



# The Lost Locket

*a PowerUp! story*



*The Lost Locket*  
(a *Power Up!* story)

*Marie Harte*



[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

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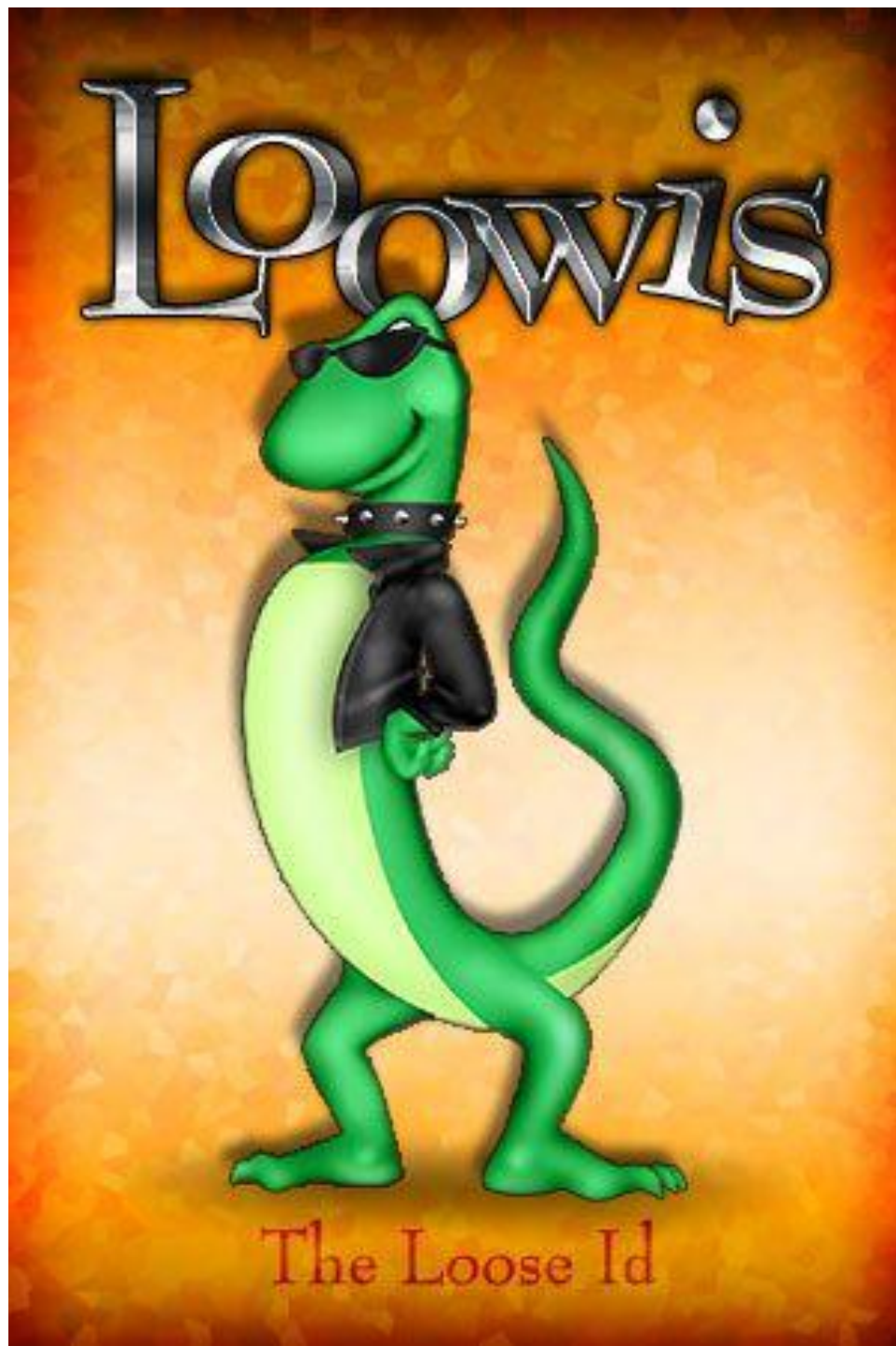
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## Chapter One

*Bend, Oregon*

Keegan Price knew something had to give when he spied Monica Salazar bending over a weight bench and felt nothing more than irritation that she'd chosen his section of the gym to occupy. Dammit, he needed to work off his frustration during the little free time he had today. He didn't need her adding to it. More disgusted with the situation than worried, he looked around for help and saw his best friend smirking at him.

Keegan nodded to Monica's tight ass—how long did it take to choose a fucking dumbbell, anyway?—and mouthed, *Help*.

James shook his head and mouthed back, *No way*.

Well, fuck.

The lusty woman glanced over her shoulder at Keegan and winked. "Hey, cutie, can you hand me that five pounder?" It sat two inches from her hand. In order to reach it, he'd have to get a little too close to the woman in order to squeeze between the weight bench blocking her and the musclehead on her other side.

"Sorry, darlin'. It's a tight squeeze for me. Why not let George help you?" he offered loudly enough to break through George's focus on himself in the mirror.

"Huh? Oh, sure, Keegan. Mrs. Salazar, let me get that for you."

Monica frowned at him, and Keegan used her distraction to focus. With a mental push, he scooted the weight into George's hand.

George picked it up in his meaty fist. "Here you go."

Keegan smiled at her and George, careful not to piss off the gym patrons he dealt with on a daily basis, and resumed his attack on the Nautilus with a vengeance. The burn wasn't enough, though, and he knew he'd made a mistake by not going downstairs to train when he noticed the sudden quiet.

The handful of people around him stared.

"What?" He used his forearm to wipe the sweat off his brow. The fans helped circulate the air, but he must have been working harder than he'd thought. And of course he'd lost his towel somewhere. Typical Monday.

"Holy crap, Keegan. Every time you lifted those weights, those others over there lifted at the same time. What the hell, man?" George asked, astonished, pointing to some discs across the friggin' gym.

Before Keegan could dig his way out of the hole he'd unconsciously landed in, James arrived and took charge. "Keegan, quit screwing around. And no more practicing at work. You know what Jack said about your stupid parlor tricks." James gave the others an apologetic smile. "He's an amateur magician, but he's trying."

Oh man, if Jack found out he'd been losing control of his telekinesis again, Keegan would be in for a world of hurt. "Check it out." Keegan wiggled his fingers at one of the weights and made it rise and fall.

The others clapped, amazed, and he forced a grin and bowed. Then he wiped down the bench on which he'd been working with a nearby sanitizer and paper towel and followed James away from the main workout area. He noticed Kitty giving him the evil eye and smiled in her direction. She really took her job as manager in this dump seriously.

James nudged him to walk faster, and he complied. Once they left the main area of the facility for a narrower corridor devoid of people, James punched him hard in the arm. "Shit, Keegan. What the hell?"

A testament to how hard he'd been working lately, Keegan barely felt the blow to his massive biceps. "I need a break," he growled low. "If I have to give one more

private training session to some pampered, rich housewife looking to get laid, I'm gonna go out of my fucking mind."

They walked through another hallway into the employees-only area. Seeing themselves alone, Keegan whipped his shirt over his head and used it to wipe the rest of the sweat off his body. "Monica Salazar won't leave me alone, and I am beyond not interested. Her poor husband must need Viagra, 'cause that is one heifer in serious heat."

James choked on the water he'd been drinking.

"You okay?"

His friend gave him a strange look.

Keegan glanced down at his chest to see what had James frowning but could see nothing more than skin needing more sun. When he looked up again, James was once again himself.

James chuckled. "I can always tell when you're pissed. Your accent gets all syrupy-Texan."

"Ass."

"I'm just jealous that my smooth, cultured Yankee voice sounds so dull compared to yours, cowboy."

Keegan snorted. "Throw me a bottle and shut up."

James foraged in the refrigerator by the small kitchenette in the break room and found him a bottle of water. But instead of throwing it to him, James brought it with him and sat next to Keegan at the table. He opened the bottle, took a sip, then slid it to Keegan. "Not poisoned."

Keegan grinned. "And you wonder why nobody likes you."

"Everybody likes me, Keegan. The girls *and* the boys."

Rumor had it James swung both ways, but he kept a discreet social life and had such a way with people no one cared what the fuck he did. Hell, James could probably rob a bank at gunpoint and they'd thank him when he left.

“Freak.”

“Wannabe.”

At that, Keegan nearly spit out his water. “What?”

Before James could explain that little remark, Kitty entered. She took a hard look at James sitting close to him and raised a brow.

Keegan felt himself flush and snapped, “We’re just getting a drink. Get your head out of the gutter, girl.”

“Sure thing, he-man. But next time you start moving things with your mind, don’t. If Jack catches you, he’s not going to be happy.”

“Is he ever?” James sighed.

“No. But lately, he’s worse.” Kitty frowned. “I’m worried about him. But then, I’m worried about all of us. We’ve only been here a few months, guys. We can’t blow it now.” Then she blinked at James and turned scarlet.

“What’s wrong?” James asked with a straight face.

“Oh.” She huffed, turned on her heel, and stalked from the room.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, drinking their waters.

“Had something to do with the word ‘blow,’ right?” Keegan asked, sure James had intentionally projected some feeling to the empath to throw her off balance.

“Yep.” James didn’t offer more, and Keegan didn’t ask.

“Nice work, son.”

“Thanks. I try.”

James did his best to make small talk with Keegan before Keegan put his shirt back on and sauntered back out on his shift. Fortunately, James had come in extra early and was done for the day. Unlike Keegan, he liked working in the gym. He never got so upset that he accidentally set anything on fire, and when he did feel a little stressed, he worked it out with weights and exercise machines. He’d never been steroid-huge, but he’d put a good twenty pounds of muscle on his six-feet-two



frame in just four months. Not like Keegan. The Texan stud looked like a walking piece of art.

Watching him take his shirt off to wipe away all that healthy male sweat was like being front and center in James's very own X-rated fantasy. He'd lusted after Keegan Price from day one, the very first time they'd been introduced in Quantico at the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

A year of partnering, then another two spent in the government's top secret Psychic Warfare Program—the now defunct PWP—and here they were, thousands of miles from DC, danger, and government red tape. Bend, Oregon, was a hot spot for outdoor recreation, especially road and mountain bikers. It also had skiing in Mount Bachelor, white-water rafting in the Deschutes River, and camping in and around the Cascades.

And what James wouldn't give for a dip in a lake right now. He downed more of his water and tried to will away the erection that had grown in Keegan's presence. Normally James kept his cool, but watching Keegan strip off that shirt and showcase all that naked flesh... *Shit*. When Kitty had mentioned not blowing their chances, he'd let himself feel all that sexual heat at thoughts of blowing Keegan.

Releasing the melting cap off his water bottle, he quickly tossed it in the trash and tried to cool himself down. Worried about being found out killed his erection better than a cold lake any day, and he forced his inner fire to fade.

Keegan had lost his control earlier because he wasn't exercising his psychic skills enough. Ever since the government had closed down the PWP, the gang had adapted by creating this home away from home. Mental and physical workouts kept them in peak condition. But they needed to utilize the underground gym more, where they worked out their psychic kinks.

James grinned at the bad pun, wondering how Keegan would feel if James "worked out" with him. Keegan made magic with his mind. Moving things without touching them could be a real boon in the bedroom. But James didn't think his own

ability to set things on fire with a thought would do anyone any good, unless it had to do with hot wax.

Not a bad idea, but not one of his best.

Jack Keiser walked into the break room just as James was on his way out. “There you are.”

*Fuck.* “Uh, hi, Jack. What’s up?”

Jack sniffed and followed the scent of melting plastic to the trashcan. He looked at James.

“I was just playing. There’s no one around.” No one to report to the pair of government lackeys who constantly watched them in case they lost control and tore up the town. No one to snitch and ensure that the PowerUp! Gym closed its doors forever.

“We can’t be too careful.” Jack sighed and ran a hand through his shaggy hair. The guy looked tired, frustrated, and as buffed as the rest of them. When they couldn’t get in enough psychic time, they made do by exercising like crazy.

“I know, man. I was just fooling around. Besides, I think using our abilities in small bursts eases the stress. I don’t feel nearly as angry about life as you or Keegan seem to.”

“Yeah, about Price...”

*Shouldn’t have mentioned him. Idiot.*

“I want the entire first shift working out tonight. Be downstairs at twenty-three hundred. Don’t be late. Bring the Texan. His car’s in the shop, and I don’t want him to have an excuse not to come.”

Jack left, and James groaned. His first night off in a week, and he’d been planning to get lucky with a cutie he’d met at the library. Now he’d have to put off a potential handjob in favor of lighting things on fire. Where he’d be with Keegan. Tonight.

All in all, not a bad trade-off. He just hoped he could prevent himself from jumping the guy. Because if Keegan yanked his shirt off again in front of him, covered in sweat, all bets were off.

Later that night, at twenty-three hundred—eleven p.m. sharp—James, Keegan, and the others met at the gym. He recognized the parked cars in the large lot. The gym was open twenty-four hours a day and run at night by four of the ex-PWP agents and a few locals. The first shift—the day shift—consisted of six psychics, counting Jack, and five or six locals, not counting the rotating aerobics instructors.

“You drive like a maniac. Next time I’m in charge,” Keegan complained as they got out of the vehicle.

“It’s a car, not a horse. I’m not letting you drive anything of mine that doesn’t have legs.”

Keegan must not have had a good comeback, so he gave James the finger instead.

“Good one, Keegan. Way to be creative.” Kitty snickered from behind them. “Look, guys,” she said to Avery and Gavin walking behind her, “the trouble twins are here.”

James clutched his heart. “I’m wounded. Kitty, how can you compare these incredible looks to that junkyard dog?” He glanced at Keegan with mock disdain.

“True. He’s sexy but rough around the edges. You look like a model.” She squeezed his arm. “Oh, and so strong,” she added in a breathless voice.

“Quit flirting and come on before we’re late. You know Jack scheduled James for a session tonight.” Avery waved his thumb at the back entrance to the gym.

Gavin added, “Ten bucks says Jack wipes the floor with him.”

“I’m in. Lately, James has been a real puss—” Keegan glanced at Kitty and cleared his throat. “Pushover when it comes to dealing with Jack,” he corrected in that low, deep voice that made James want to shiver.

Kitty shared an empathetic look and batted her eyes. "I'm so there, girlfriend," she whispered.

James chuckled and dragged her to the entrance in a headlock.

Gavin, Avery, and Keegan followed.

Three hours later, James was so exhausted, he could barely remember his last name. He'd set the training dummies in the flame-retardant exercise room on fire so hot, he'd burned his shirt off by accident. That's when Jack had ordered him to stop.

He imagined the others had their time as well. A year ago, Jack had constructed the lower portion of the gym in secret, using outside contractors to get the job done. Now the ex-agents of the PWP could exercise their psychic talents without fear of destroying the town, or of detection.

He wavered on his feet, exhausted, when he felt invisible hands hold him upright. A glance to his right showed Keegan, the bastard, several feet away, looking fit and happy. "You okay?" he asked James, concerned.

"Fine."

Chloe, the gym's night manager, had decided to visit and check things out. She blinked at James's nearly naked torso and grinned like the predator he knew her to be, all five feet four inches of her. "Nice pecs, studly."

"You callin' *him* handsome?" Keegan frowned. "Darlin', I'm telling you, I'm right here. Use me, abuse me. Please."

The others laughed, except for Jack. The bastard rarely cracked a smile at anything, and James often wondered what had made the man so fierce. "Price, Foreman, with me. The rest of you go home. And from now on, we rotate in pairs down here. Every other night, I want you guys working your talents. No more slipups." The glare he shot Keegan was telling.

As one, James and Keegan looked at Kitty, who shrugged.

"Don't look at me. Man has eyes in the back of his head."

Jack sighed. "I'm right here, Kitty. I can hear you."

He turned away, and she made a face at him.

“I saw that,” he said and kept walking.

“See?”

James followed their boss with Keegan’s help. The whisper hands, as he liked to think of them, felt just like Keegan. Yet nothing was there. It was odd, and strangely comforting, to have his best friend *not* touching him. He paused in the doorway to Jack’s underground office, or lair, as the group referred to it behind his back.

“Sure you’re okay?” Keegan whispered in James’s ear.

James jolted. “Christ. Put bells on or something. I didn’t realize you were right behind me.”

“If you girls are done chatting, take a seat.” Jack sat behind his desk, looking annoyed.

Keegan was going to say something obnoxious. James could feel it, so he yanked his buddy back, gave him a warning look, and sat in one of the two chairs across from Jack’s desk.

“Asshole,” Keegan muttered.

“Excuse me?” Jack’s voice was too quiet.

“He meant me, Jack.” Saving Keegan’s ass had become a full-time job.

Keegan gave Jack a sour look. “So what’s up, *boss*?”

Instead of responding to Keegan’s authority issues with threats the way he usually did, Jack smiled.

James’s instinct for self-preservation skyrocketed, and he sat up straight in his chair. Even Keegan tensed.

“I have an assignment for you two.”

They glanced at each other, and James asked, “Assignment?”

“We’ve gotten stale sitting around doing civilian work. It was never my intention we ignore our work with the PWP.”

“But we disbanded,” Keegan said.

“I know.” Jack exercised patience with the big lug, for which James was thankful. He didn’t have enough energy to hold Keegan back if he went for Jack’s throat again. And it was embarrassing to watch Jack slap him down time and time again.

“So...” James prodded.

“So I’ve decided to use our expertise to help those in need. We have a client—PowerUp!’s first. It’s not much, a simple retrieval you guys would have done in your sleep in the old days. There’s a lost locket, an antique family heirloom our client wants brought back here.”

Keegan clapped his hands together and rubbed. Anything to get away from the gym, James expected. Keegan grinned. “Great. So we’re headed where?”

“I rented you a car. You head out tomorrow. Cross-country, because we have a few leads we need you to check out on the way.”

“Leads on...?”

“Some other items the team will eventually need to hunt down and bring back.”

Keegan looked ready to drop everything and go, but James didn’t trust the seeming simplicity of this task. “What haven’t you told us yet, Jack?”

“See, that’s why you’re going with Wyatt Earp, here. One of you needs to think before he acts.”

Keegan snarled. “Motherfu—”

James interrupted quickly. “Jack, *please*. Just tell us. It’s been a long day.”

Jack sighed. “You’re getting soft, Foreman. Fine. Our client is a wealthy man with some very *unusual* interests. His family has collected items with unique properties over the years. And we’re just the people to locate said properties.”

“Weird shit, right?” Keegan groaned. “What I wouldn’t give for a normal bad guy these days.”

James understood. “So these missing items are somehow psychical in nature? Is that even a word?”

“Yes and yes.” Jack handed him a folder. “That’s the locket’s information, history, picture, etcetera. I had Nathan handle the locket’s case to get a feel for its history.” Their resident psychometrist, a man who could touch a thing and know its past, had been a real asset in the old days of the PWP. It seemed he would be useful again in this new capacity as well.

Jack continued. “The locket is indeed the real thing. It’s old, and it’s powerful, but we’re not sure if that’s because it’s associated with certain people who handle it, or because it’s a thing of power. Anyway, your car reservation is in there, and don’t worry, Goliath,” he said to Keegan, “I booked you an SUV.”

“Big enough to fit his fat head.” James couldn’t resist and chuckled when Keegan cursed him out. “So is there a time limit on this? How long has it been missing?”

“About two hundred years.”

James glanced at Keegan. “Ah, right. So we’re not in a rush?”

“Not exactly. Our client hadn’t even known the locket was among the items stolen from him until a hundred-year-old inventory turned up in the course of the theft. That thing’s been missing from his family for years. The warehouse burglary just brought it to light.”

“So this warehouse break-in isn’t related to the original theft of the locket.”

“Correct.” Jack pinched the bridge of his nose. “So while this family heirloom has been missing from his family’s treasury since the early eighteen hundreds, our client only found out about it recently, when Nathan handled the inventory and locket box. I’m giving you two three weeks to get there, grab the locket, and bring it back. Consider this an extended vacation for hard work rendered.”

Which James didn’t trust at all. “Bring it back how?”

“The client wants what’s his. As far as he’s concerned, whether it was stolen yesterday or two hundred years ago, it’s his. According to him, whoever has it knows it doesn’t belong to him. It’s a psychic thing. Just go with that. You see the locket, you grab it and haul ass back here.

“The locket is on the East Coast in a small town where everyone knows everyone. You shouldn’t have a problem, but townies can be very protective of their local citizens. We’ve seen this before.”

“Oh man, this keeps getting better and better.” Keegan groaned. “Why not hand this off to Noah or Aidan?” Noah could see past events, and Aidan was a telepath. It only made sense to let Noah try to envision who’d stolen the locket. And if the townies had secrets, Aidan could learn them easily. “Or any of the others? Why us?”

Jack leaned over the desk, his gaze locked on Keegan’s. “Because I tasked *you* with this. You disobeying a direct order?”

James knew Keegan was dying to argue that they no longer had to follow orders. No more government work, no more chain of command in this “goddamn gym that asshole forces us to slave away in.” But to James’s surprise, Keegan kept his mouth shut.

“Good,” Jack said. “Then get your asses out of here. I expect the drive to take you some time, what with the other stops you need to make along the way. But the majority of your mission will be spent tracking down the locket. We know it’s in Jackson Heights, and we know you’ll be within five feet of it at 1600 the day you get into town. Other than that, you’re on your own.”

For that kind of detail, Avery must have made an attempt at seeing the future. The precog was always spot-on, and James found that information already printed out in the folder.

“Oh, and guys? The future of the gym is hanging on this. We don’t make this work, our only client may just be our last. But no pressure.”

They stared at him in shock.



“Well, what are you waiting for?” Jack asked.

Keegan stood and hauled James with him.

Rising too quickly on top of his earlier exhaustion caused the blood to rush from his head, and the next thing James knew, he was being carried, fireman-style, over Keegan’s wide shoulder.

Whistles and catcalls followed them up the stairs and out the back door.

“Fuck off,” Keegan said to a few of their friends’ more lurid comments. He tossed James into the front seat of his car and belted him in. “Don’t think this means we’re dating,” he muttered and drove them home.

Neighbors they might be, but back-door friends they weren’t. Not yet, at least. At the thought, James grinned, because he’d been sensing an odd vibe from his good buddy lately. One he intended to put to the test. He had three weeks up close and personal to work Keegan over. And he intended to relish every minute of it.

## Chapter Two

Rory Taylor punched Gina Jackson in the face without blinking. If the little witch thought she could scare Rory into succumbing to her dumb-ass older cousin, she'd had too many beers.

The crowd in the bar cheered and jeered as Gina, the local bully, slumped on the nasty cement floor, unmoving.

Rory scowled. "Jackass."

"Yeah. Jackass Jackson," one of the regulars said and dumped half a cup of stale beer over Gina's head.

Several of the waitresses snickered. No one in this dive liked the uppity Jacksons, and Gina was low on the like-scale even among her obnoxious brothers and cousins.

"Here you go, Rory. On the house." Bud, the bartender, slid a cold one down the bar with the skill of a true master.

She grabbed it, lifted it to him in salute, then took a long, slow drag from it. Man, she'd needed that. Summer in Jackson Heights could be excruciating, despite the surrounding mountains. The humidity lately had been a killer, and tonight the breeze refused to blow.

She'd punched Gina with her right hand, the hand that gripped the bottle. The cold beer soothed the burn in her bones, joints, and muscles. She'd channeled a lot of furious energy through her body, letting it go through that punch. The locket at her neck burned as well, but she was used to that. It centered her.

Her hand friggin' *hurt*.

“Oh, and Bud?” she said in a loud voice. The crowd quieted. “You make sure everyone knows that if anyone so much as scratches a notch on the porch of my cute little cabin, I’m coming after the Jacksons with a shotgun.”

“Sure ’nuff.” Bud nodded and wiped down the bar before getting another order.

The townies seemed to like her well enough. Though she’d only been part of the local color for the past year, a single, pretty young woman living alone out in the woods hadn’t drawn as much speculation as she’d thought. She kept a low profile while recouping from her narrow escape from Atlanta. She’d almost seen the inside of a jail cell, thanks to some piss-poor connections with less-than-honest jewel brokers.

So now she was sticking to what she knew best. Searching out precious stones to finance her dream job. She was close. Just a few more caches and she’d have enough to start her own jewelry shop. The locket throbbed under her shirt, as if latching on to the idea of creating beautiful pieces of art with approval. Sometimes she swore the thing was more than a focus of power. It felt almost alive.

