other guys, you're always welcome to spend time with me and Randy."

"Hey, back away from our girl," Curt barked. "You had your

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turn."

"Let's go, man." Marcus stepped away. "I think our work here is done. We were just the warm-up. Don't forget how special you are, Tess."

"You brought all of us together. That's practically a miracle," Randy said before he stepped back, too.

She looked at those two gorgeous men as they walked out of the dungeon. Her body still pulsed from her orgasm, but she knew she still wasn't satisfied. Randy and Marcus might be amazing lovers, but they weren't hers.

"Get me out of these chains." She was ready to move on.

Curt immediately took Randy's place. He cupped her face in his hands. "I don't think I liked the way you just talked to me, sub."

Tess swallowed as her whole body heated up again. How did they do this to her? She felt a body at her back and something warm and soft between her legs.

"Just cleaning you up, babe," Kevin explained. "So I can dirty you up again."

Mike smiled at her from Curt's side. "You should placate the beast, *querida*. Give him what he wants so we can all get what we want."

Curt's eyes narrowed as he turned to Mike. "Tell me you don't want her on her knees. Tell me you aren't interested in this kink of mine."

Mike's cock bobbed up and down, proving his interest. "I want her on her knees."

"I can't do that if I'm stuck in these chains, boys."

Curt sighed and nodded toward Kevin. A heavy swat came down on her tender ass. She yelped. Kevin sucked in a breath of pain.

"Here, man, this will save your hands." Mike passed Kevin a quarter-inch round cane. "You have to protect those. Curt needs you in perfect form for the season."

"Thanks."

Kevin brought that cane down on her ass. It stung, burned. Desire clawed through her again.

He whispered in her ear, his voice almost contrite. "I didn't hear an apology, Tess. Seriously, give it to him. I'm supposed to swat your ass until you mind."

Well, hallelujah, the boys had finally learned to work as a team. Unfortunately, it looked like their first team effort was to make sure she couldn't sit for a week. She didn't doubt they'd remain united until she gave in. Kevin gave her another swat with the cane. Tess cried out. Damn, it revved her up, but she couldn't take more.

"I'm very sorry for talking back, Sir. I would like to come out of these chains so I can show you that I accept my position." She made her words sweet and lowered her eyes, waiting for his command.

Curt gave an assent with a silent nod.

Mike unlocked her legs while Kevin worked on her wrists. She slumped down when she was no longer supported by the chains. Mike caught her in his arms. He sat on the floor and lowered her to his lap. His cock prodded insistently at her sex, but he made no move to take her.

"You're all right, *querida*?" He smoothed back her hair. When she nodded, he kissed her temple and hugged her close. "I'm so sorry we hurt you. It began as a game, but I got caught in it. *Te amo*. I can't lose you now."

She turned her face up to his. If this was true and they really wanted her, there was no way she would let them go. "You won't. Now help me to my knees so I can placate the beast."

Mike helped her to her knees. She found the proper position, knees splayed wide, head down, palms up. Mike left her side. She watched as his feet came into view beside Curt's.

"Do you have any idea what you do to me, princess?" Curt's voice was a low rumble filled with approval. "Now, would you like to apologize?"

Her head came up. "Me? I don't think I have anything else to

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apologize for."

Kevin brought the cane across her ass again. She had to balance to remain in position. She bit her lip to stop the curse that threatened to explode. She let her eyes drift down again.

"You walked out. That's what you should apologize for. You should have stayed and called us out. Hell, cussed us out, but at least you would have been talking to us. Instead, you ran. That is not acceptable, ever. If this is going to work, we all have to be honest and communicate."

"How exactly is this going to work, Sir?" Her heart was beating so hard she was surprised they couldn't hear it.

His hand came down and lifted her chin until their gazes met. His lips curled up, and his eyes were warm as he stared down at her. "I have no idea. I just know it will."

"We'll make it work." Mike stroked her back.

"We're going to make you happy, babe," Kevin promised.

They already had. A warm confidence took root in her heart, and she smiled up at them. "I apologize, Sirs. I won't leave without a fight again. If you want me, I'm yours."

"Yes, you are. In the bedroom, you're our sweet little sex toy. Now, I want to use my toy. Open that mouth of yours." Curt had his cock in his hand. He moved in close and lined up his cock to her mouth. "Take me in."

Tess opened her mouth, and Curt took immediate advantage. He groaned and pushed that giant cock of his past her lips. She was assaulted with the masculine taste of his flesh. She licked the pre-cum off the tip and sucked lightly, hoping to get some more. He tasted so good. She ran her tongue around the head before he pulled out, and Mike stepped forward.

"You have more than one Master, Tess. You need to please me, too." Mike's cock teased her lips. She sucked him in and ran her tongue up and down his thick stalk.

"And me." Kevin had moved from behind her. He stood next to

Mike, and Tess began to alternate between their cocks. She licked and sucked them in turn.

"You keep those cocks happy, princess." Curt growled. She felt him at her back. His fingers slid between the cheeks of her ass. "I'm going to lube you up again. We're not done with this ass yet. You'll feel the burn again tonight."

Mike and Kevin pressed their dicks together, and Tess opened wide. Mike held her head still while he and Kevin began to thrust into her mouth. It was awkward, but they made it work. She felt them sliding against each other as she tongued them. All the while, Curt pressed his finger in her asshole, spreading the lube all around. He rimmed her, circling her anus, opening her even further.

"Are we ready?" Mike asked. He never let up on the steady thrust and retreat of his cock.

"God, I hope so." Kevin groaned. "I'm going to explode."

Curt pressed in with two fingers. "She's ready. Get her on the bed."

They pulled their cocks out of her mouth, and before she could register the loss, Kevin hauled her up and started toward the bed. She felt small and delicate in his arms. She looked up at his face, the very definition of all-American masculine beauty. He was her playmate, the fun one who would make her laugh.

"I love you, Tess. I never loved anyone before." Kevin kissed her and tossed her on the bed. He was on top of her with a playful growl. He wrapped his lips around one of her nipples and tugged, sending renewed heat through her body.

"Move over," Mike demanded. He nudged Kevin to the side before he, too, fell on her breast.

Tess let her hand find Mike's dark, silky hair. He was the romantic one. She could see now that the whole time she'd known him, he'd been trying to seduce her. Mike was the one who would remember their anniversary. He would bring her flowers for no other reason than they reminded him of her. She felt the bed dip a third time. Curt sat close to her shoulders. His hand found her hair, and he stared down at her.

He was her dark lover, the one who pushed her boundaries and forced her to acknowledge all of herself, the light and the heavy pieces of her soul. Curt was her Dom, her protector.

"Think about this, princess," Curt said, stroking her hair. "What we want might be tough on you. We don't know exactly where this is going. We thought we would start by all of us dating you and see where it goes from there, but I think you're my one. I think this is forever."

"I do, too," Mike said, lifting his head from her breast.

Kevin didn't stop, merely sucked at her nipple and offered a thumbs-up.

Curt shook his head and sighed. "You'll have to put up with that, for example. What do you say? Are you willing to give us a try?"

Tears, this time happy, grateful ones, filled her eyes. Was she willing to live a dream most women couldn't even comprehend? Was she willing to accept more love than she'd ever hoped for? "Oh, yes, I love you all."

A smile of pure pleasure covered Curt's often shutdown face, transforming him into something younger and lighter than normal. He leaned over and kissed her briefly. "I'm so glad to hear that."

"We all are, Tess," Mike said, emotion choking him.

When she looked back to Curt, the Dom was back. He passed a condom to Kevin and rolled one over his thick cock as he directed the action. "On your knees. It's time to play a little tug-of-war and see how many times we can get this toy of ours to come."