Rory frowned at her hand. It didn’t look swollen, but it ached. Not good to damage her most valuable asset. In the old days, she might have gone hungry, unable to pick the pockets of the wealthy who’d unknowingly funded her early adolescence. Now she’d just set herself back a few days from mining. Still, it was beyond stupid to sit around waiting for the Jacksons to get word of Gina’s smackdown and pay her a visit here tonight.

Finishing her beer with a few swallows that made the idiots sitting next to her sigh suggestively, she placed the bottle on the bar, left Bud a huge tip, and departed without another word. Her walk home was mostly uneventful. She walked next to the dirt road, careful to keep away from traffic. This neck of the woods was familiar, and she felt no fear. She never did with her trusty locket to protect her.

She turned and shrieked when she nearly ran over Becky, the town’s oldest citizen and a woman who could brew quality moonshine with her eyes closed.

Everyone loved Becky. Even the Jacksons. The old woman had taken an immediate liking to Rory—probably the real reason no one in town ever hassled her.

“Girl, where you off to in the dead of night?” Becky bragged she’d lived one hundred and fifteen years, yet the spry woman moved like a woman decades younger. It was nothing to find her out and about at all hours. Weird, but not alarming.

“Uh, just coming back from the bar, Becky.”

“Oh, right. Monday night special.” Becky nodded. The old woman remained right in Rory’s way.

“You okay, Miss Becky?” Rory felt a strange sensation, a tingle of energy that started where the locket touched her chest and surged deep, straight into her heart, then her brain.

“You’re gonna leave us soon, Rory. I’ll miss you.”

Rory smiled. “I’m not going anywhere. Why would I leave when I have the best cabin on the mountain?” And she meant it.

“Well, you just remember, that locket belongs to you, no matter what they say. But don’t give the big feller too hard a time. He needs you. Just as much as your foreman.” The woman cackled. “Talk about sexy as sin and trouble to boot. Pair of aces for you, honey. Good luck.”

Rory watched her go, not sure what to think. Foreman? Did Becky sense construction in her future? What the hell? “Woman must be hitting the still again,” she muttered and turned toward home once more. Rory wasn’t going anywhere until she was damn good and ready. And anyone who tried taking her locket would find himself in for a world of hurt. Just thinking about how good it had felt to give Gina a little payback for keying her car had Rory whistling under the moonlight as she continued walking. Foreman indeed.

\* \* \*

“Foreman, swear to God, you change the buttons on the satellite radio again and I’ll kick your ass from here to fucking Phoenix!” Keegan shouted two days later from the driver’s side as he fiddled with the car radio. Obnoxious rave music pounded in the SUV instead of the catchy crooning of country’s best.

James chuckled from the backseat, where the bastard was currently reading a book. Lord love him, but James had a real talent for annoying the shit out of Keegan. And though he hated to admit it, anger wasn’t the only thing the guy aroused. Lately, Keegan’s confusing feelings had turned decidedly...carnal.

“I thought this job was about de-stressing?” said the most laid-back man in the world. “You know we won’t fail this assignment. You can’t be worried that we’ll be responsible for the gym going under.”

“I’m not. Jack’s an ass. We’ve never *not* come through before. And I doubt one missing locket would lose us this client. Where the hell else is this guy going to find a group of specialized psychics as powerful as former PWP agents?”

“Then why are you so tense all the time, cowboy? Don’t you good old boys know how to relax? Maybe you need to get laid. Or sucked off. Find a rest stop and look for a hole in one of the stalls.” He chuckled. “Man, I’d pay to see that.”

Keegan gripped the steering wheel tight, refusing to take the bait. Damned if James wasn’t messing with his head. Keegan had no problems when it came to women. He loved licking them, sucking them, kissing them. Never fucked a guy and frankly didn’t want to. He’d never wanted a man that way, not really. He glanced in the rearview again at James.

The jerk made him laugh, always had his back, and couldn’t walk away from an I-told-you-so if his life depended on it. James was way too aggravating to even think of in context of a sexual relationship—if Keegan had thought of it, which he hadn’t.

He blew out a breath. Keegan didn’t care what others did in their own lives, but man-on-woman, or man-on-*women* sex, satisfied him just fine. His daddy’d be proud his boy was following in his large footsteps.

*“Freak.”*

*“Wannabe.”*

Their conversation from a few days ago refused to leave his mind. And last night made it hard to think about anything other than how incredible James looked when naked.

Sure, they'd worked together for a few years. Partners who knew a lot about each other, but not everything. Keegan, for one, had never seen James behind a woman, balls-deep, the way he'd been last night. That fat cock ramming up her ass while she'd cried out for more. Talk about the wrong time to come back to their hotel room early. Keegan had returned from a tame night playing pool in the hotel bar, hoping to get a good night's rest. So much for that.

He glared down at his cock, which started getting hard anytime he thought about what he'd seen last night. He kept trying to convince himself it had been the woman. Her large tits shaking as James pounded that full ass. Her submissive posture, bent over to take whatever her man wanted to give her.

Instead, his mind locked on to the image of James. His head thrown back, exposing the long line of his neck. The cords of strength in his arms and chest as he clenched and thrust. His dark brown hair sticking to his forehead as he sweated and grunted while he worked her. Or maybe it was the incredibly erotic sight of James's black-brown eyes glued to his while the fucker came and came hard. If that wasn't bad enough, while climaxing, James had withdrawn from her ass, ripped off his condom, and continued to pump a few ropy strands of cum on the woman's back.

Damn, sitting was getting more than uncomfortable; it was getting painful.

“You okay up there?” James's stare met his in the rearview mirror. “You look tired.”

The smirk on his face nearly had Keegan pulling over to beat on him. But he knew for a fact James couldn't read minds. No way the man could know how confused, how off centered Keegan felt, and all because of him.

“I'm fine.”

“Yeah, right.” James sighed and leaned forward. He placed his hand on Keegan’s shoulder, and Keegan’s entire body locked up tight. “Man, you are *tense*. I know what this is about, and I’m sorry.”

“Oh?”

“I should have asked you to join me last night.”

“*What?*”

“With Linda. She gave great head, by the way. Yeah, we could have done her together. Gotten off and been so mellow. Better than any high, I’m telling you.” James sighed and leaned back against his seat again. He closed his eyes and smiled, and Keegan had the odd sensation of looking at a truly beautiful man.

*How fucked up is it that I’m thinking he’s pretty?* Keegan swallowed around a dry throat.

“Coming in her ass was a dream. Not that I dig condoms, but there’s something about a narrow passage. Yeah, I’m an ass man.” James chuckled.

“For God’s sake, quit talking about it.” Keegan hated that his accent sounded so thick, a sure sign he was upset.

“It’s okay. Pull one off if you need to. I won’t watch.”

Keegan was tempted to do it, if only to get some relief. But it felt too weird. Jacking off while driving with his buddy in the car? This wasn’t a porno, and it sure the hell wasn’t a *gay* porno.

“Maybe I’ll take your advice and find a nice gal tonight.”

James laughed. “Yeah, Jethro. You find yourself a pretty gal in Phoenix. Hell, make sure you wear your hat and croon to them in that gravelly voice of yours, and they’ll be creaming before you can say boo.”

They rode in silence for a while before Keegan dared ask the question at the forefront of his mind. “James?”

“Hmm?”

“So last night... You were with a woman.”

“Yes.”

“But you’ve been hinting around you like guys.”

“I do. It’s more about the person than the gender with me.”

“So you really are bi. I thought that was a rumor started by Patten back in DC. He had a hard-on for you big time.” The man had lived to get James in trouble. Any way, any how.

“Yes, sir, he surely did.”

Keegan stared in shock at James in the rearview. “You’re telling me he balled you?”

“Hell no.”

Keegan breathed a sigh of relief. Their old supervisor had been such an asshole.

“I balled him. Not a great lay, but it finally got him off my ass, literally, mind you.”

“Holy shit. You did Patten?”

“Well, don’t get too excited. It only happened once. The repressed asshole actually thanked me for showing him who he really was. He cried afterward, and in a weird way, I felt like I was doing a service for all gay people everywhere.”

Keegan shared a grin with him.

James continued, “I opened the door for him in a big way. I’m good like that.”

Was it Keegan’s imagination, or did James sound as if he were implying something?

“Then again, I’m not nearly as impressive as you are, cowboy.”

“Not those stories again.”

“I heard you had the entire senior staff of the PWP half in love. The men wanted to be you, the women wanted to do you.”



Keegan flushed and focused on the road. "I'm not a horndog. I genuinely like women."

"I know. I never said otherwise."

"Yeah, well, I don't keep a scorecard."

James sat up, looking affronted. "I don't either. I just corrected your mistake. I don't let others do me. I like to be on top. But sometimes I make exceptions."

"Yeah?" Keegan *so* didn't want to have this conversation, but some insane part of his brain wouldn't shut the hell up because he needed to know.

"Depends on the partner, really. I'm pretty selective about my love life, believe it or not. And I like to top other men. But when the right man comes along, it's different."

Was James waiting for the right man, or had he meant that only the "right" men he'd already had made a difference?

Keegan unconsciously spread his legs wider to ease the ache in his balls. This trip was turning into the ride from hell.

Later that night, James watched Keegan down another beer as they waited for their table at the restaurant. Women had been throwing them covert looks for some time, attracted not only to good looks but to the power they could sense but couldn't see. Being psychic had its upside, certainly. As randy as Keegan had seemed earlier, he should have been more alert to the subtle flirting going on around him, but he seemed more focused on his beer than company.

Poor bastard. James contained a grin. He'd been patient for three years, watching, waiting. And now he was being rewarded. Reeling in this particular fish was turning out to be a heck of a lot of fun.

Keegan growled, he bristled, and he nearly jumped out of his skin whenever James casually touched him. To test his theory, James gave Keegan's shoulder a

friendly pat and watched his buddy choke on his beer. Then the Texan subtly crossed his legs to hide his erection.

"This won't help." James sighed. "Come on." He'd already gotten the phone number of one of the girls working at their hotel when he'd checked in. She'd seemed clean, of age, and decent enough. And she'd liked the looks of *both* of them.

He slapped down a twenty on the bar and dragged his friend off the bar stool—not an easy feat when Keegan was built like a bull.

"Where are we going?"

"To feed you."

Keegan frowned. "But—"

"Just trust me, okay?"

Keegan shrugged and followed him, and James felt a warm satisfaction that his partner trusted him with his health, at least.

At the truck, James held out his hand by the driver's side. "Keys. I haven't been drinking."

"Shit. Okay, *Mom*. My two beers and my bodyweight don't amount to a hill of beans, but if it'll shut you up, by all means, take the damn wheel."

James drove them to a fast-food joint and scored Keegan a few burgers and fries. He bought a salad, which Keegan ribbed him about the whole way back to the hotel. Once there and checked back in, Keegan looked better.

"Your never-ending stomach is full. Let me finish my salad."

"Go ahead. I'm getting ready for bed."

James stared in amazement at the clock. Nine o'clock? Keegan was worse off than he thought. James wolfed down his salad and waited for Keegan to finish using the bathroom. The big guy left, and he entered. The scent of toothpaste made him smile. Too bad he wouldn't be tasting Keegan's minty freshness tonight. Baby steps, he reminded himself.

He closed the door and made the call with his cell phone, confirming her arrival. He brushed his teeth and cleaned himself up. When he exited, he found Keegan lying back on his bed, clad in jeans and nothing else, flipping through channels.

James took a steady breath and forced himself to go back to his book. A half hour later, he hadn't managed to read more than one page over and over again when someone knocked at the door. *Thank God*. "I got it."

Keegan groaned. "What now?"

James looked through the peephole and smiled. "Carol, come on in."

Keegan grunted as he shoved his cock back inside Carol's warm, wet pussy. At first the idea of a threesome had made him uncomfortable, but Carol seemed into it, and if it got rid of this hard-on he couldn't shake, so much the better. Except the situation was growing far worse.

He shafted Carol with a hungry rhythm while still making sure to go easy on the woman. She wasn't big, but she liked him a little rough. And taking her doggy-style while she blew James was just about the hottest thing he'd ever seen.

She let James fuck her mouth clean, no condom, and Keegan could see every vein and sheen of slick flesh as James glided back and forth into her mouth. Keegan couldn't look away.

"That's it. Nice and slow. Feel it, baby." Damn, but Keegan almost felt as if James was talking to him and not Carol.

"Feel my dick. Let it fuck you."

Keegan watched as James's shaft disappeared between Carol's plump lips. She groaned, and Keegan slammed into her harder, so excited, so full. Reaching under her, he flicked her clit a few more times, playing her body as it told him what she needed. That pearly bud was so slick and hard, he knew the woman wouldn't last much longer. Like him.

"I'm gonna come," he warned, his voice gritty. He'd tried to hold out, but damn if he could stop himself from shooting his wad while watching James handle the girl like a filly he wanted to tame.

"Come hard," James said. "Fill that condom with cum, fill it full," he rasped and met Keegan stare for stare as they fucked Carol.

*Fucked each other through Carol.* The uneasy feeling that he was being pulled along a path he wasn't sure he wanted to go faded under the intense pleasure of Carol's flesh. Keegan heard her moan and felt her walls clamp down on him, seizing as she climaxed.

James cursed and shuddered, just as Keegan groaned and came, filling that condom right up. He pumped a few more times before pulling out, still semihard.

"Damn, Carol. I think you wore us clean out," Keegan teased and left to dispose of the condom. He returned a moment later, kissed Carol and cuddled with her while James took his time in the bathroom.

"Oh, shit. I have to get home. My roommate is gonna bust my ass if I don't go clubbing with her tonight." Carol perked up as she dressed. "Hey, you guys want to come with?"

She sounded a lot younger than she looked, though he pegged her age in the mid to late twenties. "Sorry, honey. Me and James are out of here tomorrow, first light."

She gave him a pretty pout before kissing him again. And he swore he tasted a hint of James when she tongued him. "Too bad. You are one hunk of hot Texan. And tell your handsome friend I'll see him the next time he passes through. I have his number."

She winked and left.

Keegan heard the shower running and sank back into bed, finally relaxed and too worn-out to care just what he'd done. He'd save his recriminations for tomorrow, 'cause sure as shit, he'd have 'em.

James slumped in the shower, too hot to handle right now. Coming inside Carol had been better than anything, because he'd been coming with Keegan. *So fucking hot.* He turned the water as cold as he could get it and tried to ease his need to burn.

Sometimes his urges grew dangerous, more dangerous than anyone knew. In this case, he blamed his raging hormones on his partner. He wanted to fuck Keegan, to swallow his cum, to bend over on hands and knees while Keegan rammed that juicy cock up his ass. For Keegan he'd bottom, oh yeah, whenever and wherever his cowboy wanted. His obsession with the man had finally come to a head.

James groaned, especially when the room steamed. As if he hadn't just come hard, his shaft swelled again. He stroked himself, imagining Keegan's strong grip, his firm mouth stretching to accommodate James's girth.

*Fuck. Yes, that's it. Open wider, Keegan.* James would plump his balls, lifting them for Keegan's tongue. But Keegan wouldn't suck him. He'd be too busy slamming James face-first against the shower tiles while he spread James's ass cheeks to lick his hole. His tongue darting, flickering, then plunging deep...

*"Damn."* James spewed all over the tiles, his cum a wash of relief from the extreme heat in his balls. The tiles remained hot to the touch, but now that he'd come a second time, James was too tired to maintain his energy levels, and he felt the temperature around him finally cool.

He left the shower limp, wet, and exhausted and stumbled into his bed. Part one of his plan to seduce Keegan had been a whopping success. He just hoped he could refrain from burning anything before he completed part two. He passed out cold with a smile on his face.

## Chapter Three

The normalcy of the next morning boggled Keegan's mind. James made no mention of their explosive ménage the night before, and Keegan didn't know what to say about it without coming across as a naive idiot or worse, some starry-eyed, sex-starved fiend. Because the hell of it was, having sex with James—*near* James—was addictive. He wanted to do it again. Right now, if his cock had any say in the matter.

Keegan ignored his unnaturally high sex drive and listened to Kenny Chesney, tuning out everything but the road for the next few hours. Yesterday, in a little mining town outside of Scottsdale, they'd gotten a few good tips on one of the artifacts Jack wanted them to look for. One plus at least.

After stopping for a quick lunch, Keegan drove some more, his foot heavy on the gas as they flew out of Arizona into New Mexico on their way toward New Orleans, where they needed to look for another relic belonging to Jack's mysterious new client. Keegan could only be thankful he made salary. He'd drive through Canada if it would keep him out of the gym and on a mission once more.

Randy Travis started crooning through the speakers, and Keegan saw James wince. Just to be a prick, he turned up the radio. Country music soothed him, reminded him of home. Life on a ranch helping his father settle horses and muck stalls. Watching his older brother ride to the roundup, his mother waiting at home with a hot meal and welcome arms when they finished for the day.

His parents were fine folks. God-loving people who believed in honest pay for a hard day's work. His father was foreman of the Circle Seven, and his brother worked as a hand, living life to the fullest. By now Judd would be bugging the crap

out of his mother, still dithering about tying the knot with Aggie, his hometown sweetheart. They'd announced their engagement last month, and his mother was tickled to death. At least one of her sons would give her grandkids before she hit sixty.

Keegan sighed. He liked his lifestyle—or he had before Bend. Before he'd been forced, once again, to hide what he was. It sure the hell wasn't his fault he could break things with his mind. Keegan didn't just bend spoons. He busted cars, broke trees in half, and when he didn't let his mind get the real exercise it needed... He blinked hard, trying to forget the first few weeks after his induction into the PWP. His talent had always been strong, but those damn drugs had made him into a monster. Only years of training and conditioning had tampered the psychotic need to destroy. And then they'd been kicked out of the program. No wonder so many of his former friends and agents had gone postal. A few days without the gym, and he was starting to lose it.

"You okay?"

He glanced at James, not thrilled to see his buddy staring at him with concern.

"Fine. Why?"

"Because I feel a lot of energy, and it's stirring my own. Not good, hoss." James squirmed in his seat, and Keegan felt a blast of heat that made sweat bead on his forehead, despite the AC.

"Maybe we should pull over."

He pulled off I10 and drove a ways before finding an abandoned motel.

"Perfect. Pull around back," James suggested.

Knowing what his friend needed, Keegan hurried and parked the SUV. The sun had set, and he turned off the lights, so they had anonymity in their favor. He watched James leave the vehicle, hold out his hands, and create one hell of a huge fireball. So much for remaining inconspicuous. Keegan could only hope the place was as empty as it seemed.

He left the SUV and watched as James bounced the fireball, free to create and mold the flames as he saw fit.

“You think I’m hot, don’t you? Go ahead, you can say it.” James laughed and threw the fireball into the dirt, where it scattered into sparks and faded with nothing to burn, leaving them in darkness once more. “Man, that felt good.” He paused. “Well, go ahead. Try that broken-down truck over there.” James tossed a ball of flame into the truck, where it caught fire in the seat fabric. A small burn, but enough to illuminate the target.

Grateful to have an outlet for his building energy, Keegan directed his telekinesis at the truck and smashed it in on itself.

“Anyone ever tell you that you have a bright future as a human trash compactor? Bet your guidance counselor would be proud.”

Keegan laughed, wishing James wasn’t so easy to get along with. Then his strange feelings for his friend would be easier to ignore. Not liking the fact that his body needed similar release, he exercised his mind, picking up and tossing the heavy garbage littering the motel.

“Think we made enough noise to get noticed?” Keegan asked, breathing hard.

“Nah. Go ahead. Tear into those cars over there. You know you want to.”

Keegan noticed the vehicles stacked one on top of the other. He knocked them down and shoved them into each other.

“Crash derby without wheels. Nice.” James chuckled and lit a few of the stacks of tires on fire by the Dumpster. When he’d had his fun, he held out a hand and closed it into a fist, dousing the flame with his mind. Keegan collected the trash in the lot into one central pile. If anything, he’d at least made it easier to clean up the place.

He stretched. “Man, I feel much better now.” Tired but good, and not so horny.

“Me too. Let’s motor. Another hour and we’ll hit Las Cruces. We can get a hotel there.”



They returned to the truck, and James drove the last of the way, finally pulling into a nice hotel. “Wait here. You look beat. I’ll sign us in and be right back.”

“Whatever.” Keegan was in no rush to open his eyes.

The knock on his window revived him, and he grabbed his hat and his duffel bag. Pleased to see he wasn’t the only one wearing a cowboy hat as he glanced around the parking lot, he felt more at home in the Southwest than he did in Bend. Not that he disliked central Oregon. He actually preferred the mountains and the colder weather. But it wasn’t Texas.

He followed James up a few flights of stairs to the third floor and into another moderate room. “Two queens again? Shit.”

James tried unsuccessfully to restrain a grin.

“What?” Keegan tossed his bag on one of the beds built for tiny people and flopped down on it.

“I don’t know how I feel about being called a queen. I actually thought I was pretty manly. But maybe you didn’t mean it as an insult, because you mentioned *two* queens. Hmm, I never knew you were so into—”

“You’re about as mature as a fourth grader,” Keegan mumbled, forcing himself not to laugh. Hell, he was just as bad as his partner.

“Admit I’m funny.” James took a few steps closer and knocked Keegan’s hat off. He held on to it. “Ha. See? You’re smiling.”

“Gimme my hat back.” Keegan grabbed for it, but James moved back out of reach. Keegan pushed him forward again with a psychic shove.

“That’s cheating,” James rasped as he tripped over Keegan’s feet and landed on him with an *oomph*.

Keegan grabbed for his hat and ended up wrestling with James to get it back. The physical exertion felt pretty good. Like roping a stubborn calf, except somehow, Keegan ended up straddling James, their groins plastered together, while he pinned

James's wrists above his head on the bed. The hell of it was, he felt James's erection pressing against his own.

He blinked down at dark brown eyes deepening into black.

"Well. Not exactly how I thought we'd spend the night, but I'm game."

Keegan scurried off him and stood as far away from James as the room would allow.

"Relax, cowboy. It's just a hard-on. You've seen them before."

To Keegan's astonishment, James sat up on the bed, swung his feet to the floor, and spread his legs wide as he unbuttoned his fly.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

"I'm getting hot. I don't know why, but lately I've been having a problem keeping my fire down."

Worry for James overtook any sense of caution. "You gonna blow now?"

James grinned. "You have the damndest way with words. Yeah, I'm going to blow. There's another way I can get rid of this steam. If I can't work it off with exercise, I can fuck my way cold." He didn't take his gaze from Keegan's as he reached into his jeans and freed his thick cock.

"Help me, Keegan." James began stroking himself. "Take yours out. Give me something pretty to look at so I can get off before I cook the room and us in it."

Keegan frowned. He didn't feel overly warm. But James did look pretty strained. "I don't know..."

"Come on, cowboy. You need it too. I'm all the way here on the bed, not moving, not touching you. Just you and me, easing this need to destroy something."

Rationalizing it made it easier for Keegan to accept what he wanted. And he wanted to watch James beat off. Hell, he wanted James to touch him, sexually, and that weirded him out.

"If I do this, no smart-ass comments about it later," he growled.

James shook his head and leaned his head back. "Fuck, I need this."

More than a little hard, Keegan took a few steps closer to James and ripped the tab of his jeans open. In seconds he had his cock out, stroking it in time with James's fist.

"That's it. That big hand with those rough calluses feels good, doesn't it?" James liked to talk, and his sexy words made Keegan even harder. "Imagine warm lips sucking you off. A tongue right in your slit, then under the head there, oh yeah." James locked on to his cock and didn't look away. "You're slick, man. So ready."

"So are you," Keegan said on a breath, ready to come. *Needing* to come. Christ, his balls hurt.

The sounds of their panting, the little moans James made in the back of his throat, shoved Keegan's libido into overdrive. He didn't understand it. But as he touched himself, it wasn't Carol or another woman he saw in his mind's eye, but James coming over her ass. James fucking her, James laughing, his full lips parted around a bottle, the same size as a cock...

"Oh fuck. Yes," James hissed and came hard. Jets of cum washed over his hand as he moaned, milking his cock.

"So fucking hot," Keegan heard himself say.

Then James was off the bed and kneeling in front of him. Keegan couldn't stop himself from meeting the man halfway. He gripped James by the hair and pulled him close, all but coming as James took his cock deep and sucked.

"*James*. Suck me, oh yeah. Right there. So good," he groaned and pumped a few more times before he couldn't hold on any longer. "I'm gonna come so hard. Swallow me. Oh shit!" He came harder than he ever had in his life. The explosion went on and on as James swallowed down his semen, licking and stroking Keegan into a world of sensitized pleasure and pain.

He ground against James's face, holding the soft strands of his hair tight as he knew a peace he'd always been searching for. As he softened and his heart rate finally settled down, he caressed James's head and uttered hoarse words of thanks.

James pulled his mouth away. He rose to his feet, winked once at Keegan, his dick semihard and still hanging out from when he'd jerked himself off, and then he strode into the bathroom and closed the door softly behind him.

Keegan stared blindly at the door, not sure what to do or how to feel as the import of what he'd done hit him. In a daze, he set himself to rights, shoved his hat on his head, and grabbed the key card James had earlier set on the table. Then he walked out of the room without any idea of where he was headed.

James knew he'd miscalculated very, very badly. But fuck, he was only human. Lusting after the man when he knew his feelings weren't returned was one thing. But knowing Keegan now saw him differently, that the man on some level wanted what James had to offer, had tempted him beyond reason. Carol had been a solid buffer they'd needed. Too bad James hadn't looked around for another woman to play with before heading up to the room tonight.

While he hadn't been kidding Keegan about suffering from worsening bursts of fire inside, he had enough willpower to control it, especially after their small workout at that run-down motel.

*No. You just had to ruin it and get greedy. The man barely consented to a threesome last night, and you think he's ready for mutual masturbation and a blowjob? Asshole.* He called himself all kinds of names as he banged his head on the wall. When he heard the outer door close, he swore out loud.

Keegan wasn't a homophobe. He was a decent guy, a sexy cowboy who treated others fairly, and a dangerous man to have on one's bad side. And now James also knew that his cum tasted like salted sugar. Holy fuck, blowing him was a dream come true, but because he hadn't waited, hadn't been as patient as he should have been for step number two in the seduction of Keegan Price, he might have forfeited his friendship as well as his chance to see where a new relationship with Keegan might take him.

“Fuck me. And we still have another few days of forced togetherness until we hit Jackson Heights. Shit!”

After his shower and the sleep that sucked him in surprisingly quickly, James rose in the morning still uneasy about last night. He hadn’t heard Keegan return, but to his relief, he saw his buddy sleeping, hanging half off his bed. He wore all his clothes, but James thought that had less to do with any fear of James attacking him than that he smelled like a liquor store.

They were in no rush to leave. The plan was to hit Louisiana by way of San Antonio. I10 straight across. Boring terrain, but the fastest way to drive.

Keegan didn’t move. The cowboy lay passed out on the bed, his hat on the floor under his outstretched hand. James wanted to help him, but he wasn’t sure how upset Keegan might be when he woke, and he didn’t want to add to Keegan’s probable sense of vulnerability.

James had played him, no doubt. But in the process, he’d been snared as well. His mouth still watered for more of that magnificent cock, and as he dressed and left for breakfast, he warned himself over and over again to leave well enough alone. He paid for an extended stay at the front desk, though he thought they’d leave in a few hours. He could only hope Keegan wouldn’t hate him for what had happened.

*It wasn’t like I had a gun to his head. I didn’t rape him.* Yet all the arguing with himself in the world couldn’t convince him he’d done the right thing by his friend. He knew how hard it had been to acknowledge his own odd needs and attractions, and he’d had years to deal with it. At the beginning, though, it had felt like he didn’t belong anywhere, not with gays or straights. He could only be thankful for his loving family.

From what he knew about Keegan’s folks, they were nice people with traditional roots deep in the heart of Texas. Where men were men—macho cowboy types who ranched and rode and *didn’t fuck other men*. James knew Keegan had close ties to his family. What would the Prices have to say if they learned their son had let another man suck his cock?

Annoyed with society in general for being so goddamn judgmental, James drank a shitload of coffee and barely touched his breakfast. He loitered in the hotel restaurant, reading the paper, then cursed himself for being such a pussy. Avoidance wouldn't help their situation. They needed to talk about this, and they had a job to do.

James entered the room to find Keegan still asleep on the bed. To his surprise, Keegan remained completely quiet. He didn't snore, not even when drunk. And too bad for James, he looked just as tempting. Those broad shoulders and ropy arms were anyone's version of a wet dream. The team liked to call James a model, but in his opinion, Keegan could have made a fortune selling pictures of his toned, rock-hard body.

A glance lower showed thick, muscular thighs and an ass James still dreamed about. So tight and firm.

Keegan groaned and turned his head, and the dark stubble of shadow on his face made him look that much more rugged. The combination of his tanned skin, black hair, and silver-bright eyes—when open—were killer. Simply killer. James had never met a woman who could resist him. *Hell, I just joined the club.*

"My fucking head," Keegan muttered and rolled over onto his back.

The old James would have helped Keegan up and thrown his ass into the bathroom. So in an effort to keep things the same between them, James grabbed Keegan's hand, praying his friend wouldn't smash him to bits with his mind, and tried to help.

"Come on, cowboy. Let's get you up and dressed. Time to wake up and get on the road."

Keegan opened bleary eyes still bloodshot and hazy. "Well, well, Mr. Sexy is back." He was slurring.

*Damn. How much did he drink last night?* "When did you get in?"

"Dunno. Seven, eight maybe?"

Hell, no wonder he was still drunk. He'd barely slept off his hangover. James sighed. "Come on, buddy. You probably need to piss, and you definitely need a shower." James dragged Keegan off the bed, huffing as he struggled to deal with Keegan's impressive but heavy bulk. "Can you walk?"

"Why? You gonna carry me if I don't?" Keegan thought that sounded hilarious and laughed like a loon.

"In there." James managed to shove Keegan into the bathroom and shut the door, waiting outside. He finally heard the toilet flush and the shower start. Then silence. "Keegan?" He knocked but received no answer.

He opened the door and saw Keegan staring at himself in the mirror with a puzzled look on his face. "You okay?" he asked softly.

"I don't look gay." Keegan ripped open his shirt and stared at his chest and belly.

"Yeah, uh, I don't think your orientation is written anywhere on your body." James reminded himself to be patient. It wasn't as if Keegan was deliberately flaunting his body. But those abs... James cleared his throat. "You need a shower."

"Trying to get me nekkid?"

James loved that accent, but he'd like Keegan a helluva lot better if the giant would undress himself so James wouldn't suffer later with the image of Keegan's bare chest seared into his brain. "I live to get you 'nekkid.' Cowboy, help me out here. Strip and get in the tub."

Keegan shocked him by pulling him close with his mind.

"Let me go, buddy. You don't want to do this." *Oh, shit.* James did *not* want to die from being crushed to death, his ribs piercing his lungs, his brain crushed inside his skull like a ripe melon. He'd had the unfortunate happenstance of seeing Keegan take a guy out that way once, and it hadn't been pretty.

Before James could protest again, Keegan kissed him. A sloppy, alcohol-fueled meshing of mouths and tongue that threw James's fear into arousal.

Keegan stopped and leaned his forehead against James's, closing his eyes. "Fuck, you make me hard. Why, James? I thought I liked women."

He sounded so confused.

James stroked his hair, taken with the long, shaggy strands in need of a cut. It hurt him that his cowboy sounded so unsure. "You do. You love pussy, Keegan." Terms Keegan could always understand, drunk or sober.

"But I like dick too."

James paused in thought, still stroking Keegan's soft hair. "Did you see anyone last night who interested you like that? Anyone at home you like? Jack, maybe?" Which would explain the fierce antagonism between the two. James had always thought it a case of two alpha males butting heads, but maybe Keegan was battling an unwelcome lust?

"Jack Keiser?" Keegan pushed away from James with horror on his face. So much for unwelcome lust.

Relieved, James waited.

"Hell, no. That dick just pisses me off until I want to break him in half."

"So no one in Bend?"

Keegan scowled and stumbled as his boots caught his attention.

"Sit down, cowboy."

Fortunately he listened, and James took off Keegan's boots, then his jeans and shirt. Keegan stood in nothing but his sexy boxer briefs, under which the long, hot length of him stirred.

*Fuck me.* James wiped his forehead with his forearm and started the shower.

"I never look at men, not like that. I like a hot, wet pussy, you know?" Keegan rubbed his cock, and James's eyes crossed.

*This is what I get for pushing too hard. Penance. Suck it up.* "Yeah, well, I like pussy too."



“But you do other guys. I don’t. I don’t like other guys. Some fuckwad tried to pick me up at the bar last night, thinking I was too drunk to say no. But I didn’t want him. Didn’t want none of them.”

“Damn. You didn’t hurt him, did you?” Visions of lawsuits danced in his head.

“Nah. Made a few friends, and we kicked his ass out of the place.”

“Your buddies weren’t gay bashing, were they?” *Please tell me you didn’t crush his skull.*

“Hell, no. I don’t mind gays. Remember? I *am* gay. ‘Sides, it was a gay bar.”

James just blinked at him.

Keegan grabbed James’s hand and rubbed it over his cock. “Just you, GQ. You’re the one that gets my dick hard. None of the other guys did. And I tried.”

James groaned. “Keegan, tell me you did not go to a gay bar trying to pick up men.” Keegan was going to hate him when he sobered up, because James knew he’d get blamed for this.

“Nah. I was drinking and trying to see if I liked any of ’em. But I didn’t. And I think there were some good-looking guys there.” He sounded so earnest.

James couldn’t help grinning. “So you just drank until you wandered back here and passed out.” A terrible thought hit him. “You didn’t drive, did you?”

“Nope. Caught a ride from some of the boys. They made sure I got home okay too. Truckers left this morning. Good fellas, knowin’ how hard it is to come outta the closet.”

James shook his head and tried not to think about the stiff flesh under his fingers. Keegan wouldn’t let him go. “Um, Keegan? My hand?”

“Yeah, up and down. Mmm.” Keegan closed his eyes, and suddenly his underwear swept down his legs, and James felt whisper hands pulling him closer. “Do it again. Make me come, James.”

“You don’t want this, Keegan. You need to shower and sober up. I’m not going to take advantage of you right now. And for the record, you’re not gay. Hell, I’m not

even sure you're bi," he murmured. There'd been something special between James and Keegan from the beginning, something that surpassed labels and mere physical attraction. Even knowing Keegan only ever dated women, James had sensed they might share something closer than being partners one day.

"I'm not that drunk, James. And I've been doing a lot of thinkin'." Keegan's accent was thick, his cock weeping with need. He blinked his eyes open and focused them on James.

James groaned. "I'm trying to do the right thing." His hand tightened around Keegan's shaft, the urge to suck him off strong. But a handjob was less intimate, easier to accept, maybe?

"Do it. Jerk me off, James." Keegan's eyes smoldered. "You know you want to."

"I tried." James succumbed to the pleasure, using a touch of his inner heat to warm his palms. He spit in his hand and stroked Keegan off with his thumb and fingers. Hard and fast, a firm grip that promised so much pleasure. "Don't hate me for this."

"Never hate you. Christ, you're good." Keegan groaned and widened his stance.

James didn't know what prodded him, but he inched his other hand under Keegan's sack and skimmed his perineum with the lightest of touches.

"*Son of a bitch*," Keegan rasped as he jerked and came, his cum jetting out in thick streams over James's hand. "Tighter, yeah."

James continued to pump until Keegan finished spending. "Now get in the shower and clean up. And don't you even think about blaming me for this one." He turned, washed his hands in the sink, then stalked out of the room, aroused all over again and praying he hadn't just screwed up a second time.

When Keegan stepped out of the bathroom in a towel a good hour later, he looked subdued but not angry.

James opened his mouth to speak, but Keegan shook his head.

“Not now, James. I need time to think. Let’s focus on this case.” Keegan must have seen the hurt James tried to hide, because he ran a frustrated hand over his slick hair and sighed. “Just—Look, I need to think about things, okay?”

Part of James wanted to argue that he hadn’t forced Keegan into any of this. Keegan hadn’t been drunk before, and he could have said no at any time. Yet another part of James wanted to crow because Keegan hadn’t flat-out rejected him.

So he took the better part of discretion, nodded, and said, “I’m packed. I’ll be waiting in the SUV for you. And I’m driving.”

Keegan didn’t protest, and James felt both better and worse. *Again*. Mixed up, pent up, and not sure which way to go. He could only hope they had less trouble when it came to tracking down that fucking locket. James didn’t think he could deal with anything more difficult than waiting for Keegan to face his feelings, or he might actually set the damn world ablaze.

## Chapter Four

A week after the Gina Incident, as it was now dubbed, Rory ignored her french toast and glared up at Ed Jackson, beyond annoyed. “Ask whoever you want. Your cousin keyed my car. I took it out on her face instead of suing her for the thousand-dollar paint job she owes me.”

“You can’t prove she messed with your car. But, sugar, there’s witnesses saw you punch her in the face.” Ed scratched his jaw. “Not that I’m not saying she didn’t have it coming to her, but there might be a way we could work things out.” He sat at her table in the diner without asking, and the waitress immediately brought him a cup and poured him coffee.

“Thanks, Darlene.”

She nodded and raced away, no doubt confabbing with the cashier and her fellow waitresses about Jackson Heights royalty’s interest in the new girl. A year spent in this town, and Rory still wore the moniker.

Rory sighed. Ed Jackson might give her a run for her money this morning, but he still didn’t hold a candle to her. Not that Rory liked to brag, but she knew her strengths as well as her weaknesses. Intelligence, determination, and that extra brainpower that let her do extraordinary things—all strengths. Things that glittered and getting into situations like these—definite weaknesses.

“I’ll bite. Exactly what is it you think I can do to work things out with you?” she asked.

The amused gleam in his snakelike gaze was telling. “Personally, I like you, Rory. You’re a beautiful woman, and you know it. I like your confidence. Tells of a

smart woman who knows her own worth.” Ed’s gaze roamed over her face and breasts, and lingered there.

Rory felt the need for a shower to wipe the *ick* off her.

“You could do a lot worse than a town councilman with eyes on the mayor’s seat. Election time’s only eight months away,” Ed suggested without suggesting. Tricky bastard, but she could respect that about him.

Ed never said or did anything that could be used against him in a court of law. But her subtle rejections apparently hadn’t gotten through his thick skull and perfectly coifed hair. “I’m not having sex with you, Ed.” *Ever*.

“Well now, you’re not as friendly as I’d hoped you’d be, but I can’t say I wasn’t expecting your answer.” He paused, and she had the odd feeling Ed Jackson was holding back.

Rory leaned over the table, intrigued. “So what’s on your mind?”

“We Jacksons have lived in Jackson Heights for over two hundred years. We were here when the town was founded. Nothing goes on that we don’t know about. It’s kind of a calling to watch out for everybody here.”

Which explained his aunt, the mayor, his brother, the sheriff, and half his relatives on the town council he himself led.

“Your point?”

“I could have you arrested for hitting my cousin. I’m not going to,” he said to forestall her argument. “I want you to know I’m on your side. My cousin Brent’s been making you feel uncomfortable with his comments. I’ll put a stop to that too. You can’t help being as pretty as a picture, now can you?”

What the hell did this guy want?

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen eyes that color green before. Not green, not gray, but—”

“They’re gray-green. And I’ve seen lots of people with this color. Now spit it out, Ed. What do you want? My french toast is getting cold.”

His frown appeared and left in the blink of an eye. Ed smiled. "To the point. I like that."

Apparently he liked everything about her. She could die a happy woman. Hurray.

"For years a friend of mine has been collecting antique jewelry. He swings by during the ski season, and we catch up. He tells me his latest finds and puts out feelers for stuff lost in this region of the Southeast. I can't swear to it, but that locket around your neck makes me think of something he was looking for the last time he was here."

She tensed but tried not to let her unease show. "Who's your friend?"

"No one you'd know. Just a small-time jeweler I've known for years. Can I see your locket, Rory?"

It burned against her chest. "No."

He blinked. "No?"

"It's the only thing I have of my mother, and it's mine. I won't sell it, I don't loan it out, and I don't let anyone else touch it. So no."

Ed just sat there, stymied.

"Something else you wanted?" Rory let out a frustrated breath. She had wanted to stay at least through the end of the year, but now it looked as if she'd be moving on. Becky had been right about that, at least.

"That's too bad, Rory." Ed whipped out his cell phone and texted someone. "Mind if I finish my coffee?"

Aware she'd made a mistake in being so open in her refusal to part with the locket, Rory simply ate her breakfast. When the sheriff arrived with his deputy to take her away for assaulting Gina, she had no one to blame but herself.

She should have stalled Ed, should have allowed him to look at the locket and see it wasn't the one his friend was looking for. Rory hadn't lied. Her mother had

owned the locket before passing it on to Rory the day before she'd died. Rory hadn't taken it off since.

"Rory Taylor? Come with me," Sheriff Jackson ordered.

Rory made a face at Ed and stood. "You're making a mistake by doing this," she said in a soft voice. "I'm not at fault here. And I won't forget this."

"Threatening me in front of the law?" Ed shook his head and sipped at his coffee, the glint of a diamond on his ring finger one she'd missed.

She couldn't look away. Oh yeah, she knew how Ed could make it up to her. He'd start with that ring, and every other piece of bling in that mansion he lived in on top of the hill. She reached for Ed's hand and gripped it tight. "Don't do this, Ed." Just a few seconds more, and the diamond would literally jump into her palm...

He pulled his hand away, not noticing the diamond now missing from his ring. "It's already done."

"Come on, Rory." The sheriff and his deputy nodded to Ed and took her away. But at least they treated her gently, and they didn't check her pockets, where she'd stashed Ed's diamond.

At the jail, she refused to part with the locket.

"Let her have it, Stanton. It's not like she's going to hurt anyone with it," the sheriff snapped.

The jail was empty.

"Sure thing, Sheriff." The deputy shrugged. He pushed her into the cell and closed the door with a solid *bang*.

Rory blew out a breath and flopped down on a neatly made cot. At least the Mayberryness of the town extended to the jail. If nothing else, her imposed incarceration would give her the time and space to make plans.

She drew the locket out from beneath her shirt and held it tight, then closed her eyes. Behind her lids, sparks flared, the wash of bright lights, gold and silver

stars, and diamond clarity suggested all kinds of ways to grab Ed Jackson's famed sapphire collection, as well as any other treasures he had holed up in his house.

Rory smiled. She knew just how to begin her exodus from town. One glittery step at a time.

\* \* \*

James had run out of patience. Three days of monosyllabic responses to his questions. Three days of driving, country music, and hotels, the tedium broken only by lifting weights and running until he neared exhaustion. Keegan, for all his faults, made sure the hotels they stayed in had state-of-the-art facilities. Jack, he'd deigned to explain, would just have to suck up the cost.

James calculated they had another thousand miles before they hit Jackson Heights. And before that, one more stop in Savannah. Thankfully, the painting they'd been ordered to locate had been sitting pretty in a gallery window in the French Quarter. An easy find, and one that had finally put James and Keegan back on the boss's good side.

When James had called to report his findings, Jack had answered with, "Good job. You have two more weeks to get to Jackson Heights, grab the locket, and get back. Don't fuck it up." Words to live by.

"So here's the thing, James."

*Finally. He speaks.* "Yes?"

They'd bunked down for the night in a New Orleans hotel room overlooking St. Louis Street, a historic hotel worth the price for the gourmet dinner they'd eaten. In silence. Once again.

"Keegan, talk, or I'll do something you'll probably regret." Poor choice of words, but to his relief, Keegan didn't seem to read anything into them.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking, and I don't understand something."

"What's that?"

"Jack built the gym a year ago, right?"



Expecting to hear Keegan's reasons as to why they could never be more than friends, James blinked in confusion. "Ah, right."

"But the PWP didn't shut down until six months ago, so Jack obviously caught wind something was going down before the program got the ax. And he couldn't know which of us would actually choose not to join any of the other agencies and join with him instead. I know you almost stayed with the bureau but changed your mind at the last minute."

"Where are you going with this?" And when would they talk about the mess between them currently eating James alive?

"I've been doing a little digging. Did you know Jack has a silent partner who owns half the gym?"

"Everyone knows somebody staked him. Jack's not made of gold."

Keegan frowned. "But do you know who the silent partner is?"

"And this matters to me why?"

"Owen Stallbridge, multimillionaire playboy, the one that owns all those properties in Bend. That's the guy we're also working for."

"So what? We get a paycheck for honest work. Who cares?" James crossed his arms over his chest and reminded himself to be patient. Frying his lover was not the equivalent of foreplay.

"Stallbridge also happens to own a warehouse in Strasburg, France. One that was broken into a little over a year ago. Lost a fortune in family heirlooms. It was all over the news."

"Your point?"

"Don't you think it's a little coincidental that we now have a mission and an anonymous client? One who happens to have a lot of bizarre things he wants found, items of power that psychics—that's you and me—are suddenly stumbling over? Items gone missing from said client a little over a year ago?"

“So tie it all together.” James scowled in annoyance, irritated beyond measure. Keegan refused to talk about *them*. He ticked off his fingers. “One: Stallbridge owns half of PowerUp! Two: his warehouse full of crap was broken into. Three: said crap is powerful stuff. Four: we’re now in charge of finding that powerful stuff. So what?”

Keegan shrugged. “Something weird about it, and hell, I have to connect the dots when I see ‘em.” He ran a hand through his hair, bringing to James’s attention that Keegan still wore shorts and a T-shirt that molded to his fine body.

“Well, connect *these* dots. I’ve been waiting on your sorry ass for three days. You’ve been freezing me out, making me listen to your shitty music, insisting you drive us everywhere, and generally acting like an asshole. I’m tired of it, and I’m getting hotter each day you ignore me.”

“Ah, James? Your bed is on fire.” Keegan didn’t even flinch as James swore and closed his hand to shut down the fire scorching his comforter. Fortunately, the fire was small and didn’t set off any alarms.

“I need to go for a walk,” James muttered, embarrassed. The strenuous workouts he’d been doing helped, but his emotional stress was taking its toll. Not knowing where he stood with Keegan drove him crazy.

Before he could get to the door, whisper hands shoved him hard up against the wall.

He landed and huffed out a breath. “What the fuck?”

“See, here’s the thing.” Keegan took off his shirt and toed off his shoes and socks. Standing in nothing more than nylon shorts that clung to his thick and expanding cock, he looked like a veritable god. “I’ve also been doing a lot of thinking about you and me.”

James didn’t speak.

“It’s your fault I went into a gay bar trying to prove something to myself.”

“I *knew* you were going to blame me for that.” James shut his eyes, frustrated and trying to keep a lid on his temper.

"I found out I still like women. Guys don't do a thing for me."

James opened his eyes and snarled, "Then explain *that*." He stared at Keegan's stiff cock.

"I wasn't finished." Keegan shook his head. "Your easygoing attitude has surely flown out the window, hasn't it? So much for de-stressing," he teased and walked up to James, pinned to the wall like a dead butterfly.

"Let me go, dammit."

"No, I don't think I will." Keegan's husky drawl aroused him like nothing else. "You see, the biggest problem I had with you was wanting the guy who's my partner. Well, that and wanting a guy, period. But from the first, there was just something about you."

James struggled but couldn't move his arms. As if Keegan's actual hands held him tight to the wall, he remained stretched out, his arms above his head, his feet glued to the floor. Helpless, vulnerable, and so turned on, he worried he might come with a touch.

Keegan knelt before him and pulled off James's shoes, socks, and pants.

James didn't dare breathe, praying Keegan meant to go somewhere sexual with this striptease.

"Those handsome looks, that Yankee charm. The way women swoon over you and men watch you move. Had to be a spell you put on them, or so I thought. You're one hell of an interrogator, son." Keegan brushed his fingers under James's T-shirt and over his tightly coiled abdomen.

He shivered.

"Yep. And you have one helluva body for a man who's not into lifting."

"I do it to maintain control," James answered, his voice nearly hoarse.

"Now see, control. That's what my problem was all along." Keegan stroked the cotton over James's erection, and James could feel the wet spot of precum sticking

to his skin. "I like control. It's a part of who I am. And you took it away. I didn't like that."

"Could have fooled me." James glared at him. "Let me go."

"I don't think I will." Keegan stared at James's wrists, and they separated. Then James's shirt lifted up off his torso and flew over his arms to land on the floor, leaving James in nothing more than his underwear.

Keegan continued, "See, I like pussy. Love it, actually. But your cock, now that's something I think I need to understand."

"Oh, fuck." James sucked in a breath when Keegan shoved his hand beneath James's underwear and grabbed him tight.