Kevin popped up like a puppy eager to play. He sat up and gripped her hips, flipping her over. "Come on, Tess, the quarterback's calling an audible. You're going to like this play."

A light joy infused her as she got on her hands and knees. "Is it a triple play?"

Curt slid underneath her. "That's baseball, Tess. We're going to

have to educate you. You see, sometimes on the field in the middle of a game, you have to think creatively. Sometimes a varied approach is best. Let's start with a Quarterback Sneak."

He gripped her hips and shoved that big cock straight up her cunt. Tess gasped at the feel of him filling her up. He held the cheeks of her ass open wide. Tess felt Kevin move between her legs.

"The sneak play is very effective, babe, but I prefer the End Around." Kevin pressed his dick to her anus and pushed in.

Tess groaned. She was stretched beyond reason. In this position, she felt so full.

Mike took up his position at the head of the bed. He pumped his cock in his hand. "And I prefer a play called Up the Middle."

He pulled her head forward and fed her his cock. He filled her mouth as her other lovers began to move. Kevin fucked her ass. The sharp contrast of burn as he tunneled forward and jittery pleasure as he pulled back made her groan. Mike spoke with soft Spanish words that made her feel worshipped. Kevin gripped her hips, anchoring her in place.

Curt matched his strokes to counter Kevin's. When Kevin shoved in, Curt pulled out. His hips thrust up powerfully.

"You feel so good, princess." He growled. "So tight. Our toy."

She felt like a well-loved toy, shared between the three of them. Curt's finger found her clit, rubbing with just the right friction.

Mike cradled her head as he fucked her mouth. He forced her to take every inch. She concentrated on breathing through her nose as he found her throat and pressed down.

Something huge was building in Tess. It pulsed softly at first and then steadily grew. Tess fought for it. She found the rhythm and rode it, moving her hips in time with their clever cocks. Curt's chest heaved, and she felt Kevin's strokes become frantic. When Curt pinched her clit, she went straight over the edge. Wild pleasure speared through her. It invaded her veins like liquid fire.

She groaned around Mike's cock, swallowing as he pressed

against the back of her throat.

"Oh, *querida*," he shouted as cum spurted from his cock. It filled her mouth as the other men began to come.

Curt bucked up. His cock pulsed as he came. He slammed his hips up and ground himself into her. Kevin pressed his cock deep in her ass as he came. He pumped in over and over as though he didn't want to miss a drop of cum.

Mike slid back, his sated cock popping out of her mouth.

Kevin fell forward. Tess was pushed into Curt's arms. He held her tightly, and she could feel his heart racing. Her own was pounding, the blood rushing through her veins. It was a rapid beat at first and then slowed to a languid pulse. Her skin was slick with sweat, and she was surrounded by them. Her ear was against Curt's heart. Kevin covered her back. Mike's hand came in to stroke her hair. She was safe and loved.

"You ready to play offense this time, princess?" Curt grinned up at her.

Tess brought her head up and looked from man to man. None of them seemed anything less than serious at having another go. She was in so much trouble.

Kevin flipped her over, and the boys rearranged their toy. Tess sighed as she felt hands caressing her, heating her up all over again.

It really wasn't so bad to take one for the team.

## Epilogue

Tess stood at the edge of the railing, her heart in her throat as Curt dropped back into the pocket. She felt sick. Five seconds left. The Bandits were six points down and on their own thirty-yard line. It looked so bleak, but Tess just gripped the railing and sent a silent prayer to the universe.

Please, please, please, please.

Randy broke free, his legs taking him far from defenders who would run him down. He ran with grace and power, but Curt was in trouble. Tess screamed as she saw a beefy linebacker break past the offensive line like a steamroller running straight for Curt. Curt didn't flinch. He stood firm in the pocket, waiting.

Out of nowhere, Kevin smashed into the defensive player threatening his quarterback. The crack was audible through the massive stadium, and Tess felt her heart clench until his hand came up. He gave her a thumbs-up to let her know that he wasn't broken. He was so reckless on the field he'd taken to giving her some sign that he was okay.