"You're hot, James. Silky smooth and wet too." Keegan took a step closer, brushing himself against James. "I like you this way. Under my control. Yeah, I think this is gonna work for us."

"Us?" he rasped.

"I'm telling you straight out I liked doing Carol with you. Something about tits and a pussy, the softness of a woman, that gets me off. Oh, you like that too, huh?"

"I told you I like women." James counted to ten backward in his head, determined not to come in Keegan's hand after two strokes.

"You like men too. See, that's new to me, the liking men part. But I really like you, James. I need to see where this takes us, my way. Can you live with that? Can you let me run the show?"

*Fuck, yes!* "If I have to. Control freak." James tried desperately to act as if he wasn't a hairbreadth from losing it.

"You have to," Keegan said in no-nonsense terms. "I'm not going to label us or this. I'm not afraid of being gay or bi or whatever the hell they call it. I'm not afraid of you, James."

"Then why are you trying so hard to convince me of it?" Zing. He was right on target by the frown on Keegan's face.

Keegan kept his eyes on James's as he slowly pushed James's underwear off his hips. Then he dropped to his haunches, his breath fanning James's erection, and took them all the way off James's body.

"Yessiree. You look hard enough to poke through wood." Keegan stood and stripped off his boxer briefs as well. The minute his cock bobbed free of the material, it grazed James's tight belly.

"So you want to keep me tied up with your mojo while you fuck me?"

Keegan nodded, a spark of humor in his eyes mingling with the raw lust there. "Yep. That about nails it. Just waiting for your okay. And I'm warning you, I want to see what this man-on-man fucking is all about. I ain't about to rush things 'cause you're about to come."

"Fuck you." James flushed.

Keegan laughed. "Back at you. I have to say, this feels good. You're a smug asshole a lot of the time. Especially when you're prancing around, flaunting that tight ass."

"*Prancing?*" Starting to get seriously irked, James pulled at the hold on his wrists and ankles, wanting to get free so he could pound some sense into his friend. He had no problem admitting to being attracted to men, but he wasn't a twink. He didn't do feminine. He was a man with a man's needs.

"You sure do take offense easy." Keegan crowded him and kissed the side of his neck. "Hmm, salty. I wonder if you taste like that...everywhere."

James couldn't help arching into Keegan's body, consumed with the need to increase the friction between them.

"Time for some investigatin'." Keegan sucked on his neck and rubbed his cock against James's belly, the act so sexual, it made James sweat.

"Do it. Please," James begged, aware he'd fallen under Keegan's power without much issue. But God, he was on fire, needing to come, needing Keegan to finally touch him the way he'd been dreaming about for years.

Keegan pulled his head back and looked down into James's eyes. The cowboy leaned close, cupped James's cheek, and lowered his lips for a kiss. So gentle, so tender, the kiss was an exploration as much as it was a sexual melding of desire. Firm lips met his with pleasure in mind. And then the kiss turned from light to intense.

Thrusting his tongue inside James's mouth, Keegan swept inside, taking and owning James's response like a true master. Though James had never been into the D/s shit, he could see where it would appeal to Keegan. And damn if it wasn't appealing to him as well at this minute.

His groan echoed in Keegan when the larger male ground against him. Their cocks rubbed together, and the thought of it sent James into orbit.

"Gonna come if you don't back off. So hot for you," he groaned, needing Keegan to touch him, to fuck him. "Take me. Bend me over and shove that pole up my ass."

Keegan kissed him again, a rough taking that showed James his friend was close to his own end. He humped James brutally, sliding that thick shaft over his cock and belly, so stiff he bruised James when he prodded.

"Lube's in my bag," James offered and tilted his head, giving Keegan easier access as the man slid his mouth down his cheek to his neck and bit. "Yes, oh yes."

Keegan wrapped his fist around James's cock. "I like it thick. So big. Do you like it in my hand? Or would you rather have my mouth? My ass?" Keegan teased as he jerked him off.

"Anything you want," James rasped. "Just don't stop. I'm nearly there."

But the bastard did stop. "Not yet." Keegan ignored his curses and stepped back, not unaffected by the pleasure himself. His cockhead was wet, his nipples tight beads, and his belly a clenched mass of muscle. Then the Texan further teased James by kissing his way across James's chest while he ran a fingertip over James's cock.

"Fuck." James thrust his hips forward, but Keegan's finger disappeared. Lips surrounded his nipple, sucking the tiny bud before biting it. "Oh shit, *Keegan*."

“That’s it. You like that.” Keegan murmured around his flesh and continued to kiss his body, sliding his mouth from one nipple to the other while he petted James’s stomach, circling his fingers around but not close enough to his groin.

“Come on, Keegan. Do me, man. Don’t tease, not now. So hard for you,” he managed to say between panting breaths. “Put that lube all over you and slide up inside me.”

Keegan pulled up from his chest, and his eyes glittered like diamonds. “You’d like that? I thought most guys couldn’t come when getting fucked.”

“I’m not most guys.” Trust Keegan to research the life instead of just living it. “Besides, I’m so hot now, it wouldn’t take much more than a breath to send me over.” At the look Keegan shot his cock, James nearly broke. “Oh shit. Fuck. You’re not going to—Oh baby, you are. Please. Do it,” he said as Keegan slowly knelt. “Suck it, swallow me. Christ, yes.”

Keegan trailed kisses down James’s chest and licked his way past James’s belly and pelvis, running his tongue along James’s swollen shaft.

“Hmm, salty,” Keegan rumbled and sucked James’s cockhead, then eased more of his mouth around it.

“I’m gonna come. Lots to give you.”

Keegan pulled more of him inside that wet mouth. James hadn’t moved an inch between those lips when he cried out and came, jetting inside Keegan’s mouth with force.

He moaned and shuddered as Keegan swallowed him. Big, strong, powerful Keegan on his knees, worshipping James. James knew he’d never in his life forget this moment.

When Keegan had finally swallowed all of James’s cum, he pulled his mouth away and stood. Beautifully erect, powerfully aroused. “Different, but not bad.” Keegan smiled, and the sight of his happiness pushed James into another realm altogether.

Lust mixed with a heavy dose of love, scaring the shit out of him.

“Oh yeah. You’re tasty. But I’m not done, James. I’m hurting, man. And you offered.” Before James knew it, whisper hands dragged him across the room and bent him over the dresser, which stood at the perfect height for what Keegan obviously had in mind. The tube of lube and a foil packet flew across the air, and then Keegan was slipping the condom on and greasing himself.

“Just go slow. Remember, I’m fragile,” James teased, but he was somewhat serious. Keegan was more than excited and very, very big. Injury was always a hazard when someone without experience did the driving.

Keegan must have seen his hesitation, because he stilled. “Don’t worry, James. I won’t hurt you. You direct this part, and I’ll follow your lead.” He paused and grinned. “This time.”



## Chapter Five

Keegan had to force himself to move with slow deliberation. He wanted nothing more than to ram himself inside James. The connection he'd felt when he'd swallowed his friend's cum was nothing on this. Fucking women for pleasure was one thing, but fucking James would mean so much more. He knew it, could feel it, but had no idea how to put it into words.

For days he'd struggled with what it would mean if he succumbed to his desires to bed his best friend. Worst case, he'd lose their friendship and everyone would know he'd done a guy. Big friggin' deal if anyone called him names. Of course, he had no intention of letting his family know anything about this. They'd never understand, and he couldn't afford to lose the only people in the world he loved.

Best case, he'd finally have James all to himself, their friendship would grow even stronger, and maybe, just maybe, they could do it again.

Keegan trembled as he positioned himself behind James. He put his hands on James's hips and stared at him in the mirror over the dresser. He could see every one of James's expressions, and that turned him on as much as the thought of fucking him did.

"Spread my cheeks and rest the tip of yourself in my hole," James said in a thick voice.

Keegan stepped forward and looked down at the tight white ass under his hands. He pulled James's flesh apart and angled his tip to sit at the entrance to heaven. He could feel heat there through the condom, and for a moment, he wished it was just him and James, no rubber between them.

He glanced up at the mirror to see James's eyes fogged with lust. He watched as James flushed and bit his lip as he pushed back, impaling a small bit of himself on Keegan.

"Oh boy. This is gonna be tight. Just wait, you're going to love it," James promised on a breath. "Now slowly push forward, just past my sphincter. That's it."

Keegan groaned at the pressure surrounding him, and it took all he had not to surge deep.

"Yeah." James wiggled his hips. "A little more. Keep going slow. Fuck, you're huge."

"And you're like a fist. You sure you've done this before?" Keegan gripped James's hips hard enough to bruise.

James laughed, and the vibrations pushed Keegan deeper. "Funny. I have done this once or twice, but like I said, it takes an exceptional lover to top me." James met his gaze in the mirror. "More, *lover*."

Keegan moaned and pushed deeper. Every inch was torment, the need to thrust hard and to come overwhelming. To distract himself, Keegan counted by fours in his head and slowed almost to a stop.

"Bored with me already?"

"I want to fuck you like you can't believe. It's all I can do not to shove deep inside you, James. Shut up and let me concentrate."

James chuckled, then gasped when Keegan finally settled all the way inside him. "Fuck, I think you just hit my throat."

Keegan grunted.

"Now pull out slowly. That's it. Oh, it burns, but so good." James moaned, and knowing it was from as much pleasure as pain really turned Keegan on. "Now fuck me. Slow then fast, push me hard. I like it a little rough."

The magic words. Keegan needed no further urging. He lost himself to the feel and rhythm of mating, of taking James the way he wanted to. His lover bent over, receiving Keegan, submitting...

James moaned as Keegan worked him, and unfortunately, Keegan didn't take much longer to come.

"I wanted to draw this out, but I can't," he apologized in gasps as he moved from sliding to slamming his girth inside James's passage. "Oh fuck. James. Yes, yes." Keegan shouted and came hard.

He trembled with the force of his orgasm, lost in the bliss of so much feeling. Like a lightbulb had burst in front of his eyes, he was blinded with lust as he emptied into the condom. Sweating and panting, he continued to spend in smaller jolts, the electric fractures of release stealing everything but the tactile sensation of James against him.

When Keegan could again think, he carefully withdrew.

"Good, hmm?" James stared at him in the mirror with half-closed eyes. "I told you."

Keegan chuckled and turned to the bathroom to clean up. Trust James to have to have the last word. But the little shit was right. God above, that had been the most explosive climax he'd had in a long time. A lot like the one he'd shared with James and Carol, but so much better. Here, it was just the two of them. Carol had been sweet and convenient, but she didn't pull at him the way James did. The way someone else might in the future. The right woman would make all the difference.

At the thought, he stilled, his hands on the sink. *So now I'm not only a bisexual, but an orgy guy?* Keegan groaned and wet a clean washcloth with warm water, then turned off the water.

He took it to James, now lying belly-down in the middle of his bed.

"James?"

James didn't answer, but the smile on his face said what words didn't. Keegan spread James's legs and cleaned him up, not feeling at all weird about taking care of his friend—his lover—the way he'd expected he might.

As he examined his emotions, he realized he felt no less manly, no less James's best friend. *With benefits*, he added with snark, thinking James would appreciate the sentiment. Keegan tossed the washcloth to the floor and stroked James's firm, muscular back, in awe of the toned body his friend had developed.

One thing for living on the outside of the government's program. Without the regimented schedule and magic drugs from the PWP, the team had definitely gotten in much better shape. Every one of them had a body others envied. Though Keegan knew the rest of the team looked at him with appreciation, he now understood how they felt about James as he looked at the man from a new perspective.

A glance at the bedside clock showed the lateness of the hour, and he knew he should get some shut-eye like James. But after what he and James had just done, he couldn't make himself go back to his side of the room. Telling himself not to be such an emotional pussy, he made all sorts of excuses for himself as he eased next to James and pulled the idiot into his arms.

He just didn't want to hurt James's feelings, was all. And they needed to be partners again. The last few days had felt like he'd cut off his own arm. The jokes, the laughter, and the easy friendship he shared with James Foreman meant a lot more than he'd ever admitted to himself.

Keegan tightened his arms around James and pulled him against his chest. *Hell, he means a lot more than I'm admitting to myself now. But take it slow, Keegan. Tomorrow ain't worth sacrificing tonight.*

He fell asleep with James in his arms and a lost locket dangling in his dreams—the promise of something more just out of reach.

\* \* \*

Four days later, Keegan stretched his neck, cracking left and right. "I'm beginning to miss Bend. And I never thought I'd say that."

“Well, you did say Bend and not Jack.”

“Hell no. Not seeing Jack Keiser’s pissed-off expression day in and day out is a blessing.” Keegan grinned and dug into the diner’s special french toast, which he had to admit was excellent. “Darlene,” he called out. “This is the best damn breakfast I’ve had in weeks.”

The older woman beamed and flushed, then scurried back behind the counter to whisper with her friends.

“Stop flirting,” James said as he salted his eggs. “It’s embarrassing.”

“Jealous?” Keegan teased, his voice low so as not to be overheard.

James snorted. “You wish. Come on, cowboy. Get your strength back up so we can find what we came for. I swear, I’ve never seen anyone eat as much as you do in my life.”

“You should see my brother.” As soon as he said it, Keegan had a sudden urge to invite Judd out to introduce him to James. He’d of course talked about his partner with his family, but in much less intimate reference.

“I’d like to.”

Keegan couldn’t read the look James sent him. “What about your family? How are Aunt Gloria and Uncle Chris doing?”

James smiled. “Same old, same old. This year they’re after Marianne to settle down with her boyfriend. Last year it was Katie. Two down, two to go.”

Keegan knew his friend had four cousins, all older, all women. “So we’ve never talked about it, but how did they respond when you told ’em about, well, you know.”

The smile around James’s mouth invited Keegan to lean over and taste it. And the notion freaked him out, because behind closed doors, the intimacy between them was one thing. But in public? Keegan wasn’t ready for that yet, if ever.

“My family knew everything there was to know about me when I was eight. I set my cousins’ dollhouse on fire while trying to debate who would make a better kisser, Barbie or Ken.”

Keegan froze with his cup almost to his mouth. "What?"

James shrugged, humor in his dark eyes. "My cousins used to treat me like their personal living doll and included me in everything. So when I overheard Katie talking to Melissa about who she'd rather kiss, I joined in. I couldn't figure it out in my own head, and when I said it out loud, they started quizzing me like you wouldn't believe. Then Marianne went and told my aunt, and she came in and started grilling me. I was so upset and confused, I set the dollhouse on fire."

"No shit."

James chuckled. "But it ended well. Thankfully, my family is pretty open about things. My uncle and aunt sat me down and had a talk. As I got older, they continued to talk. Never at me, but to me. Makes a difference." James took another bite of his eggs.

Fascinated, Keegan nodded. "I guess it does. My family never talks about anything confrontational. Ever. To this day, my momma still hints about grandkids, but you say one word alluding to sex and she turn three shades of red and runs from the room. Which is weird because I know my daddy was a real hell-raiser growing up."

"Apple doesn't fall far from the tree," James murmured suggestively, and Keegan felt his face heat.

After their explosive encounter four days ago, he and James had blown each other a few times, but nothing as fierce as what Keegan had done, taking James the way he had. He thought the fact they'd slowed down had been a good thing, giving him and James time to relax and treat the new aspect of their friendship as mostly casual. But Keegan never quite stopped thinking about sex without imagining James somewhere in the picture. And that he hadn't expected.

"Well, my momma has been on my ass for grandkids for years. I think my brother is gonna fulfill her wishes soon, though. He asked his girlfriend to marry him last month. Now the pressure's off me."

James chuckled.

“What?”

“Come on, Keegan. Was the pressure really on? Do you ever do anything you don’t want to do?”

Keegan wanted to argue, but James was right. “Sometimes it’s scary how well you know me.”

“I’m good like that.” James wiggled his eyebrows.

Keegan laughed. “Dick.”

“Freak.”

“Can I get you anything else?” Darlene asked when she came back, trying to stifle a grin.

“No, darlin’, we’re good.” Keegan held out his hand to accept the check.

James smiled, and like that, the woman was hooked on all that gooey brown-eyed charm. Keegan restrained himself from rolling his eyes.

“Actually, you might be able to help us,” James said in that husky voice designed to remind a body of sex. “My cousin and I are looking for a long-lost relative. My aunt passed away and left us a family history. It’s actually pretty neat, though I wish Aunt Kitty was still with us.”

James was in his heyday spinning stories, but Darlene seemed to like him well enough.

“You don’t say.” She leaned closer to hear.

“Yes, ma’am. Seems like Aunt Kitty found out she had a cousin disinherited a long time ago. Some indiscretion or another,” James said in a lower voice. “But anyhow, she wanted us to pull the family together for our annual reunion.”

“So how can I help you?”

A good question. Keegan glared at James to hurry the hell up.

James ignored him. “Well, from what we’ve learned, Aunt Kitty’s cousin had a daughter who lives somewhere around Jackson Heights. We don’t know what she

looks like, but we do know she'll be wearing a locket the size of a dime. It looks gold or silver, depending on how the light hits it. And there's a—"

"Small blue stone right in the middle of it." Darlene nodded. "Well, what do you know? The new girl is who you're looking for!"

Keegan's heart raced. "New girl?"

"Rory Taylor. Pretty girl. Long blonde hair, tall, kind of thin except up top." Darlene held her hand out in front of her chest. Then her face fell. "Oh no."

James asked, "What's wrong, Darlene?"

"Well, it's just that Rory was having some problems with Gina Jackson." Darlene glanced around her and, seeing no one, pulled up a chair from a nearby table and joined them at their booth. "See, Gina is jealous of Rory, on account of half the men in town are panting after her. Beautiful girl, but she has a bit of an attitude." Darlene sniffed. "Anyhow, rumor has it Gina keyed Rory's car for some reason. Then Rory socked her right in the kisser."

James blinked. "Rory punched the woman in the mouth?"

"Broke her nose, actually."

"Sounds like Aunt Kitty's relations to me," Keegan said with a straight face. Their friend and fellow psychic Kitty was a pain in the ass, but this woman sounded like someone he'd like to get to know better. Too bad they'd come to take back the locket she'd stolen.

Darlene nodded. "Gina surely had it coming to her. No one likes her. Problem is, the Jacksons pretty much run the town. From the mayor to the sheriff. Ed Jackson, one of the town council members, was in here with Rory just the other day, right before the sheriff came to take her away."

"Sheriff?" Keegan prodded.

"But you know what?" Darlene whispered, her watery blue eyes bright with excitement. "I heard Ed asking her about her locket. Wanted it for a friend of his who collects jewelry. Rory told him right off no way in hell she'd give it to him. Her



mother gave it to her. Means the world to that girl. So anyway, Ed called his brother, who came to arrest her.”

“That doesn’t sound right,” James said slowly.

No, it didn’t. Another player in this game looking for the same locket they’d been sent to retrieve? What were the odds that an antique piece of jewelry missing for hundreds of years just happened to turn up here, now, and not only were they after it, but someone else was as well? So much for a simple grab and go. Keegan couldn’t be happier this wouldn’t be simple. He hated easy.

“Well, I never thought Ed would go that far, but Rory won’t have anything to do with him. Personally, I think he’s hoping she’ll beg him to free her. Ed Jackson is a thug in designer pants. Wants Rory real bad.”

“So she’s sitting in jail as we speak?” Keegan asked and pulled out a wad of bills, more than enough to cover their breakfast and leave Darlene a whopper of a tip.

“Yes, she is. But you didn’t hear it from me.” Darlene accepted the money, nodded, and left their table under the watchful stares of the few patrons at the counter, the couple at the far booth in the corner, the busboy, and the other waitress.

How she thought no one would know she’d said anything was beyond him, but Keegan didn’t much care. Time to collect the locket and go. He had a funny feeling they needed to move sooner than later.

“Yeah, I know that look on your face, and I agree.” James stood with him, and they left the diner in a hurry, walking the short distance to the police station just down the road at the end of the main strip.

Keegan pulled him to a stop before they entered. “Let me do the talking. I’m big, but my good ole boy accent eases ’em. You do charming real well, but your accent can irritate us Southern folks.”

“Yes, sir.” In a quieter voice, James added, “Don’t think you can get away with this dominance shit all the time. It’s sexy, but it’s also annoying. And you’re going to owe me for this later tonight.”

Keegan had to fight down the urge to smother his growing erection. He mentally called on visions of his boss and imagined failing to retrieve the locket. That willed his arousal away in a heartbeat.

Preceding James, he entered the building.

\* \* \*

Rory had had enough. She’d tried to play nice, but four days in the slammer for failing to sleep with Ed or hand over her most prized possession was the end of enough. She’d been saving her breakout for an emergency, but at this point, she’d make do with just leaving this stupid six-by-eight-foot cell. They’d moved a belligerent drunk into the one next to her last night, and the creep had vomited all over himself. The stench alone made her want to heave.

Low voices caught her attention, and she eased off the narrow cot.

The deep drawl of a Southern boy joined the arched pitch of someone not from around here. And there, Deputy Do-Right, Stanton, that prick.

“This her?” Stanton rounded the corner with two strangers she’d never seen before. Because no way in hell could a woman forget those faces.

The taller one wore a cowboy hat, a black T-shirt stretched tight over a huge chest and broad shoulders, jeans, and dark brown boots. Southern sex personified. He looked rough and ready, and it was a good thing she was behind bars, or she feared she would have climbed the mountain of his glorious body and mounted him then and there.

Not to be outdone, his companion looked like the epitome of handsome. More streamlined than the cowboy but muscular all the same, he had short brown hair and eyes so dark, they looked black. The square jaw, aquiline nose, and cheekbones hinted at Nordic ancestry. Dressed in jeans and a button-down shirt, he looked like

the cover model for a fashion magazine that specialized in the world's sexiest people.

Whoa, strange time for her libido to go crazy and for her locket to suddenly try to burn a hole through her chest.

"Ow! Shit!" She pulled the chain away from her body and danced in place to ease the sting. After tentatively touching it again, she sighed with relief to find the metal cold once more.

"You okay?" Stanton asked as if he cared. Putting on a show for the visitors.

She glanced up at them only to see two pairs of stunned gazes fixated on her. The one in the hat cleared his throat and blinked, taking away the sight of that magnetic silver gaze.

"That's her."

"Her who?" she asked, trying not to appear so fascinated with the sexy duo.

The one with the big brown eyes forced a grin. "Honey, you don't know us, but my cousin and I have been looking for you." He gave her some spiel about a dead Aunt Kitty and a reunion, but she wasn't buying it.

He was good, but she'd been bullshitting bullshitters since she'd learned to talk. A genetic gift, like her affinity for precious metals.

"I'm sorry," Brown Eyes continued. "I know this is a lot to take in. Your mother never mentioned Kitty?"

He spoke as if Deputy Dawg and the iron bars didn't stand between them. "Never talked about her, no." Rory summoned a few tears, pleased she still had the ability to cry on command. "Mother died when I was just twelve." Truth. "But Uncle Bobby never mentioned he had another sister. Must have been bad blood between them."

Cowboy and Brown Eyes exchanged a glance while Stanton looked on, suspicious.

“Sorry, sweetheart,” Cowboy murmured. To his friend, he said, “You shouldn’t have dropped it on her like that, James.”

“Look, Keegan, I just thought she should know how much Aunt Kitty wanted us to find her.” James smiled apologetically. “The family really wants to meet you. We’d be happy to pay your fine and take you home. You’ll love Uncle Jack. He’s a treasure.”

Keegan choked and muttered something under his breath, and she knew she was missing half of what James meant.

“Where’s home? And who are you?”

Keegan nudged James out of the way. “I’m your cousin Keegan, and that’s James. We live out West and made the trip east just to see you. It’d mean a lot to my momma if we found you.” His voice dropped an octave, and she had to restrain her urge not go to him and beg him not to stop talking. Could this guy be any sexier? “She and Kitty were real good friends.”

James nodded behind him. “Shawn, what do we need to do to get her out of here?”

Shawn? James was already on a first-name basis with the deputy?

Her expression must have changed, though she’d done her best to show nothing but sadness and confusion.

Keegan took a cautious step back. “We’re rushing you. Sorry, Rory. That is your name, right?”

She nodded.

“It’s just that the reunion’s put us on a deadline. But we’re not gonna force you to come. We’re not here to force you to do anything,” he emphasized. “You want to stay here, it’s okay. Deputy Stanton tells us you’re safe enough. I just thought you might want out of here.” He glanced at the drunk snoring in the cell beside her.

He made a good point. Before she could agree, Ed Jackson appeared, looking none too pleased with her visitors.

“Shawn? What’s going on?”

Keegan and James turned as one, putting themselves between the jail cell and Ed and Stanton. They worked as a team, but if they were cousins, she’d eat Keegan’s hat. And *her* cousins? Please. She knew enough about her heritage to know there’d never been a Kitty anywhere in her family tree, on her mom’s or dad’s side.

“Who are you, and what are you doing here?” Ed asked in that lord-of-the-manor tone she hated.

He didn’t seem to know them, and Rory’s tension eased quite a bit. She decided she’d be better off leaving with them and letting them explain what the hell they were doing pretending to be her relation than staying in jail under Ed’s thumb.

“That’s James, and I’m Keegan,” Keegan replied. “Who the fuck are you?”

Oh, she liked him more and more.

James hissed at him to behave. “Calm down, hothead.” He turned to Ed. “We’re Rory’s cousins. And you are?”

“That’s Edward Jackson, head of the town council in Jackson Heights,” Deputy Stanton answered with pride. “Finest man ever stood here in this jail.”

Ed’s anger seemed to deflate at the compliment, but he didn’t take his gaze from Keegan. “Thank you, Deputy. As Shawn said, I’m head of the town council. I’m responsible for the citizen’s arrest on Rory.”

“Citizen’s arrest?” she scoffed. “You threw me in here because I wouldn’t sleep with you.”

Ed flushed. “I had you arrested because you assaulted my cousin. Rory broke her nose.”

Keegan turned his head and winked at her over his shoulder. “Rory? A little thing like her? I don’t believe it.”

Only a guy six and a half feet tall would call her little.

“You just met her. You wouldn’t know what she’s capable of.” Stanton defended Ed, his boss’s brother, with his every breath.

“Yeah, and I just met you. How do I know you didn’t trump up the charges? Let’s see the arrest record,” Keegan demanded.

Stanton stuttered.

James interrupted. “Actually, I’d be interested in seeing that as well. Has she had her due process? Been Mirandized? I work for the State Bureau of Investigation, so when I say I know the law, I’m not kidding.”

Stanton winced, and Ed paled.

James’s voice grew razor sharp. “I didn’t think so. I want her out of here right now.”

Keegan and James stood back as Stanton hurried away to get the keys without looking at Ed.

“You can’t just come in here and—”

“And what? Demand that Rory receives what every citizen of this country has been guaranteed?”

Keegan leaned back against the bars and crossed his arms over his chest, his biceps flexing. “Go on, cuz.”

“You shoved her into a cell and violated her civil rights. You’ll be lucky if she doesn’t decide to sue you *and* your police force.”

“Hell, why not sue the town?” Keegan offered.

“I just want out of here,” Rory murmured, trying her best to figure out what the hell was going on.

Ed looked flustered. “She hurt my cousin. I have proof.”

“Fine. Take it to a court of law and get justice the right way.”

Keegan straightened up when Stanton returned with the key.

He unlocked the door, and Keegan reached in to grab Rory's hand. At the contact, she gasped. He felt warm, and the locket at her throat hummed the way it did when she found buried gems and precious stones.

A glance at him showed him focused on the others, but his jaw was clenched tight. Heat literally welled where they touched. So warm, arousing, sexual.

Good Lord, she was not going to orgasm in a jail cell two feet from Ed Jackson and a drunk covered in vomit. And not from the touch of a stranger.

She willed herself to relax and felt the locket cool. But Keegan's touch still bothered her. She liked it too much.

His voice was definitely gritty when he said, "James, you can argue this in court. Let's go."

"Court?" Ed frowned. "You're going to take this to court?"

"Damn straight. I may have just met her, but she's blood. You don't fuck with family." Still gripping Rory's hand, Keegan pushed past Ed and Stanton, James in tow.

They said nothing as they left the building and practically ran down the street.

"To the SUV, now," Keegan murmured.

They rushed around the corner and froze. Two men armed with rifles stood guarding the one vehicle in Jackson Heights that didn't belong. More proof that Ed and his relatives had a stranglehold on this town. Before they were spotted, Rory and the guys retreated into a copse of trees back around the corner.

"You just had to run at the mouth, didn't you?" Keegan said with disgust.

"What's going on? Hey, let me go." Rory tried but couldn't break free from Keegan's giant hand engulfing her smaller one.

"Sorry, sweetcakes, but you're coming with us. SBI, my ass," he muttered at James.

"Hey, it got her out of there," James protested.

“You couldn’t have come up with something nontraceable? Jackson is probably making calls as we speak. Dumb-ass. After all I’ve taught you.”

“All *you’ve* taught *me*? Please, cowboy. You were a glorified cop who used to rope steers. I was Marine Corps before I joined the mumbo squad.”

“Mumbo squad?” Keegan surprised her by laughing during their heated argument. “Haven’t heard that one in a while. I guess you are good for something.”

Rory considered her options. They’d obviously lied, but they’d freed her in the process. And Keegan had taken Ed down a few pegs. For that alone, she’d have done him a favor. “You two rescued me, I figure I owe you. Follow me, and then you can explain just what the hell ‘Aunt Kitty’ really wants with me.” She tugged her hand, simultaneously relieved and strangely at a loss when Keegan let go. *Too weird. Even for me.*

“After you, beautiful,” James said with a nod. And off they went.



## Chapter Six

Rory knew better than to return to her cabin, so she sought sanctuary at Becky's. The old woman answered the rickety door of her shack before Rory could knock.

"Bout time. I was just heading out to bingo."

Keegan tipped his hat. "Ma'am."

"Ma'am." James nodded.

Becky sighed. "You just don't see manners like this anymore." Then she leaned closer to Rory and whispered in a voice loud enough to wake the dead, "Or men this fine. Did you see those muscles, girl? I bet they're both packin', and I don't mean guns." She cackled until she coughed.

Rory flushed and tried to pretend she hadn't heard Becky's embarrassing comments. "Yeah, well, we kind of ran into trouble downtown. So I was wondering if—"

"Don't stay here. Ed will be coming soon enough with his brother and a few more deputies, I imagine." She'd foreseen. "You'll be safe enough at number four. You know where to go."

Becky's favorite watering hole was a large space set in the heart of the mountain. A little-known treasure trove of illegal goods, guns, and anything else Becky wanted hidden from the authorities. It all added up to a nice stash after six or seven decades' worth of collection, and Becky had supposedly only ever shared it with Rory. Why, Rory didn't know.

"Thanks, Becky." Rory paused, wondering how to introduce her companions.

“Don’t bother. I’ll see my way out.” Becky smiled. “I left a bag up there for you. Figured you might need it.” To James she said, “Foreman, make sure you take care of my girl.”

Foreman? The same foreman who was coming to take Rory away?

James blinked. “Ah, okay.”

Not sure what to make of that, Rory watched Becky amble off. “Number four, she said. It’s a hike up the mountains, but you guys look like you can handle it.” And if Becky trusted two strangers with the whereabouts of her most prized hideaway, Rory would trust them too.

Up to a point.

Two hours and stiff joints later, she and her “cousins” walked into a ten-foot-wide by thirty-foot-deep cave in the mountain that Becky had converted into a small, one-room house. Rock walls and a ceiling braced with wooden beams surrounded a cleared space complete with two small skylights letting in the sun. The even floor looked worn, and she wondered how often Becky had come to store the treasures lining the multitudes of shelves by the back wall. Her trusty still looked well-used and sat by the western wall in pristine condition. Next to it sat two large jugs of what could only be some type of pungent alcohol.

“Hey, there’s a stream running through here.” Keegan knelt by the back corner, removed his hat, and put his hand in the water. Then he ran his hand through his thick black hair. With his hat off, she could see that his hair fell to just below his nape and was prone to unruly waves. And wow, did he take masculinity to a whole new level.

James sidled next to her, making her jump.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to startle you. I don’t suppose Becky has any food up here? I’m starved.” He patted his flat stomach, and Rory had the urge to ask him to lift his shirt and show off what had to be killer abs.

*So not normal, girl. Lusting after not just one, but two strangers?* Aware said strangers had neared and were now standing too close, staring at her, she took a

healthy step back and crossed her arms over her chest, wishing they didn't follow her every movement like hungry hawks. Granted, Rory indulged in sex; she wasn't a prude. She liked feeling good. But she'd never been into more than one partner, and not after just meeting the guys. Trust was one commodity she didn't have in spades.

She nervously tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "Okay, guys. Spill it. Who are you, why are you here, and what do you want?"

No one spoke. The intensity in the room ratcheted up another notch, and then Keegan sighed and sat in one of only four pieces of furniture in the room. A large, thick recliner, a table, a chair, and one huge-ass mattress that lay on the ground occupied the sparse room. Rory had no idea how Becky had managed to drag a mattress that size up the mountain, even in her younger years, but she was dying to ask.

"I guess I'll answer your questions," James said drily when Keegan closed his eyes and tipped his head back, exposing a thick neck and wide shoulders. Even at rest, he appeared dangerous. Rory told herself not to underestimate either of them, especially after seeing the way they'd handled Ed and Stanton. They not only had bulk but brains at their disposal.

James sat at the table, leaving Rory standing in the middle of the room, no longer crowded. Alert and ready to flee at the slightest provocation, she felt safer standing above both men. Understanding James wanted her at ease, she nodded in appreciation.

"Nicely played. Show yourselves as nonthreatening by sitting, making your size less of an issue. And the little woman softens, begins to think she might just be able to trust you."

Keegan didn't speak or open his eyes, but James grinned. Her heart seemed to stop, captured by his lethal warmth. A genuine smile like that knocked her socks off. Were these guys deadly or what?

"I like you, Rory Taylor. That is your name, right?"

“Mine, yeah. But what’s yours, *cousin*?”

“I’m James, that’s Keegan. Our real names. We’re not your cousins, not related at all to anything but a job concerning you, your locket, and Bend, Oregon.”

Mention of the locket alarmed her, but she forced herself to remain loose. The second time in four days someone was after her necklace. It was like being sixteen all over again, fighting with her uncles over possession of it. As if her mother would have ever wanted *them* to have anything of hers.

“Go on,” she said when James studied her. She was more than aware he still hadn’t given her his or Keegan’s last names.

“We came to Jackson Heights to get a locket that was supposedly stolen from our client.” James frowned. “You seem pretty attached to it. I was prepared to buy it from you if you hadn’t already pawned it. But I get the feeling you’ll just tell me to kiss your pretty ass if I ask how much.”

“Hmm, pretty ass. Yep.” Keegan blinked his eyes open and grinned at her. “She’s got a pretty ass and a hard right hook, I’ll bet. You sure do pack a wallop, darlin’.” The sharp look he sent James didn’t go unnoticed.

“She does, doesn’t she?” James said quietly.

Keegan raised a brow. “You feel it too?”

James nodded.

“Touch her and see what happens.”

“Whoa, down boys.” Rory backed up a step when they both rose to their feet.

“Calm down. I’m not going to hurt you.” James stopped an arm’s length from her. “Just touch the tip of my finger if it makes you feel any better.”

“Why?”

“Why not? Just do it,” Keegan said. “I promise not to kill you, and he promises not to molest you with his pinkie. Okay?”

“That’s not funny.” She glared at him. To her surprise, he smiled back at her at the same instant James did, and the double whammy of charm had her reaching out

to James before she could overthink it. The second her finger touched his, sparks danced through her body and power built like an inferno under the spot beneath her locket.

“Fuck,” James swore, his eyes wide.

“Told you.” Keegan licked his lips and stared at her as if he wanted to eat her. So much hunger in that stare...

Scared and unsure of what they meant to do to her when she refused to give up the locket, Rory gave in to her instinctive need to flee and stepped back, breaking the unwanted connection between herself and James. Before the men could approach, she held out her hands and released the power inside her.

The explosion that resulted propelled both men against the walls, shook the cavern, and dislodged rocks and dust from the ceiling. James and Keegan landed hard. James didn’t move, but Keegan moaned.

Rory knew she needed to escape. *Like yesterday.* The locket never lied. She took off down the side of the mountain as if the hounds of hell were on her heels. And by the roar that followed, they very well might be.

Keegan tried to stand. It took him several tries before he could see straight. “James?”

James didn’t move, but he did groan. The woman had gone.

Annoyed and angered she’d put both of them on their asses, Keegan yelled out his frustration and forced himself to stand. He went after her like a man possessed.

Though she had a good lead on him, he narrowed it down until he could hear her ahead of him. Using the adrenaline surging through him for strength, he stopped and called on his telekinesis to crack a few trees in the far front of him.

Her shriek pinpointed her location, and he rushed to see her disappearing into another thicket in front of him. Keegan focused and heard her scream in fear as he tugged her back to him with invisible hands.

She struggled but couldn't free herself from his telekinetic hold.

When she saw him, her eyes narrowed, but before she could zap him again with that powerful energy, he ripped the locket from her neck with a mental tug. "Insurance."

"No! Let me go! Give it back!" She squirmed and swore but couldn't break free.

Keegan held out his hand and clenched it tight once the locket dropped in his palm. "Use that weird mojo against me again, and you'll never get it back." A weak threat, but it was all he had at the moment.

"Just don't lose it." Rory panted. Her eyes were wide, and her face looked too pale. "Now whatever you're doing to me, stop it."

"Scared? Worried about that bubble holding you off the ground?" Three feet off the ground. "You should be. We're going back up the mountain, and you'd better hope James is okay."

He tried to sound mean, but a huge part of him wanted to reassure her he wouldn't harm her. Keegan didn't stand for hurting women. It went against the very foundation of his upbringing. Besides, he liked what he'd seen of Rory so far. And if that touch was anything to go by, they had some serious chemistry they needed to explore.

Touching her had been like touching James. Hot, intense, and sexual beyond belief. That James felt it as well told Keegan they needed to see just what kind of power Rory had.

The walk back to number four passed in silence. They were an odd sight, Keegan was sure. He looked done in, a big man covered in dirt and sweat followed by a floating woman glaring holes through his back. He didn't have to see her to know she was more than pissed off.

Luckily, she hadn't tried to fry him with that mind power again.

When he reached the cave, he looked around for James and saw him sitting on the ground with his back against the wall. His friend gingerly touched a bruise at his temple.

“So much for your good looks,” Keegan said gruffly, relieved to find his partner in one piece.

“Shit. That fucking hurt,” James growled. “My head feels like it’s splitting in two.”

Rory cleared her throat. “Let me down from here, and I’ll take a look. I had some medical experience in my younger years.”

“What, when you were twelve?” Keegan drawled. She didn’t look much older than twenty-one or -two, and she’d done enough damage already.

“I’m twenty-eight, asshole. Now let me go.”

“Keegan, let her go. We’ll be safe enough.” A ball of fire danced in James’s palm.

“Oh my God. What *are* you two?” Rory’s eyes were wild.

“One wrong step from you,” Keegan warned Rory, “and I’ll launch your ass off the mountain. That’s if James doesn’t barbecue you first.”

She scowled at him, but he could see her fear. “Try it, and I’ll brain you like I did your buddy.”

“You tried, but my head’s like a rock. Or so I’ve been told.”

“That’s the truth,” James agreed.

Keegan cautiously loosened his hold, but Rory didn’t move.

She just stood there looking back and forth from him to James. She settled her gaze on James and warned, “You set me on fire, and I will *not* be happy.”

“Just consider me a psychic friend—1-900-HERE-TO-HELP.”

She quirked a wobbly smile and finally crossed to him. “I thought I was weird, but you two have me beat. A fire starter and a man who moves things with his

mind.” She gave Keegan a side glance. “Who knew there was even a brain cell under all that muscle?”

James snorted with laughter while Rory fussed over him.

Seeing her genuine remorse and gentle hands on his friend, Keegan relaxed and sat next to him.

James leaned his head back so Rory could look at it. “I thought she’d lost you for sure.”

“She was fast, but I’m faster.”

“Which is amazing, considering how much your giant ego must weigh,” she said under her breath.

James grinned, then winced when she touched his forehead.

“Wait here.” She glanced around her.

Keegan asked, “What are you looking for?”

“A rag to put in that stream over there. The cold will help the swelling.”

Wanting to be rid of his sweat-soaked shirt anyway, Keegan pulled off his T-shirt and handed it to her. “That feels better.” He sighed. “Wet this down and use it.”

She stared at him, her mouth open.

“What?”

“N-nothing.” Rory took his shirt, careful not to touch him as she did so, and scurried away to the stream in back.

James said in a low voice, “She was probably stunned at the sight of you. You have that effect on us mere mortals.”

“Fuck you.” Keegan flushed. James thought it funny that Keegan, for all his brawn, was a bit self-conscious about his body. He knew he looked good, but he didn’t handle compliments well.

James taunted, “Trying to tempt her into staying?”



“Woman is going to be a huge pain in my ass, I can feel it.” He glared at her as she returned.

“I thought that was my job,” James said under his breath.

Rory returned with the wet shirt. She wouldn’t look at Keegan, and he couldn’t tell if she’d heard James or not. Damn. Would having sex with a guy hamper his ability to get laid by women now?

Complications he had no business thinking about, with his friend nearly brained and the instigator of all their trouble too sexy for her own good. Her hair was a tangle of ash blonde hair that hid half her face and tickled the tops of her generous breasts.

“So Rory, why don’t you tell us about this locket.” Keegan held it in the palm of his hand.

“Let me see it.” James held out a hand.

“Sure. Just keep it far away from Attila.” Keegan nodded at Rory.

James turned it over in his hands. A thin locket of what looked like white gold encrusted with one shining blue gem in its center sat on a sturdy gold chain. “Is it your focus? Or does the power come from the locket?”

Rory remained tight-lipped.

“Hold on.” James placed the locket over his neck, and Rory gritted her teeth. She really seemed to want it back, which gave them leverage.

James held out a ball of fire and concentrated on it. “Nothing. Keegan, you try it.”

Keegan took it and tried to pull some energy from it, but the locket felt completely normal. “I don’t get it. What’s the fuss over this thing if it’s not part of the weird collection?”

“I guess it’s not. You remember what Jack said. We’re here to collect a family heirloom gone missing.”

"I don't know what was told to you, but that locket belongs to me," Rory stated. "I've had it since my mother died and kept it for sentimental reasons."

"So the tie to the locket is an emotional one, and the power is all you." James studied her with interest.

Keegan frowned. "What you're saying is you're a telekinetic, like me."

She shook her head. "You're strange, even by my standards. I've never had anyone touch me without touching me before."

"I call them his whisper hands." James grinned. "Almost as good as his actual hands."

Rory stared between them with speculation and, if Keegan wasn't mistaken, more than a little prurient interest. "Yeah, well, whatever. I want my locket back. It's mine. Really."

"And we really don't care."

"Keegan." James shook his head and groaned. "Remind me not to do that again."

"We saved you from Jackson and Deputy Dawg, so do us a favor and come clean. What the hell is up with this town?" Keegan wanted to know.

Rory sat there on her knees, exasperated, annoyed, and so friggin' sexy, he wanted to lay her flat on her back and see what she was made of. Postured the way she was, she would have looked right at home in a bondage video, collared and wearing a leather bustier he'd slowly take apart with his teeth.

She blinked at him, blushed, and quickly looked at James. "I grew up around here but never actually lived in Jackson Heights. I've only been in town the past year. From what I've seen, the town is practically owned by the Jacksons. I haven't had too much trouble from them."

"Except for Gina and now Ed," Keegan reminded her.

She ignored him. "Gina has some idiotic notion that whatever her older cousin wants, he should have. Brent is fixated on me."

James corrected, "Don't you mean Ed?"

"Him too." She sounded miserable. "It's not me, it's this town. Say no to a Jackson, and they'll hound you for life. I told Brent I didn't want to go out with him. He won't take no for an answer. So a few weeks ago, I was forced to embarrass him in front of a bunch of his friends. He was trying to shove a hand up my skirt in public, for Christ's sake."

"Asshole." The more Keegan heard about the Jacksons, the more he disliked them.

"Brent was embarrassed, and Gina got back at me by keying my car. Meanwhile, Ed has been all over me, trying to prove how much better he is than Brent and every other guy in town. Like, he can get the girl no one else can. Me? I just want to wrap up my business and move on."

"To where?" James asked.

She shrugged. "Nowhere in particular."

"What do you do?" Keegan wondered. "Beat people up for a living?"

"Jerk. No, I make jewelry."

"You have a shop in town, darlin'?"

"No. I'm saving up for one." She cleared her throat and gave Keegan a smile so bright, it blinded him. "I'm very close to having enough to start. So trust me when I say as much as I love this locket, I'd sell it to you in a heartbeat if I trusted you guys are who you say you are. I just don't know that you won't try to rip me off at the first opportunity. I've been around enough people to know you don't trust who you don't know. And even then, I never give away treasures without a guaranteed fee."

Keegan wanted to look away, but the sincerity in her gray-green eyes begged him to believe her.

James rubbed his forehead, and his tension seemed to ease. "How do we know *you're* telling the truth?"

“How do you know I’m not?” she countered. “Consider this. I’ve been in town a whole year, and right before you clowns arrive, Ed is asking on behalf of a friend of his that I sell him my most prized possession. Why the hell would I trust you two, who I don’t even know?”

“Which leads us to believe there’s more to it than a keepsake,” James reiterated.

Keegan agreed. “I’m thinkin’ you didn’t tell the whole truth. The locket didn’t work for me or James, but it works for you. I have a feeling you’d blast us off this mountain if you could, but without the locket, you can’t.” He was thinking out loud, but the more he thought about it, the more he thought he might be right.

She pursed her lips. “Tell you what. Let’s all get out of town together, and I’ll agree to talk to your client about the locket. If he’s legit, he can pay me what it’s worth and the deal’s done.”

James nodded. “First things first. We need to get off this mountain and back to the SUV.”

Keegan agreed. He clutched the locket in his hand and started to rise when Rory tackled him, digging frantically in his palm for it.

Amused by her struggles, Keegan shoved the locket into his pocket with one hand and grabbed Rory’s wrists with the other and a bit of telekinesis.

“Honey, you want it that bad, you just had to say so.”

“You son of a bitch. Gimme back what’s mine.” She growled and tried to knee him in the crotch.

“Bad girl.” He enjoyed the feel of her on top of him. So much softer than James. She was wiry, yet those full tits were really exciting him—and her, if her hard nipples were anything to go by. He used his mind to shift her, so that the vee of her legs fit right over his groin, where his cock strained against his fly.

She suddenly froze. “You, oh. That’s not, that’s a big—”

“Yes, it is. Good of you to notice, darlin’.” Keegan shot her a grin, more than amused when James laughed with him.

“Shut up.” The red staining her cheeks made him want to kiss her there. “I thought you said you wouldn’t molest me.”

“No, I said I wouldn’t kill you. I said James wouldn’t molest you.” Keegan drew his hands around her and dragged her ass closer, grinding her against him. “But honey, I’m just dyin’ to convince you to come.”

He rocked into her, lost in how good she felt. By the look in her soft eyes, she felt the same. Keegan plastered her flat against him and kissed her neck, her cheek, her mouth. Try as she might, she couldn’t disguise the soft sighs and tight nipples pressed up against him as she struggled to get free.

Pulling back to look at her, Keegan whispered, “Come with *us*, Rory. It’ll be good, I promise.”

“Us? Both of you?” she squeaked, her eyes like jade quarters.

James groaned. “Now that’s an image.”

Keegan continued. “Yeah. Come with us...all the way to Oregon. You can ditch the idiots in Jackson Heights who are after you, meet with our client, and tend to your business. After we fly back, we could—”

“I don’t fly.”

“Afraid?” asked James.

“No. I just have, um, a bit of a problem with authority.” At Keegan’s blank look, she grudgingly explained, “The law and I are not the best of friends. And I don’t need any more attention than I can handle.”

Keegan looked from her to James, wondering at the images and ideas floating through his brain. He didn’t know this woman. Didn’t know if she was a con artist, a thief, or the real deal. But those big eyes called to him. As did her rockin’ body. He wanted to ride her hard, to watch James take her. Maybe do her at the same time.

"Honey, we don't like extra attention either. So this calls for a road trip back home. You up for it?"

"Not as much as you are," she muttered and squirmed in his hold, making his ache worse.

"Rory, you do that again and we're both gonna get a big surprise."

"Big is right," James added with a grin.

She shoved at his chest, and Keegan released her. Rory rolled to her feet and stood. "I'll come with you to Bend. But I'm not making any promises."