Then all of her attention was on Curt and the football that rocketed out of his hand. One hundred thousand people held their breath as the championship hung on one final play. The air seemed to still as that small leather ball flew. It was like a missile, never wavering from its destination, and Tess began to cry even before it reached Randy. She knew that it would happen. It had to.

The roar was deafening as Randy's sure hands brought the ball in, and he sprinted for the end zone. The clock went to zero, and Tess couldn't hold in her joy.

#### Playing the Field

The season had been amazing, but everything about her life had changed since the day she'd accepted their love. After a few weeks of trying the dating thing, they'd all given in and done what they wanted to do in the first place. They moved into Curt's place together. She slept with them on alternating nights, though more often than not they all ended up in a heap on the big bed in the dungeon.

Her book was back on track. She had a series of lectures coming up now that the Bandits' team owner credited her for getting his team to the championship. She'd become an advisor and held sessions with all the players. Once Curt had gotten onboard with her system, everything else had fallen into place. She'd put off traveling until her men could come with her, but with Curt's retirement looming, she would be working a lot.

Tess wiped happy tears from her eyes as the point after touchdown was set up. Mike's kick was utterly flawless, and finally the Bandits were league champs. The players on the field quickly surrounded Curt and Randy. She saw Kevin and Mike lifting Curt on their shoulders as some of the other players doused Coach Wilde with a barrel of Gatorade.

The Bandits were finally a true team. They weren't the only ones. She, Curt, Mike, and Kevin were a team, too. A strange and wonderful family. She had loved watching the three men become the best of friends and true partners as the year went by.

The first time she'd really seen them in action had been her sister's wedding. She smiled at the memory. She'd shown up with three hot athletes on her arm and hadn't given any explanation except to say that they were her dates. The boys had been obvious with their affection, and Janie had complained that she stole the spotlight. Tess really hadn't tried to. She couldn't help it that no one could take their eyes off her men.

Tess jumped and screamed with the crowd as confetti began to flow. She watched as her men turned and, dodging reporters and crazed fans, began jogging her way. Tess waved and blew them kisses, but they didn't stop until they were at the railing. Curt held up his arms, Mike and Kevin helping him bring her onto the field. Tess leapt over the railing, into their arms, and into her future.

# **THE END**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Prior to becoming a novelist, Sophie worked in theater and comic books. She lives in Fort Worth, Texas with her husband and three precocious children, who wonder when mom is going to write a book they will be allowed to read. Her answer: probably never. Sophie believes in happy endings for everyone, no matter how extreme the story. Her stories may feature some of the fringe elements of sexuality, but at heart they are always about love. *Small Town Siren*, *Siren in the City, Three to Ride (Nights in Bliss, Colorado 1), Away From Me* and *Two to Love (Bliss, Colorado 2)* are available now. Sophie loves to hear from readers. Please feel free to contact her at www.sophieoak.com.

Chloe Lang began devouring romance novels during summers between college semesters as a respite to the rigors of her studies. Soon, her lifelong addiction was born, and to this day, she typically reads three or four books every week.

For years, the very shy Chloe tried her hand at writing romance stories, but shared them with no one. After many months of prodding by an author friend, Sophie Oak, she finally relented and let Sophie read one. As the prodding turned to gentle shoves, Chloe ultimately did submit something to Siren-BookStrand. The thrill of a life happened for her when she got the word that her book would be published.

Chloe's family consists of a wonderful man she's been married to for twelve years and a precious daughter.

## Also by Sophie Oak

Ménage Amour: Texas Sirens 1: Small Town Siren Ménage Amour: Texas Sirens 2: Siren in the City Ménage Amour: Nights in Bliss, Colorado 1: Three to Ride Ménage Everlasting: Nights in Bliss, Colorado 2: Two to Love Siren Classic: Away From Me

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