James nodded. "Good enough that you're coming with us. Our job is to bring the locket back to our client."

"But no using your weird skills on me. No fire and no whisper hands," she said to them, looking both annoyed and sexually frustrated.

Keegan grinned. "No problem, darlin'." He couldn't wait to see what she was like under him, because he had a feeling this road trip would be as much an exercise in revelation as his trip with James had been. A glance at his friend—his *lover*—showed James looking from Keegan to Rory with interest.

Keegan gave him a subtle nod, on the same wavelength, and James smiled with satisfaction. "It's a deal, Rory."

"Good. One more thing. I keep the locket on me."

"Nope." Keegan slowly got to his feet. "I'll hold on to the locket. You hold on to me, and you won't lose it."

"Good one." James nodded.

"I thought so."

Rory looked from Keegan to James. "You don't mean that literally, do you?"

"Only if you want it. I won't lie. I'm gonna use our time together to get you in bed. You're hot as hell. But I'm not into force. You'll come to me because you want to, not because you have to."

"Arrogant much?"

James groaned. “You don’t know the meaning of the word *subtlety*, do you, Keegan?”

Rory shrugged. “That’s okay. I can deal with blunt honesty. And here’s some for you two. I’m not a mattress. I don’t sleep with men I don’t know. And I’m not going to sleep with either of you. No matter how attractive I find you.”

Keegan raised a brow. “Now that’s honest.”

James nodded. “Fair enough.”

“Then it’s a deal.” Rory held out a hand to shake on it.

“Sealed with a kiss.” Before she could protest, Keegan shoved her at James with his whisper hands, hoping James would catch on.

To his pleased surprise, James did.

## Chapter Seven

Watching Keegan and Rory roll around had been arousing, but kissing her proved more so. The woman had lips made for touching. So full and soft. She stiffened at first in his embrace, but when James traced her soft mouth with his tongue and slowly invaded, she responded. Beautifully.

Those full breasts pressed into him as he deepened the kiss and pulled her closer. Sipping, drinking, devouring her. She filled him the way Keegan did, leaving James desperate and hungry for more.

Astounded to feel such desire for this woman he'd met only a few hours ago, James slowly withdrew and stared down at her, gratified to see her mirrored confusion and caution.

"Holy shit. That was hot." Keegan broke the mood with a leering grin. "Oh yeah, I think we're all gonna get along real well on the way home."

Rory pulled away from James, breathing hard. "Asshole. Keegan, what did I say about those whisper hands?" Her shaky voice and heaving breasts made James feel protective, and he glared at Keegan to behave.

Keegan held up his hands in surrender. "Just wanted to solidify our deal, Rory. No harm, no foul. And I promise. No more whisper hands from now on out unless you ask for them. Now before you two get to rolling on the floor, how about we figure out a way to grab the SUV and ditch this place."

She gave Keegan the finger.

James fought his grin and ignored the urge to finish what he and Rory had started. But he couldn't help admitting how good she felt with him, and how good she'd looked in Keegan's arms. He had a sense that this woman would be able to



handle them both, and something about her hinted at more than a one-night stand. He wondered what she'd make of him and Keegan fucking and couldn't wait to find out.

"Why don't we rest up here and plan a way to distract the guards in town?" Keegan suggested.

"Yeah." Rory let out a long breath. "And I need to swing by my place to pick up my stuff."

"There's a bag you can use." Keegan walked to the corner of the room and held up a large red sack.

"Wow. She really did put my things together." Rory crossed to take the bag from Keegan, peered inside, and nodded. "That's most of what I need. Now for some clothes."

Keegan glanced at the corner again. "There's a suitcase."

Rory blinked. "Becky thought of everything."

"That's odd. How would Becky know what you needed?" James had a feeling this was all too easy, and tension pricked the back of his neck.

"Becky's psychic. Has odd visions of the future. She's beloved around town, which is probably why Ed and his cronies didn't give her a hard time when she stopped by my place to pack that stuff up." At James's questioning look, she explained. "Ed has someone keeping an eye on me all the time. Started a week ago, then a few days later, he asked about my locket. He's always been creepy, but lately it's gotten worse."

Keegan frowned. "I'll say. Our timing couldn't be better, huh, James?"

James agreed. "You have your things. And I have an idea of how to grab our SUV."

Several hours later, just as most folks settled down to sleep, James and Rory watched Ed Jackson's Mercedes catch on fire and burn in his driveway. While Ed shouted for help and the sirens sounded in the distance, James and Rory drove off

in the car they'd borrowed and met Keegan on the outskirts of town at a small mom-and-pop gas station. Rory parked the car in the lot, and she and James joined Keegan in the SUV.

"Any problems?" James asked.

"Nope." Keegan pulled away, and they started the long journey back to Oregon. "Two of Jackson's men left the minute his car blew. I heard it from where I was waiting. Nice job."

"Thanks."

"What about the other two who were hanging by the vehicle?" Rory asked from the backseat.

"They tripped into each other and somehow knocked themselves unconscious."

James turned around to see Rory's expression. Curious yet approving.

"Not bad. You're as dangerous as you look, slick." She sighed and settled back into the seat. "Now if you don't mind, I'm going to get some shut-eye. Wake me when we hit the hotel."

They'd agreed to drive west immediately, taking the fastest route back, and I40 seemed to be ideal. James spent the time catching up on his reading, leaving Keegan to his annoying music that the bastard had the nerve to program into all the channels of the radio.

Two hours later, outside of Knoxville, Keegan pulled over. "I'm tired, hungry, and if I don't get a workout pretty soon, I'm going to explode." Without asking James, he left the vehicle in front of a hotel and checked them in. He returned and tossed James a key card.

"You wake her. I'm going for a run." The hotel was in a rural area, and James had noted several dirt roads that they'd passed.

"No problem. Just don't leave me alone for too long. I need to stretch out myself." He'd expended a bit of energy earlier, but being in the close confines of the

car with two people he lusted after and who vibrated with psychic power left him buzzing and hungry.

“Understood.” Keegan grabbed a bag from the back, plunked his hat on his head, and left them behind, his long strides eating up the short distance to the hotel. As usual, the tall Texan garnered more than his share of attention as he moved.

So damn sexy. James sighed and moved into the driver’s seat. He drove the vehicle into the lot and parked. He turned to Rory, taken again by her loveliness. The woman was stunning, no two ways about it. Thick lashes dusted her almond-shaped eyes. A pert nose, stubborn chin, and patrician cheekbones graced a face too beautiful to be called merely pretty. Her plump lips parted with each slow breath she took. In sleep, she looked so vulnerable and trusting, a definite contrast to the tough-as-nails woman he’d met earlier today.

God, had it only been today they’d met? Oddly enough, James felt as if he’d known Rory much longer.

“Rory, honey. We’re here.”

She frowned, the pull of her light brows marring her angelic appearance. He snorted. He’d seen her attack Keegan and had felt her power nail him into a wall. Angelic she wasn’t.

“Rory?”

Silver-green eyes blinked at him, and Rory licked her lips. “We there yet?”

He chuckled. “You could say that. We’re just outside Knoxville and down for the night.”

Sitting up, she looked around her.

James followed her gaze. The night started to descend, pushing the late-summer sun past the horizon. To their right, fields of grass stretched far, cut off by a thick wall of trees. Beyond them, a diner and two gas stations squared off on either side of the road, competing for business.

She turned back to him. "What now?"

"Now we bunk down. I'm sick of driving. And I need to stretch out my legs. Come on."

He left the SUV, took a few things from his large suitcase, and threw them into his overnight bag, then waited while she did the same. She threw all her things into that red sack.

James wanted to know what she carried in there, but the protective way she handled the bag told him to exercise caution. He didn't want to scare her off.

"Where's Keegan?"

"He checked in already."

"Huh." She walked with James into the hotel and down a corridor to their room. They entered, and she paused. "One room, huh?"

"With two beds and a pull-out couch." At her wary look, he sighed. "Rory, we're serious about not forcing you into anything. Trust me; the last thing we want is you afraid of us."

A stubborn expression appeared on her face. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Good. Then there's nothing to worry about, right?"

"But I'm not stupid. You're both bigger and stronger than me." Her hand went to her throat and as quickly dropped away.

"And you don't have your locket," James murmured.

"So what? That doesn't mean I can't hurt you if I want to."

"Maybe if I told you a little something about us, you'd find it easier to accept we don't mean you any harm." James decided to trust his instincts and tell her some of the truth. Maybe it would help her trust them with her secrets. "Keegan and I met in the FBI. We went through the academy and worked a few cases before joining a special team, one made up entirely of psychics."

Rory sat in one of two chairs in the room, on the other side of the queen-size beds, and stared. "Really?"

“Yeah. Turns out the government isn’t as opposed to science fiction as people think. Anyway, Keegan and I partnered for a few years before the project closed down. We hunted bad guys; we didn’t rob, rape, and pillage for fun.”

She flushed, and he had the feeling she might have done some robbing of her own.

“When the program shut down, we left and joined with a few friends in Bend. We currently work in a gym.”

“That I can believe.” She eyed his build with appreciation. “You guys are seriously built. Weight lifters or steroid users, I wasn’t sure which.”

“Thanks,” he said drily.

“But why are psychics hanging out in a gym?”

Jack was going to kill him for telling her this, but James wanted her to know. He had a feeling if she wanted, she’d fit in right at home in Bend. And for the life of him, he couldn’t figure out why that mattered. “When we worked for the government, we were given a steady routine of exercise, both mental and physical, and drugs.”

Her eyes widened into silver pools edged with moss. “Drugs?”

“They made us stronger, but they did something to us that we’re still paying for. I could always call forth fire. But not to the degree I can now. And because I don’t have the drugs to keep it under control, I need a lot of physical and mental exercise to command the flames.”

“That makes a weird kind of sense, I guess. So that’s why Keegan is out running at night?”

He nodded. “And why when he gets back, I need to go out.”

“There’s no possibility of you accidentally setting the room on fire or anything, right?” she teased, but he could read the fear in her eyes.

“Not at all. I know when I’m hitting my limit. I’m more tired than anything right now, but it’s there inside me. It’s why working at a gym really helps. Lifting

weights, using those endorphins, it eases the power inside us.” He wanted to tell her that sex helped them as well, but didn’t want to push her more than he already had.

“So the two beds, one room thing,” she said when he kept silent.

“Yes?”

“Is this so I won’t bolt?”

James grinned. “Sweetheart, you want to run, no one’s stopping you. We have the locket we came for. I just thought there was safety in numbers. We still haven’t talked about who might be after that locket. Because it’s not any of our guys. Keegan and I were the only ones assigned to come and get it. And frankly, we were looking at this as a cush assignment. A pickup at the most. We had no idea there would be any danger involved.”

She sighed. “Danger seems to follow me around. Not your fault.”

James sat back on one of the beds. “You have no idea why Ed’s friend wants that locket?”

“No.” Her hand went to her neck again, and she frowned. “The only people interested in this locket, besides you guys, are my uncles. I haven’t seen them in ten years, after our last big fight about it.”

“Why’d they want it?”

“I don’t know.” Rory shrugged. “My mother’s brothers were a real pain, if you want the truth. My parents died when I was twelve, and I spent the next four years being shuttled around to a ton of relatives. I wasn’t a bad kid, but my relatives are beyond what you’d call wacky.”

He felt for her but didn’t allow the emotion to show. She didn’t seem the type to welcome pity, a lot like Keegan with that hardheaded attitude.

“The last place I ended up was with my uncles Bobby and Fred. They saw the locket I always wear—wore,” she corrected, glaring at him.

“Blame Keegan.”

"I do. Anyhow, my uncles saw it and recognized it. Had a real thing for it, but it was my mother's. I wasn't lying when I said it was the only thing I had left of hers."

James wondered. "Do you know the name Stallbridge?"

"No. Why?"

"No reason. I just thought, maybe... So you were saying you were with your uncles who wanted the locket."

"They turned out to be real snakes. I didn't wait to be told to leave. I left."

"They didn't hurt you or anything, did they?" he asked softly.

"They weren't perverts, no. They didn't hit me or hurt me, but it was only a matter of time, I think. They wanted my locket like crazy. And I never knew why."

Her look of puzzlement was to her credit, because James felt with every fiber in his being that she knew exactly why they wanted that antique jewelry. He played along with her, though, and before long, he'd charmed her into sharing stories of Jackson Heights with him. But every tale showed her on the outside looking in. An interesting facet to Rory, that she didn't seem to live *with* her few friends, but around them.

"Becky seems to really like you."

She smiled, a genuine grin that made his heart stop. "Becky's stranger than strange. She and I really get along. She sees through the crap, you know?"

"I got that."

"She seemed to like you and Keegan well enough. So what did she mean by calling you a foreman? You said you worked for the FBI and a gym, not construction?"

He debated whether to tell her, then thought why not. "James Foreman is my name."

Rory stared at him and flushed. "Oh."

Curious, he started to ask what that look meant when someone pounded on the door.

James looked through the peephole before opening it to admit a sweating Keegan. He still wore the locket wrapped around his wrist like a bracelet.

“Your turn,” he said in an even breath. His gaze sought Rory’s, and he smiled. “Hey, darlin’. You’re lookin’ good.” He slicked his hair back, his muscles bunching in that way that made James instantly hard.

Heat swirled between them, and he knew he needed to get moving.

“Gee, my heart’s all aflutter.” Rory’s eyes narrowed on his wrist. “This is probably stupid to be asking, but you aren’t planning to give that back to me anytime soon, are you?”

Keegan shook his head. “Nope. Not till we get to Bend. Then, once you and the client are together, you two can hash it out. But you have to promise not to blast him into the next state. If the guy is who I think he is, he’s a real pain in the ass.”

“You don’t even know who you’re working for?”

“We work for our boss. Our client demanded anonymity. So taking you back to meet him isn’t going to be pretty. But we said we’d do it, so we will.”

Keegan appeared to have done something James hadn’t. He’d gotten Rory to soften.

“Oh. Well, um, thanks, I guess.”

Keegan snorted. “You really want to thank me, you could get on your knees and—”

“*Keegan.*”

The cowboy snickered at him. “Come on, James. I was just gonna say she could kiss my feet. Worship me, you know.”

Rory grinned. “You’re such an ass. It’s almost cute.”

“See? I knew she liked me.”



James rolled his eyes and left for the bathroom to change. “Now I really need a run. If I don’t get out of here soon, I might be sick. All this sugary-sweet flattery is making me ill.”

“This is a small room,” he heard Rory say to Keegan through the door. “So don’t even think about taking your clothes off in front of me, Texas. You wait until Prince Charming is finished. Then you can shower. Because with all that sweat, I’m thinking you need it.”

Seemed like their new roommate had a touch of bossiness in her. James laughed to himself at the thought of the three of them, all control freaks, trying to get along for the rest of the drive. *Should make for one hell of an interesting trip home.*

Keegan waited until James left before dropping to the floor. Though he and James didn’t mind nudity anymore, Keegan didn’t want to risk a hard-on with Rory so close. His run had helped a lot. But he wasn’t quite there yet. At home he’d have lifted until muscle exhaustion. But the dingy, tiny workout room in this place sucked, and the run had been the best he could do.

“What are you doing?” Rory asked.

He didn’t look at her as he started doing pushups. “Finishing my workout.”

She didn’t say anything more until he counted past fifty and kept going.

“Wow. How many are you going to do?”

“As many as I can.”

“Why? I thought the run would pull the energy out of you. That’s what James said.”

James and his big mouth. “James and I are different. The run will do him good, but I need more. I usually lift until I can’t move my arms, but there’s nothing here for me. And I can’t chance using my telekinesis without some yokel pointing it out.”

“Explain that.”

“What did James tell you?” he asked, not even out of breath.

“That you guys worked for the FBI, then some psychic group. The project broke up, and you have to work hard because you don’t have those drugs they gave you anymore.”

“Great. You know the important parts. What he didn’t tell you is that we have a few government lackeys that keep a distant eye on us. Anything weird or dangerous happening, they’ll be there to put out the fires, literally. We don’t want anything more to do with them, so we’re keeping a low profile.”

“Huh.”

“Yeah, huh.” Having had enough pushups, Keegan turned onto his back and started doing crunches.

“Holy crap. No wonder you’re so buff. You work out like a madman.”

Keegan laughed and pushed through another set of ten on his way to a few hundred. “Hey, you want me to stop, all you have to do is—” He could almost hear James in his mind shouting at him to watch what he said. Keegan wasn’t stupid. He knew Rory was attracted to him, just as she feared him. Only natural, considering he’d caged her with his mind. And hell, he weighed at least twice as much as she did, if not more.

“Yes? All I have to do is what?” she goaded.

Keegan stopped and lay flat on the floor. To his relief, he wasn’t yet hard. But the thought of what she could do for him certainly put him there.

“Oh.” She noticed.

“Yeah, oh.” He stood and stripped off everything but his shorts, pleased she hadn’t yet blinked. “Thing is, Rory, sex is a way we can relieve our psychic buildup. It’s something we’ve only just learned, but it works like you wouldn’t believe. Knowing James, he didn’t say anything about it. He’s a real gentleman.”

“Right.” She stared at his body, centering on his groin, and he nearly asked her to blow him.

So much for his ability to treat a woman like a lady. Fuck, where had his manners gone? His momma would strap him for sure for acting like this. That is, if she ever woke up from the fainting spell at the thought of her little boy having s-e-x.

“Rory, James and I are serious. You’re gorgeous, you’re built, and you’re cautious. A real challenge. I want you. You want to fuck, I’m right here, right now. But I won’t force you, and neither will he.”

He stood, praying she’d make a move.

She didn’t, and he sighed. “I have to shower. Don’t worry, I’m fine. Just happy to see you.”

To his pleased surprise, she chuckled.

He took his clothes into the bathroom with him and took his time cleaning up and beating off. Finally finished, he dried off and dressed in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, so as not to offend her. A glance at the locket on his wrist made him feel more connected to her, and it startled him that he liked the tie to the wary woman.

Keegan returned to the room to see Rory on one of the beds, watching cable.

“You can have the bathroom if you want.”

She nodded to the table, where a few trays of food sat. “I ordered up some room service for you. Thought you might be hungry.”

“Thanks, I am.” He looked at her, unable to keep from zooming in on those lips he wanted to taste again. “That was real thoughtful of you, darlin’.”

“Don’t thank me. I used your credit card to pay for it.”

He chuckled. “No worries.”

She sat up. “You know, I thought you called me darlin’ because you couldn’t remember my name. But I’m sensing it’s just a thing with you. Like the hat and those boots.” She nodded at his hat sitting on the dresser and his boots on the floor.

“Yup. My momma drilled manners into me from the time I could walk. The Price boys don’t sass, and we treat a lady like a lady.” He winked at her. “I’d just love to treat you like a fine lady.”

“Shut up.” She grinned. “Keegan Price, huh? And James Foreman. So those are your real names.”

“James sure was chatty with you.”

“Another question for you. Did James know Becky before you two arrived in town?”

Thrown by the topic change, Keegan answered. “Nope. Never set foot in Jackson Heights before today. Christ, feels like we spent a month in that town, not a day.”

“Tell me about it.”

“So why did you live there? A year, you said.”

“Yeah. I used to live near Jackson Heights, growing up. I mine gems, and there are more than a few around the town. Some sapphire mines I actually own. Small, but profitable. I inherited them from my father.”

“Interesting.” He sat at the table and dug into a plate of steak, potatoes, and beans. As he did, he glanced at the clock. “Did James call, by chance?”

“No.”

As if the thought conjured him, footsteps sounded outside the door. Keegan hoped it was James, but not willing to put Rory at risk, he stepped between her and the door. “Stay back,” he warned in a low voice. At her nod, he walked to the door and peered out the peephole.

He opened the door. “Bout time. Where the hell did you run to? Kentucky?”

James glared at him and pushed into the room. “Not all of us are supermen, cowboy. I needed to burn off a little more steam.”

They both glanced at Rory.

“What?”

James turned back to him. "But I'm good now. Let me shower, and I'll join you."

"Okay." Keegan and Rory watched James disappear into the bathroom.

"He really is one fine-looking man." Rory gave Keegan a curious glance. "So what's with you two?"

Keegan hadn't wanted to deal with this, but figured he might as well tell the truth. Kind of. "He's my partner."

She bit her lower lip, and he wanted to trace the tender flesh with his tongue. Mindful of the direction of his thoughts, he threw the safety chain over the door and sat to hide his erection. He returned to his food.

"What kind of partner? Work partner or life partner?" The woman definitely wanted to know.

Keegan decided to toy with her. "Does it matter?"

"Oh. Um, I guess not. Not to me." The blush that lit her cheeks made her that much more attractive.

"Honey, James likes both teams. Trust me when I tell you that if you gave him the go-ahead, he'd thank you to kingdom come."

"Keegan, really." She turned a darker red.

"Really."

"What about you?" she asked, then looked as if she regretted the bold question.

"I'd fuck you right now if you asked." *Do it. Ask me. Please.*

"But you and he... You're not a couple, then?"

"We're new to being more, ah, friendly. I'm not into guys. James is just... James."

She seemed as if she understood.

"Just so you know, the invite's open, darlin'. Anytime, anyplace. But it's your call. Not mine, and not James's. You're in charge." *At least until I get inside you. Then all bets are off.*

Rory cocked her head, as if studying him like some new, interesting disease she'd just discovered. So much for turning her on to the idea.

Keegan dug back into his food and started when she sat across from him and took the lid off her plate.

"I don't think I've ever met a man like you before, Keegan."

"Well, not many of us use whisper hands," he joked.

Her serious expression unnerved him. He didn't think anyone but James had ever looked at him as if they truly saw him. The real him. "You don't hold back. You don't play games. I like that. A lot," she added softly, then dug into her meal.

They ate in silence with the muted sounds of the television and the shower between them.

Then Rory made the mistake of asking him if he liked the Dallas Cowboys. A few hateful comments about his favorite team ended in a loud argument that had James hurrying to intervene. But to Keegan's delight, the sexy beauty knew her football, and she liked her steak rare.

He had a bad feeling he was starting to fall under her spell, the same way he'd fallen under James's. When they turned off the lights, Keegan took one of the queen beds, Rory the other, and James grumbled on the fold-out couch. Keegan felt for him, because the fold-out looked like a futon gone wrong. The queen-size he used was lumpy and too small for his frame, the pillows flat and musty, and he rested uncomfortably on his belly, hiding the hard-on that refused to fade around James and Rory.

Still, knowing he shared the room with the pair gave him a strange sense of contentment, and he drifted off to sleep with a smile on his face.

## Chapter Eight

The next few days passed like the first. Driving along the interstate had bored the three of them, so they drove along back roads and spent less time in the vehicle than they spent wandering small towns as they searched for local gyms that could give Keegan and James the outlets they needed.

To her surprise, Rory didn't mind the travel. They'd gone maybe half of their trip but showed no sign of being in a rush. Now in Nebraska, they experienced cooler weather. A shame Keegan and James now covered up those strong thighs and tight asses while running outside. But in the gyms they continued to dominate attention wherever they went.

She couldn't count how many women had made passes at Keegan when they didn't think she was looking. Or how many women and men flirted with James. The man was a virtual sex magnet. Rory ignored the men who tried to get her to look their way, used to dealing with unwanted attention for most of her life. When she'd wanted someone to care for and love her, no one had been there. But after growing that hard shell around herself, making it impossible to connect, it seemed she'd somehow advertised an invisible signal that drew men like flies.

Not impressed with herself in the slightest, because her appearance had to do with genetics and not any skill she'd earned, Rory dealt with admirers the way Keegan did. She politely ignored them.

To her surprise, she had a lot in common with the tall Texan. James was a lot more amiable than she or Keegan, and they shared a lot of laughs as they watched him handle people.

They currently sat next to each other on the weight benches in a gym in Felton, Nebraska. Their hotel was more of a bed-and-breakfast, and they had the entire top floor of the old house, which was run by two elderly sisters.

Never having taken a real vacation before, Rory marveled that she hadn't thought to experience life outside of work and her goals. If nothing else, this time with Keegan and James showed her how to enjoy the journey. They joked and teased each other, showing a true camaraderie one couldn't fake.

She knew what James and Keegan had told her that first night was true. They kept their word, and slowly but surely, she'd come to trust them. Not all the way, she thought as she saw her locket still gleaming on Keegan's wrist. He should have looked effeminate wearing it, but she didn't think anything could make him look less like a man's man.

Which made her wonder about him and James again. As if she'd been able to think of anything else since she'd started pondering the idea of them as a couple. Well, anything other than herself starring in a bunch of perverted threesome fantasies.

She watched one of the targets of her lust lift two hundred pounds like it was nothing.

"How do you do it?" she asked Keegan, aware of the covert stares around them.

For her part, she wore a grungy T-shirt, shorts, and sneakers, with her hair up in a ponytail. She didn't find her look attractive, because she wasn't showcasing muscles like Keegan was. A glance over her shoulder showed James powering on a treadmill, running like he had the devil on his tail. He saw her looking and winked at her right as the woman next to him drew his attention.

"Do what?" Keegan asked around hard breaths.

"Do so much physical activity and still stay awake past eight each night."

They'd spent their mornings and early afternoons driving. The evenings took place in the gym, their nights in their hotel room playing card games or watching



TV until they fell asleep. James was usually the first to go, then Rory. Keegan always remained alert, going to sleep only once the others tucked in first.

"I have a hearty metabolism," he drawled. "Always have. But darlin', there are easier ways to sate my, ah, needs." He grinned at her and winked, then started up another set.

"Jerk." She couldn't help grinning with him, though.

Never in a million years would Rory have ever considered herself safe without her locket at hand. She still reached for it about fifty times a day. And truth be told, if she had it right now, she'd take off like a shot. But she was glad Keegan refused to return it. It gave her an excuse to spend more time with two men she wanted to get to know *a lot* better.

They never treated her like a third wheel, and making her feel welcome, like a part of them, was a balm to a wound she hadn't realized she still carried. Losing her parents had ripped a hole inside her, and having to grow up without them, unwanted and unloved, had hurt her more than she wanted to admit. Yes, she'd grown stronger because of her loss, but at what price?

Old Becky was the best friend she'd had in a long time. What did that say about her? Had she ever been as close as to anyone as James and Keegan were?

And that easily, "close" took on a whole new meaning. She could too easily see Keegan covering James, their naked bodies sweaty and hard, aroused...

"Darlin', you have the strangest look on your face. Penny for your thoughts?" Keegan asked. He sat up, facing her in the mirror.

She flushed. "Shut up. I'm going to get more water."

She heard him chuckling as she left. Rory veered toward the water fountain when a tingle lit her from the inside out. She stopped in her tracks and walked down the corridor toward a woman's room across from a set of racquetball courts. Unexpected in a small town this size.

Entering, she let her senses flow and followed the lure of a barely visible diamond ring way behind a toilet in the stall at the far end of the restroom.

“Holy shit.” The thing weighed a carat if not a little more. An emerald shape, signature ideal cut, internally flawless and colorless stone. It would sell for at least twenty-four or twenty-five thousand dollars. And it was stuffed underneath the baseboard of a gymnasium bathroom?

The price of the diamond would solidify her future, but the feel of the stone told her it belonged to someone. Someone special. She tucked the stone into her shorts pocket, determined to find out who the diamond belonged to. But she didn’t think asking the management would help. The young kids at the front desk would be clueless, and she had no intention of handing over an expensive ring to just anyone so they could hock it for top dollar. Her days of selectively helping herself to other people’s jewelry were over, and she’d be damned if she’d contribute to some other thief’s pockets.

Lost in her thoughts, she nearly ran over James when she exited the restroom.

“Whoa. You okay, Rory? You seem a little preoccupied.”

Another odd thing about James. She wanted to trust him with all her secrets. It had been hard to keep a good distance between them, but self-preservation wouldn’t let her get too close. This diamond, however, would be a good opportunity to gauge how he handled temptation.

She pulled him aside and, seeing no one near, showed him the ring.

He said nothing.

When she pocketed the ring and glanced up at him, she couldn’t read the look on his face.

“What do you think?” she asked.

“I don’t know what to think. Where’d you find it?”

“It was stuck in the back of the stall in there.” She pointed behind her. “It’s expensive and special. But I don’t want to ask anyone around here about it. I have a feeling we’ll find a lot of owners wanting it back.”

James nodded slowly. “Yeah. But how did you find it?”

She frowned. “I wasn’t on my hands and knees in the bathroom looking for it. And I didn’t steal it.”

“Wasn’t going to suggest that you did.” His smooth charm didn’t fool her.

“But you were thinking it.” She tricked a surprised smile out of him. Keegan would have out-and-out asked her if she’d stolen it. James would pry the answer out of her, one charming question at a time.

“Well, maybe I was.” He grinned, taking the sting out of the accusation. “But I don’t think you’d steal it and show it to me.”

“Thanks for crediting me with some intelligence.” She wanted to find the ring’s owner, right now. As if the ring were pushing her to move. “Grab Keegan and let’s get out of here. I want to get this to its owner.”

He found Keegan, and in no time the three of them drove back to their rented rooms on the third floor of Millie and Mabel’s B and B. After a hasty shower, Rory paced in the hallway outside the guys’ rooms. They had all taken individual rooms for the first time since they’d begun the trip, and to Rory’s disgust, she missed being in the same room with them. Their presence soothed her, made her feel secure and at the same time wanted. Because they had yet to look at her in her nightshirt with anything other than lust, and the damn thing covered her from neck to knee.

When James and Keegan finally opened their doors, she grabbed James and shoved him and Keegan back into Keegan’s room.

“Finally.” Keegan wrapped her up in a hug. “I’ve been waiting for this for days.”

“Let me go, you idiot.” She laughingly pulled herself out of his arms. “I wanted to show you something.”

He eagerly sat on the bed and leaned back on his hands. "Go on, darlin'. Take it off slow."

"Shut up, Keegan. Rory found something."

Keegan frowned. "What?"

She held out the ring to him. "This."

He whistled. "I don't know much about jewelry, but I think this is what's called a rock."

"Yeah." James sat next to him.

They made a handsome picture, two virile men, both dark-haired, tough, and handsome. *A sandwich just for me.* Rory cleared her throat and did her best to ignore her inner slut. God, she hadn't lusted after anything or anyone like these two since...well, since never. Her few forays into sex hadn't satisfied her, and lately she didn't have it in her to get messy with a man she barely knew when she could take care of her needs herself.

So why the heck did she want to strip these two naked and let them do naughty things to her?

"Rory?" James lifted a brow, but the hint of a smile on his face told her he'd read her desire.

*Crap.* "Right. I found it in the gym in the bathroom."

"You still haven't explained how," James said, and the pair of them watched her, waiting.

The diamond sat in Keegan's large hand, a delicate metal caging the hardest mineral on Earth. He held it out to her, and something in his eyes made her think of promises and hearts and forever.

Swallowing around an unfamiliar lump in her throat, she ignored the heat of his palm and took the diamond ring. "My psychic ability is linked to gems. I can feel them, like a hum in my blood. This ring called out to me."

"No shit." Keegan blinked at her in surprise.

“No shit,” she agreed. “But it’s important to someone, and I need to find who it belongs to.”

James frowned. “You wouldn’t think to find something that valuable in this town. Not to say it’s not fancy or anything, but come on. This is Felton, not Lincoln.”

“Maybe our hostesses will know more,” Keegan offered.

“Good idea,” she and James said at the same time.

“No reward for thinking it?” Keegan stood quickly and had her in his arms once more. “Come on, sugar. Just a little kiss?”

“Fine.” She tried to peck him on the cheek, but he turned his face and met her mouth-to-mouth.

Between one heartbeat and the next, Keegan was kissing her like his life depended upon it. His tongue thrust between her lips, and he took, ravaging her mouth with a fiery need she couldn’t deny. He pulled her closer, shoving his hard erection against her belly and moaning when she ground against him.

“Fuck. Okay you two, don’t make me hose you down.” James sounded both frustrated and amused.

Keegan pulled away, but she sensed he did so grudgingly, as further evidenced by his comment to James.

“You’re such an asshole. Can’t you see Rory and I are connecting?”

“Connect later. Let’s turn in this ring now, eat, and get some rest. Jack called me while we were cleaning up, and he’s annoyed we’re not further along than we are.”

“He said three weeks.” Keegan swore. “Jack can go fu—” He glanced down at Rory and kissed her with a tenderness that made her feel funny. “He can kiss my ass.”

“Thanks for watching out for my virgin ears.” Rory forced herself to pull away from him. At least James had the sense to know now was not the right time for sex.

*Now? Try never. You don't know them. You can't trust them.* Rory didn't like the way her emotions were starting to trip her up when dealing with Keegan and James. She had a bad feeling if she didn't break apart from them soon, she might find she didn't want to.

That would be a disaster.

Whenever she wanted something more from a relationship, it inevitably went south. She didn't relish getting in too deep with these guys, then having them break her heart. And seriously, she had no business even thinking *guys*—as in plural? Normal people slept with one partner at a time. Not two. She glanced at them. No matter how much she wanted them.

Rory took a deep breath and stepped back.

James rubbed his arm an hour later, still aching from where Keegan had punched him after Rory had left his room. But seriously, did Keegan really think he could fuck Rory on a moment's notice? They'd planned to let her come to them. Besides, their needs had grown greater the more time they spent with her and went without. Exercise, they found, could only do so much to alleviate their hungers. And James didn't want to scare her away from a potential relationship.

By opening his connection to Keegan, James had a feeling he'd started a hunger only sex could cure. Having Rory so close only exacerbated his combustible libido. Tonight, whether Keegan liked it or not, they were getting it on.

"You okay?" Keegan asked him.

Rory shot him a look as well, and James wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I'm fine." He glared when Keegan looked at his arm. "And you hit like a girl."

"Then why do you keep rubbing it?"

Millie returned to the dining room with a huge plate of apple pie. Around the lace covered table, empty casserole dishes and serving plates remained. Not a crumb left, thanks mostly to Keegan's huge appetite. The man ate enough for three

people. Though honestly, Rory couldn't remember when she'd eaten such a tasty meal.

Rory gave the older woman a grateful smile. "Thanks so much, Millie."

"No dear, thank you. I can't believe you found our ring." Tears filled the older woman's eyes again. "When we were robbed six months ago, we feared we'd never see it again. I have no idea how my grandmother's ring found its way into the local gym, but I can't thank you enough for returning it to us."

Mabel joined them and poured the trio coffee. "Everything's on the house."

Keegan shook his head. "No, ma'am. Can't do that. But I tell you what. You give us that extra pie I saw in the kitchen to take on the road tomorrow, we'll call it even."

Mabel beamed. "You're such a nice young man. I can't say we've ever had such wonderful visitors before, can you, Millie?"

"No, Sister, I can't." Millie pulled Mabel toward her. "Now you three enjoy. There's plenty of dessert and coffee, and more biscuits and dumplings if you like in the kitchen. We're turning in. You three have a nice night."

The pair left, and Rory and James watched Keegan help himself to a fourth slice of pie.

"Does that stomach ever quit?" she asked.

"Nope."

James snorted. "Like his mouth. Unfortunately, neither seems to be attached to his brain."

Rory raised a brow. "Funny, coming from you. I've yet to see a woman turn away from you once you open your mouth."

"I can't help that I'm naturally charming," James protested and ran a hand through his perfect hair. She didn't think he did more than wash and comb it, but he never looked a bit unkempt.

Too handsome for his own good, Becky would have said. And that still bothered her. “James, how do you know Becky?”

“I don’t.”

“But she knew you.”

“Oh?”

Rory didn’t want to think any more. She’d been feeling hemmed in by the guys, thanks to the intimacy of this little road trip. Staying at Millie and Mabel’s, seeing the sisters so at ease with each other and the three of them, as if Keegan, James, and Rory were a family, scared the shit out of her.

“Never mind.” She stood. “I’m tired. Think I’ll go to bed early, since we need to get to Bend sooner than later.” She paused, not sure how she felt that James might get in trouble for taking her back, when he and Keegan really didn’t need her at all, now that they had the locket. “And thanks for not just taking my locket and running, though you *could* give it back now.”

Keegan leaned back in his chair and licked his fork with such enthusiasm, she suddenly wished she could sense sterling silver the way she did gems and crystals. “Yeah, right. Once that locket is in your little hands, you’ll vanish like a puff of smoke. I may be pretty, darlin’, but I ain’t stupid.”

James chuckled. “No, Jethro, you *ain’t* exactly stupid, are ya?”

“Make fun, GQ. But you know I’m right.”

The men stared at her, their expressions telling and all too right.

“Whatever.” Rory didn’t wait for them to stand, the way they did when she sat with them. She didn’t stick around to watch them fuss over her, to look at her with confused but caring expressions.

Frustrated with the way they made her feel—as if she mattered to them as anything more than this case—she stomped up to her room but took care not to slam any doors. She liked Millie and Mabel. It wasn’t their fault the stubborn men



with Rory refused to play to type. No sexual harassment, no mauling, no treating her like a tease because she refused to sleep with them.

And why did they insist on taking care of her? As if she needed anyone to—

A hand wrapped around her mouth and a large body appeared at her back. Another man stepped in front of her. The familiar sight of Bobby Landers dried her mouth with fear. “Well, well, if isn’t our wayward little niece. Hey there, sweetness. My friend Ed was telling me you had something that belongs to us.”

James sighed. “She’s getting ready to bolt.”

“Not without this, she won’t.” Keegan held up his wrist, and the blue sapphire on the locket winked at James, as if it knew all of Rory’s secrets.

“She’ll make a play for it. I’m surprised she hasn’t already.”

Keegan grinned, and James’s mouth watered. “I can’t wait till she tries. The minute she comes into my bedroom and tries to steal it from me, her ass is mine.” He kept his voice low, on the off chance Millie or Mabel rejoined them.

“Her ass, hmm? I thought we’d agreed. I get her ass, you get her pussy.” James licked his fork the way Keegan had and got the satisfaction of watching his friend’s eyes darken with lust.

“Stop teasing.”

“Why? You hungry for it again? How about this time, you let me get on top?” James could see that as much as Keegan tried to deny it, his friend—his *lover*—was curious. And maybe horny enough to try it. *Hallelujah*. “Are we done pretending you don’t need me anymore? That Rory can’t survive if she sees the two of us kissing?”

“James, you need to take it down a notch. You keep pushing, I’ll fuck you right here on this table.” Keegan ended on a growl.

James grinned, glad to see he wasn’t the only one hurting. “It’s not just me. This thing between us is getting harder to deny, isn’t it?”

Keegan groaned. "You're not going to talk this out, are you? We gonna have to discuss feelings and love and all that shit?"

Love? That Keegan mentioned the emotion at all threw James into a tailspin of desire. "Not if you put your money where your mouth is." James paused. "Or rather, where your mouth should be." He started to say something more when he had an uneasy feeling. He met Keegan's startled gaze.

"Somethin's not right." Keegan stood, and they both moved as one to the stairs. "Quiet now. Third stair creaks."

"Yeah." James couldn't have said how he knew, but he sensed Rory in trouble, and he didn't want to add to it. As hot as he'd been feeling lately, he understood the need to keep a lid on his fire. "You're going to have to deal with this. If I let go, I might burn down the house."

Keegan whispered, "Dammit, James. Don't let it get so bad next time. Come to me sooner."

"I didn't want to put you out. I don't see you offering invites to bed."

Keegan colored. "I'm new at this. You're the aggressive one. We'll fix it after Rory. Just hold on."

"I will. Don't worry. Let's focus on her."

His partner nodded. They continued up to the third floor in silence. Once at the top, they stilled and heard what didn't belong. The low mutter of a male voice.

"I'll go in as if nothing's wrong. You wait for me. Backup." Keegan waited for James to agree, then continued down the hall. Before he reached Rory's room, someone opened the door to Keegan's room from the inside.

Keegan entered without a sound.

Gun. It had to be a weapon to make Keegan surrender without a fight. But before James could figure out how to help his friend, the door opened again, and Keegan stepped back out without making a sound. He nodded at James, who tiptoed

down the hall. They found James's room to be empty. Then they stopped at the last room on the floor.

Waiting on the other side of Rory's door, James counted to ten then knocked.

"Yes?" Rory answered in a strong voice.

Keegan answered. "Darlin', I need to talk to you about this locket. It keeps burning my hand when I move it around."

The door flew open, and Keegan entered. Before the door closed, James followed him inside.

Two men stood on either side of Rory. One held a gun to her head, the other pointed his gun at Keegan.

Without thinking, James heated the gun grips, making them so hot, the men dropped them immediately. Then Keegan reacted. He knocked both men on their asses with a mental slap that must have hurt, because one of them landed so hard, something snapped. Neither moved once down either.

"Oh my God." Rory shook as she stared at Keegan, having never seen him so vicious before.

It turned James on, which wasn't a good thing. He felt so fucking hot...

"Rory, honey," James said in a thick voice. "Tie these two up, and we'll put them with the others in Keegan's room. I have to hit the shower, *now*."

He raced down the hall into the shared bathroom, entered the claw-foot tub fully dressed, and turned on the shower. The cold water soothed him somewhat, but after a good ten minutes and not yet having cooled down, he knew what he really needed.

He was in the middle of masturbating when the shower curtain was ripped aside. Rory stood staring at him with wide eyes. Keegan was right behind her.

"It's like a sauna in here," she whispered, her gaze glued to his swollen shaft.

"This is why you don't wait," Keegan snarled. But he handled James with gentle hands. "Rory, strip him, and hurry."

She nodded, not seeming intimidated by the huge cock sticking out of his pants, and turned off the water. When her hand grazed him, he groaned, and the little witch stroked him.

"Fuck. Yeah, that's it. Touch me." James didn't care about anything but finding release. He needed her. He needed *them*.

"You're so hot and hard," Rory murmured and cupped his balls as his clothes seemed to melt off him. Keegan and his whisper hands. "I want to see you come."

Like he needed any more help getting there. James moaned her name as he jetted into her hand, covering her fingers in milky white spurts. The heat surrounding him suddenly eased, but James knew he had a few more rounds in him before he'd finally be at peace.

"That is so sexy," Rory whispered. "You're naked, and you're still hard."

James smiled. Then he kissed her, and the passion in their embrace carried the kiss on far longer than it should have.

"Ah, guys? I'm gonna make a real mess of things myself if I don't see some happy time." Keegan gritted his teeth and stood naked behind them. It was then James noticed the locket missing from his wrist.

"Oh hell. Where is it?"

Keegan said in a gravelly voice, "After I rushed downstairs to let Mabel know not to worry about the noise up here, I returned to find two more thieves waiting in your room with Rory. Not sure how the bastards got in there. They threatened to kill her if I didn't hand it over. I might have been able to take them, but I didn't want to chance it. But what's really odd? The minute one of them put the locket around her Uncle Bobby's neck, the fucker woke up and started zapping his buddies to life. The six of them took off without looking back."

"Keegan gave them the locket so they wouldn't hurt me." Rory looked more puzzled and upset over that fact than she had when she'd originally lost the necklace.

James dried off and wrapped the towel around his waist. “Don’t worry, honey. We’ll get it back.”

She stared at Keegan. “But they wouldn’t have actually hurt me. You could see it in their eyes, right?”

Keegan shrugged his massive shoulders. “I didn’t think they would, but it wasn’t worth taking a chance. It’s just a locket, Rory. Compared to you, that’s nothing.”

The baffled look on her face said volumes.

James suddenly understood that she’d been alone for a long, long time. “Come on, Rory. Let’s help Keegan before he knocks the house down.”

“He can do that?”

“Oh, the cowboy can do all sorts of things.” He paused and took a good hard look at her. The woman was in shock, in lust, and confused. He knew just how to center her. “Yeah, Keegan’s a real expert with that tool between his legs. He’s thick and hard. Fills me up nice and tight.” James kissed his way up her neck to her ear and whispered, “How’d you like to watch?”

He wasn’t prepared for her heartfelt answer, but he couldn’t have been happier when she said, “Oh yeah. Would I.”

## Chapter Nine

Back in Keegan's room on that monster antique bed, Keegan barely had a steady enough hand to put the condom on and lube up, and having Rory do it for him nearly made him come before he'd had a chance to enter James's finer than fine ass.

Her long, graceful fingers took their time as they rolled the latex over his sensitive flesh. She measured him with an unhurried stroke, sliding the condom over him in a tight grip, the way he imagined her pussy would feel.

"Don't play, darlin'," he warned. "I'm two seconds from coming into this thing."

Her lips parted. "I want to watch."

He groaned when she guided him to James, lingering to caress his hard sac, then James's flat stomach. Rory moved back, her breath coming faster, her pupils dilated with a lust Keegan could appreciate.

James already lay on the bed on his back, his legs spread wide, his cock stiff as he worked it while looking from Keegan to Rory. A secret smile hinted at mysteries Keegan intended to find out.

Keegan tilted James's pelvis up and awkwardly moved close enough to notch his cock into James's hole. He'd never done it this way before, not with a man, and he found the differences intriguing.

"Push slow," James murmured, arching closer to Keegan.

Sliding inside slowly, Keegan took care not to harm his lover. This time he would fuck James face-to-face, missionary-style. And the position gave him so much more than he'd thought it would.

Keegan could watch James, could look into his best friend's eyes as he fucked him. And even better, Rory's gaze felt like a physical caress, urging him on.

He groaned and began pistoning inside James. "I'm not gonna last long. I need it too much."

"So distract yourself," James murmured, pinching Keegan's nipples.

"Oh fuck. Do it again." Keegan pushed harder and stilled, loving the feel of warmth surrounding his dick. The erotic taboo, especially having such a sexy voyeur, made him crazy with lust.

"That's so sexy," Rory whispered.

"Come on, Keegan, distract yourself. Strip her. Play with her."

"Only if she asks me to," he gritted through his teeth, on the verge of orgasm. "Won't force her."

"For God's sake, use those whisper hands before I explode from sexual frustration," Rory snapped.

James grinned and blew her a kiss. The asshole was hard and grinding against Keegan's belly as Keegan fucked him. But James's skin had cooled down, thanks to experiencing his own orgasm. Keegan needed it bad, but he didn't want to end the sensation of being so close to his lover, soon to be *lovers*.

"I want us to do Rory together," he protested.

"We will," James promised. "But you can prime her for it first."

"Right. Prime her." The way he was primed to explode. Keegan used his power to strip Rory to nothing, feeling her with psychic senses and enhancing his own pleasure. As he sensed the hard tips of her nipples and the soft fullness of her breasts, James contracted the muscles in his ass.

"*Fuck*." Keegan shoved hard and came, crying out as he shot so hard, he saw stars.

Rory moaned. "Oh God, that feels so good."

He shuddered, still filling his condom and wishing it was James taking his cum with no latex between them. When he finished, he pulled out and turned to see Rory writhing against the wall, where he'd unknowingly pinned her. Her arms and legs were spread wide, and he continued to play with her breasts and feather ghostly kisses over her folds, teasing her slick clit.

"That's so sexy." Keegan felt a rise in his cock again. "Shit. Don't move, either of you." He mentally locked James down and heard him swear. But Keegan didn't care. James and Rory at the same time was his ultimate fantasy. The perfect woman with his perfect lover.

*Wow* with a capital W.

Keegan hurried to the bathroom down the hall, removed his condom, tied it off, and threw it away. Then he soaped himself up and rinsed and dried off. After wetting a washcloth, he grabbed it and a towel and raced back to his room.

He closed and locked the door behind him, knowing they really needed to be after that locket. But he didn't give a damn. Not now, not with this feast before him.

Keegan lifted Rory from the wall and moved her to the bed next to James with a wave of his hand.

"Me too, dick. Let me go." James growled.

Keegan released his hold.

"You owe me for that," James rasped and immediately latched on to Rory's breast with his mouth.

While Keegan cleaned James, he watched him and Rory move together. So beautiful. Rory with her killer body and angelic face scrunched in sensual pleasure. And James, the sexy Adonis, ravaging the softer creature beneath him, his features drawn tight with lust.

"I so wish I could take a picture of this."

James chuckled. "Why not take a taste, instead? I think Rory wants you to."

She moaned and spread her legs wide. "Dammit. You're seducing me again."



The complaint came out more like a thanks, and James shifted his attention to Rory's other breast. "I love your tits. So fucking sweet."

When James started with the dirty talk, Keegan was a goner.

He tossed the rag to the side and scooted down to kneel between Rory's legs. "What a sexy pussy. I'm going to lick you up, darlin'. But try not to yell too much. Wouldn't want Millie and Mabel to come up here and get an eyeful."

James laughed and kissed his way to Rory's lips.

Keegan didn't see much more, lost in the sultry thighs and honeyed pussy demanding his attention. He sucked her clit into his mouth, gratified by her gasp and the warm wetness pooling between her legs. Oh, she was slick, her nub plump. She needed it bad.

It looked like James planned to give it to her. James lay diagonally across her body, giving Keegan room to lick her. But Keegan noticed him humping the bed. He reached under his lover, caught James's cock in his fist, and began stroking.

"That's good, Keegan. Yeah, get me even harder so when I take Rory, she won't forget it."

"Please," Rory begged and ground into Keegan's face. She tried to move her hands, but James held her tight. The sexy bastard had assumed control, and Keegan's cock spiked with renewed desire.

"Fuck her," Keegan ordered and moved back.

James didn't argue. He mounted Rory and thrust hard. Keegan wanted to remind him to be careful, to pull back and protect himself and her from hurt and the possibility of... But watching James's ass flex as he took her, seeing him pull that thick cock all the way out of her pussy, then slide it back in, consumed Keegan's thoughts.

"That's it. Feel it, Rory. Let him fill you up, baby." Keegan plucked her nipples as James rocked into her slowly, then increased his speed.

Her mewls of pleasure stirred Keegan once more, and he gripped himself tight, pumping with his fist in time with James's thrusts. With his mind, he pinched her nipples and rubbed her clit while cupping James's balls. A carnal, psychic wind blew over the pair, so wrapped up in each other, so beautiful.

And then Rory turned her head to look at him, her eyes bright, hungry. "Get ready for me," she purred, a temptress he had no chance to resist.

"Damn, Keegan. This is so fucking good." James panted. His ass clenched tight, his brows drawn in sensual agony as he neared his end. "Rory, honey, I'm coming hard."

"In me," she urged and yanked his head down to kiss him.

Keegan watched as James tensed and thrust a few more times, coming inside Rory with force.

He leaned up from her and kissed her cheeks, her neck, then her mouth again, seeming unable to lie still. "*Rory*. Baby, that was so good. But you didn't come with me. Bad girl." He glanced over at Keegan with a sly smile. "Your turn."

James withdrew, his cock wet with cum, and Keegan *had* to experience the same. He took over James's position and slowly inched his way into Rory, sliding home.

"You two feel so good inside me. Perfect," she said on a breath and held on as he began shafting her, unable to go slow. He continued his mental stimulation, but it grew erratic as he neared his end. He held out as long as he could for Rory, wanting her to come first. Then James toyed with her breasts and inched his finger into her mouth.

She sucked hard and clamped down on Keegan's cock like a vise, climaxing and shattering his control.

"Fuck." He shoved one final time and poured himself into her. His cum filled her already wet pussy, and a dim part of him recognized that for the first time since learning what his dick was really for, he'd come inside a woman without wearing a rubber.

For that matter, so had James.

Shocked he'd completely lost his fucking mind, Keegan blinked over at his buddy. James seemed to be reading his mind, because he gripped his slick shaft, slid his fingers over it, and shrugged.

Not sure how to feel, Keegan decided to live in the moment. He'd finally taken the right woman between himself and James, and nothing would ever be the same again. Fucking Rory wasn't just physical. It felt better than right; it felt perfect, because James had shared in the experience. Their joining felt anything but simple. Instead, it was as if they'd formed a connection that intensified as they rested together.

When Rory shifted under him, Keegan pulled out and lay down next to her. "Honey, you okay?"

James laid down on her other side and kissed her. "She's better than okay. She's completely worn-out." James winked at him. "Me too."

Keegan grinned back at him. "You two are enough to wear anyone down to exhaustion."

Rory turned to look at him and cupped his cheek. The gentleness of her touch melted that final reserve inside him, and he shivered, knowing he'd fallen into a place he'd never wanted to go. Forever didn't happen to telekinetic freaks. Not with a woman he'd just met, and not with his *male* best friend. Yet he couldn't imagine a tomorrow without either one of them, and the seriousness of his thoughts was enough to pull him out of his lazy mood.

"Thank you," Rory whispered and kissed his cheek. She turned to James and did the same thing, and Keegan realized he'd linked hands with James over her slender stomach. "That was beyond words. I've never... I can't say..."

"I thought you said that was beyond words. Why try to talk now?" James teased. "Hasn't Keegan already mentioned how much he loves a quiet, biddable lover?"

“Ass.” Keegan huffed and nuzzled Rory’s neck. “You smell good, darlin’. Like me and James. I like.” And he’d never thought to say *that* after a rousing sexual encounter.

She let go of his cheek to touch her neck, something she often did when nervous or unsure. When she touched her naked throat, she froze, and her eyes widened. “My locket. They have my locket!”

James held her down when she tried to move. “Easy, sweetheart. We’ll get it back. Don’t worry.”

She blinked away the tears forming in her eyes, for which Keegan was profoundly grateful. “But, the locket.”

Keegan cleared his throat, not liking her distress. “It’s important to you, we know. We’ll get it back. Don’t worry. James and I are an unbeatable team.” He paused. “And with you joining us on this one, I don’t doubt for a minute we’ll track down those assholes and take back what’s yours.”

Rory sat up and looked down at both of them. “Don’t you mean, what belongs to your client?”

James sighed. “Rory, we aren’t out to rob you. We told you. We’re taking you back so you and our client can figure this out. And we won’t let him steal from you. Either you trade the locket because you want to, or he takes a hike.”

She tilted her head, and her hair grazed her plump breasts. “I don’t get it. Is this because of the sex?”

Keegan glanced at James in confusion. “Is what because of the sex?”

She looked so cute, so sexy. Frustrated, scared, and unable to look away from Keegan and James. “This act, like you really care. Guys, I liked what we did. You don’t have to pretend to be so nice. Trust me; I plan on being with you two as much as we can before we arrive in Bend. Don’t play me. I prefer honesty to all this schmoozing.”

Keegan chuckled. Seemed he wasn't the only one reading more into their sex than the physical. Rory's nerves made him feel better.

"Rory, I'll be honest," James said. "I'm planning to fuck you so much, you'll have trouble sitting in the truck. Between me and Keegan, we'll keep you so busy on your back, you won't be able to resist us."

"Dream on, Casanova."

"A dare? Hmm. What do I get when I win?" James rubbed his belly, and Rory seemed unable to look away from the motion of his hand over his taut flesh. For that matter, neither could Keegan.

"A great big kiss?" Rory offered, trying to hide a smile.

"How about a date? I know a few places in Bend I've been trying to take Keegan to, but he's so dense, he never realized I was asking. The three of us go out, together. A prelude to incredible sex."

"Ah, I guess." She frowned. "But shouldn't we focus on getting the locket back?"

"I like to plan ahead." James looked way too satisfied with himself.

Keegan admitted he liked the fact that nothing James offered Rory included an "I." It was all about *we* and *us*. Keegan and James and Rory.

Keegan grinned at her. "Don't be such a scared little rabbit, Rory. We'll take care of you."

She narrowed her eyes. She didn't like it when they questioned her courage. Hell, Keegan knew how she felt. This whole relationship thing scared him shitless. But he couldn't imagine going back to the way it used to be with James. And not having Rory around anymore? He felt her with more than his heart, but that special something inside him that let him move things with his mind. She'd lodged there under his skin, right next to James.

Christmases with his family would never be the same.

He was so fucked.

“Buddy, you okay?” James asked. “You look a little pale.”

“Not so little,” Rory teased and gripped his cock. She shifted on the bed and looked down at herself. And froze. “Oh. My. God.”

“Huh?” Keegan stalled. He knew what had upset her. By the way James stilled as well, he knew exactly why Rory was going to freak.

“You two came inside me.” She glared at them both. “Good Lord. I’m swimming in you!”

“Now Rory.” James stroked her thigh and spoke in a low voice.

“Don’t ‘now Rory’ me.” She smacked his hand away, and her fury turned Keegan on again, like flipping a switch. “Oh no you don’t. Get that thing away from me.”

Keegan swore. “Come on, Rory. It was an accident.” Sure it was. He’d watched James take her, had seen his lover come inside Rory and been determined to do the same. A primitive way of marking her, of making her theirs. He wondered what James made of it all and was startled to see his friend looking a little green.

Rory crossed her arms over her breasts. “James?”

“Shit, Rory. I’m sorry. I was caught up with you. I swear it wasn’t intentional.” Maybe, maybe not. James looked sincere. And he wasn’t the type to knock a woman up just to get her to stick around. Not that Rory necessarily would, even if she did turn up pregnant.

Why the thought of her pregnant made Keegan even harder was a puzzle.

Rory tried to hold on to her anger, but she slumped down on top of James and groaned. “It’s not all your fault. I should have said something.” She toyed with his hair, then trailed her fingers down Keegan’s belly.

“So do we have anything to worry about?” Keegan asked.

“Blunt. I told you I liked that.” Rory leaned over James to kiss Keegan. “I don’t think the timing is right. And on another note, I’m clean as a whistle. Haven’t had sex in forever.” She blushed. “Well, until now.”

Keegan ran a hand over her hair. "I've never not used a condom with someone."

"Me either," James muttered under his breath. "I'm blaming Keegan for all this."

"How is this my fault?"

"You turn my head upside down. That sexy ass, that huge cock. I can't think around you. And then Rory smiles at me, and I'm toast." James tugged Rory to him and kissed her. "I'm sorry, Rory. It won't happen again. Coming inside you without a condom, I mean. Not the sex. That's still strong."

"Amen." Keegan slapped her on the ass, startling a small gasp out of her. "You know, Rory could have prevented all this."

"*What?*"

"Well, if you'd given us a little lovin' with that sweet mouth, we could have avoided any chance at pregnancy. I tell you what, James considers himself an ass man. So next time, he can take that fine ass while I come in your mouth. See? Everyone's a winner."

Rory and James stared at him in silence.

"What?" Keegan pretended a frown, trying not to smile. "Something I said?"

James shook his head. "Let's try to get some sleep. Then we'll track down Rory's locket and get back home before Jack blows a gasket. And I swear, you make one more reference to the word *blow* and I'll set your hair on fire."

Keegan opened his mouth and closed it. Not worth the risk.

The next morning, Rory showered, cleaning herself up from the most intense sexual escapade she'd ever had in her life. She'd never done two men at once, and the experience left her feeling so much more for them now. As if by penetrating her body, James and Keegan had somehow penetrated her heart.

She clearly recalled how her locket had heated when she'd first touched each man. She couldn't ignore that, nor could she deny how good they had felt with her. In her. Coming inside her. Just thinking about it made her wet, and not from the shower.

Rory turned the water colder and finished cleaning up. Though still worried about her locket, she didn't have that mind-numbing fear she should have. For the first time in a long time, she wasn't alone. She had two powerful lovers to back her up. She still wasn't sure why they were going through the trouble of dragging her back with them to Oregon, but she wouldn't refuse their company.

Especially if she got to see James and Keegan going at it again. Talk about the fantasy of a lifetime. Two powerful men giving and taking. Watching James receive Keegan had been almost as good as receiving Keegan herself.

She shivered and turned off the shower, then dried off and scurried to her room to dress. Her clothes lay all over the place, thanks to her dipshit uncles. She'd just finished putting her shoes on when someone knocked.

"Come in."

Keegan and James entered, looking ready to go. Keegan in his customary jeans, T-shirt, boots, and hat, and James in jeans and a polo. Their hair was wet, their skin clean, and their eyes shining. Possession was stamped over both of them as they looked at her, and to her surprise, she didn't mind it in the least.

Unnerved, she tried to clear her thoughts. "Ah, okay. Let me just pack up."

"Your uncles are fuckwads. You know that, right?" Keegan drawled as he frowned and lifted her strewn clothes with his mind, dropping them all in the center of her bed.

"That's pretty handy." James nodded. "So if you can do that, why does your place look like a pigsty? Maybe to remind you of being back home at the holler?"

"Dick." Keegan glared at him, but James made her laugh. Hearing the sound, Keegan slowly smiled. "Well, I did grow up on a farm."



“How about you, James?” Rory asked as she tucked her clothes away, grabbed her red sack she’d stashed behind the heater, which luckily her uncles hadn’t searched, and left with her men—*the* men—for the SUV.

“Me? I grew up in Maryland with four older cousins and my aunt and uncle. We’re all close. But if I seem more sensitive and pleasant to be around, it’s because my older cousins are all women. They dragged me everywhere growing up. I wasn’t allowed to be a Neanderthal.” He looked pointedly at Keegan.

“Shut up.” Keegan pushed James ahead of him. “Smooth Talker means he thinks he wines and dines with the best of them. Fancy dinners, fancy dates. Like I couldn’t show a girl a good time with a beer, a hot dog, and a good ol’ Cowboys game.”

James snorted. “Why not spring for a whole pizza while you’re at it? Don’t think small. Go big, cowboy.”

Rory stifled a laugh, wondering why she felt this good after losing her most prized possession. They gathered all their belongings and said a quick good-bye to Millie and Mabel. Keegan accepted the apple pie the sisters had promised him and claimed he had no intention of sharing. He jumped into the driver’s side before James could protest.

“Seriously. You’re a little OCD with the driving, Keegan.” James scowled as he put their bags into the back and entered the backseat, leaving Rory to sit up front next to Keegan.

Once they returned to the road, Rory turned to them both. “So what now?”

“Now we call on our resources,” James answered. “There are ten of us at home, and our skills run the gamut from telekinesis to levitation.”

“Really?”

Keegan grinned. “Yup, actually flying. But Gavin isn’t who we need. I’m betting James calls Avery or Noah. Maybe Nathan?”

James explained. "Avery is a precog. He has the ability to see the future—precognition. He might be able to tell us where we need to head to find the locket. Or Noah, who can see the past. Maybe he could tell where it was stolen. Nathan can touch an object and know it. Jack made sure he handled the files and everything associated with the locket before we left, just in case."

"What can files tell him?" Rory couldn't believe they discussed psychic abilities way beyond the norm as if they were everyday occurrences.

"Well, our client didn't just have pictures and files of the locket. He has the original case the locket was supposedly housed in."

"He does?" That bothered her.

"Yeah. So that might help us, or it might not. The locket has been missing from his family for over two hundred years. But we're not sure how long it's been missing from the case."

"My mom always wore it around her neck. She never took it off," Rory added quietly.

"That's a lot longer than a year. Hell." Keegan swore. "I'm sorry I took it off you, okay? But if I hadn't, you would have bolted."

And she still might. Rory didn't like her burgeoning feelings for these two men she barely knew. Yet for all that they'd just met, she didn't want to leave them. And that wasn't normal. Rory used to live day to day. Except for her desire to own and run a jewelry store, everything else in life happened the way it happened. No planning or forethought went into what she ate or what she wore unless it contributed in some way to her dream of financial independence and success. Of stability.

But she wanted to stick around James and Keegan. She'd even had a few thoughts about spending some time in Oregon after their mission, to check out that part of the West Coast.

"Rory?" Keegan's gruff voice dragged her from her musings. "I'm sorry, darlin'. Okay?"

She leaned close to kiss him. “Okay. But we’re getting it back. And you owe me.”

James looked smug.

“You’re not off the hook, either, James,” she added.

“You can collect anytime, Rory.” Keegan winked. “I’m your man.”

“Me too.” James nodded. “Keegan? Find us an exit and pull over at the nearest pharmacy. While I’m getting the info we need to track down the locket, you can go in and buy some condoms.”

Rory blushed and turned to see James’s broad grin.

“A big box. It’s all about priorities, Rory.”

“And that’s why he’s along for the ride,” Keegan explained with a straight face. “Man has a head for logistics.”

## Chapter Ten

By the time Keegan returned to the vehicle, James had an address as well as a general direction. To his relief, they could continue west, hopefully not veering too much from their deadline to return. They needed to detour into Colorado to cut off Bobby and Frederick Landers.

He handed the notes he'd taken to Keegan. "Avery gave me this address. Said to expect a confrontation. But that's all he would tell me."

Sometimes Avery knew more than he said, and sometimes he simply couldn't make out more than a possible future. Either way, James knew they'd find Rory's locket soon enough. He'd been tempted to ask Avery what the man saw in Rory's future, but with her sitting in the front seat during his call, he hadn't had the opportunity. That, and he was scared to know.

James wanted the beautiful blonde to stay with them. He needed time to find out how to worm his way past her defenses, to see what motivated her and find a way to give it to her. So far the sex had worked, and he planned on using it to get as close to the secretive woman as possible.

"So Rory, you know about my background and Keegan's. What about yours?" he asked as they continued on their course to retrieve the locket.

She turned around in her seat to face him and shrugged. "Not much to tell. I grew up in Pennsylvania just north of Philly. Just me, my mom, and dad. They were good parents until they died. Car crash in the snow. I wasn't with them when it happened."

"Sorry."

"That had to be tough," Keegan sympathized.

"It was." She cleared her throat. "My mom has four brothers, my dad three sisters. And all of them are constantly in and out of jail. I didn't really have a place to grow up, and by sixteen, I was on my own."

James thought she'd been on her own longer than that. How tough it must have been to lose everything with no one for support. "My parents died when I was little, but I had my cousins and their parents to help. It would have been really hard to not have that kind of stability."

She shrugged. "You get over it quick. It hurt, I won't lie. When my parents were alive, we teased about their troubled relatives, but my aunts and uncle seemed nice enough from a distance. We'd see them at holidays and birthdays, and my dad's family was always pretty nice. My mom's? Not so much."

"I could tell from last night," Keegan muttered.

Rory gave a bitter laugh. "Oh, you haven't seen them at their worst, trust me. The Landers brothers are real con men. They pretend they're friendly right before they stab you in the back. But they taught me a lot in the short time I lived with them."

James watched her fingers stroke the hollow of her throat and inwardly winced when she hurriedly dropped her hand. He almost felt responsible for the locket being stolen. Maybe if he and Keegan had let her keep it, she'd still have it. And he did think of it as hers. No matter what Jack or their client said, James instinctively knew Rory hadn't lied about the locket or that it had belonged to her mother.

"So how did you live when you left home?" he asked.

Keegan's gaze met his in the rearview. "A little personal, don't you think? Maybe Rory's had enough of the James Foreman question-and-answer period."

"It's okay, Keegan." Rory shot James a challenging look. "Would it shock you to know I stole for a living? I was really good at it. Pickpocketing, small cons, minor thefts."

“Actually, no.” James chuckled. “I don’t doubt you could smile your way out of trouble every time.”

“Well, I am charming.” She batted her eyes, and he laughed again. “My affinity for gems would tell me which mark to track, who could offer me the most value for the stone, and after some study, I’d see who could afford to lose it. You can tell a lot from what people wear and what they drive.”

“So you’re a thief with principles? Stealing from the rich?” Keegan snorted.

“*Was* a thief. And I prefer the term collector.” Her eyes gleamed with naughty amusement that sobered when she added, “I’m not ashamed of what I had to do to survive. Trust me, foster care is not all it’s cracked up to be. I was sometimes safer living on the streets.”

James shook his head. “With your looks, I’m not surprised.”

She blushed, a fascinating contradiction of shyness at odds with the assertive, stunning woman he’d thought her to be. “Yeah, well, I eventually built up enough that I didn’t feel so frantic to keep risking jail time with each take. I started saving and even investing. Went to school, completed my GED, and even some college.”

“Studying what?” Keegan asked.

“Investing and finance. What else?”

“So you’re no longer a thief. You’re what? You mentioned opening up a jewelry store.”

“Not yet. But I will be. I’ve spent the last few years interning at smaller shops, working behind the counters of specialty jewelry stores, the ones that have quality stones.”

“How?” James frowned. “If your history is spotty, no way you’d have passed scrutiny with the security paperwork needed to work for a jeweler.”

“Let’s just say I had help with my background.”

“Forged documents. It’s what I’d do.” Keegan nodded.

“I’m neither confirming nor denying that.”

Keegan snorted.

“But I will say I’ve been pretty successful with everything I’ve learned. This last year, I’ve been adding to my collection. I—”

“Collection?” James looked from her to the back of the vehicle. “That red bag, right?”

Rory’s good humor faded. “No, that’s something else. Some keepsakes I’ve gathered from here and there. Nothing special.”

James sighed. “Rory, I’m not going to take anything from you. Neither is Keegan.”

“Right. And I’m supposed to believe this after you took my locket?”

“We’re going after it right now. We could have left you behind, you know,” James said softly. “We could have left you behind right from the start.”

“Then why didn’t you?” she challenged.

“Because you’re special, and Keegan and I sensed it from the beginning. When you touched me, I felt a spark all the way to my toes. You felt it too.”

“Maybe.”

Next to her, Keegan touched her cheek. “With me you did. I saw it in your eyes.”

“So? Sexual attraction is a powerful thing.”

James disagreed. “It’d be easier if it was just physical. But we all know it’s not. Hell, look at me and Keegan. The man wants me, and he can’t help himself. But if it was as easy as getting off, he wouldn’t look so hunted all the time.”

Keegan returned his hand to the steering wheel, gripping it with clenched fingers. “This isn’t about me.”

Rory’s defensiveness seemed to fade as she considered Keegan, which James had intended when he’d shifted the attention to his buddy. “Have you ever been with a guy before James?” she asked.

Keegan scowled. “We were talking about you.”

“And now we’re talking about *you*.” Rory refused to back down. “So how long have you two known each other?”

“Three years,” James answered, pleased to finally air the issue out in the open.

“And in all that time, you two have never...?”

Keegan flushed. “No.”

“Not until our little road trip. And trust me, I wanted him. But Keegan’s not gay. I knew that. Just like it is with you, Rory, there’s something special between me and the cowboy, though he refuses to see it.”

“Bullshit. If I refused to see it, I wouldn’t have been fucking you the past couple days, now would I?” Keegan shot Rory a disgruntled glance. “And don’t think you can turn all this on me. You want us both, but you don’t want to. You’re used to bein’ alone, used to bein’ around folks you can’t trust. And then comes me and Wonderboy back there,” he said as he thumbed at James in the backseat. “We’re throwin’ you for a loop, darlin’. We can see that. But if I’m not allowed to hide from him, you’re not allowed to hide from us.”

James caught Keegan’s threatening stare in the mirror, aware he’d pay for this confrontation later.

“Quit being so scared, Rory,” Keegan dared her. “It’s not like we don’t have feelings for you.”

James blinked at that.

“Oh? How *do* you feel, Keegan? You barely know me.”

James leaned closer and saw her cross her arms over her chest, her chin out, her manner testy.

“I know plenty. Hey, GQ, you want to answer her?” Keegan asked James. “You’re Mr. Sensitive, after all.”

“Ass.” To Rory, he said, “You’re like us, which is special all on its own. We don’t have to hide who we are with you, and that’s rare.” James snapped, and flame



licked at his thumb before he let it wink out. "You're courageous, beautiful, sexy as hell, and loyal."

"How do know that?"

"You helped us get out of Jackson Heights when you could have ditched us right after we broke you out of jail," Keegan said.

James added, "You gave that ring to Millie, when we both know you could have kept your find a secret and never said a word."

She shifted in her seat. "Maybe."

"And Rory, you gave yourself to us last night. It was more than simple pleasure, it was a sharing." *Of souls*, James wanted to add, but didn't want to overwhelm his two less-sensitive lovers.

"I just wanted to get off, and you two are hot. You know it, so don't pretend to be modest."

"Of course he knows it," Keegan taunted. "I call him GQ for a reason. Everyone loves James. Even you, I'd bet, if you were honest with yourself."

Rory looked away from James and turned to face front once more. "I barely know you two."

"Which makes it so much harder to acknowledge how you feel." James nodded. "You and Keegan have so much in common. Self-denial, discomfort over your appeal, stubbornness in spades..."

"Shut up, James," they both said at the same time, and James grinned.

Into the sudden silence, Keegan spoke. "Rory, you like country music, don't you?"

James's grin left him, and he groaned. "Not again. Please."

"I love it, Keegan. It's like you're reading my mind." She turned her head and flashed James an evil grin. "And I like it loud. I guess we really *are* alike."

They stopped four hellish hours later for a bathroom break. While Keegan refueled the vehicle, James and Rory made use of the bathrooms in the convenience store. And he decided to put his new plan of attack into play.

The more he learned about Rory, the more he wanted to know about her. He and Keegan both wanted her, and if Keegan's earlier comments meant anything, the big guy was hooked on the tempting blonde trying to keep just out of reach.

James liked her bonding with Keegan in her quest to drive him insane with the radio. He'd endure torturous crooning about dogs, deadbeat daddies, and cheating wives if it meant she'd smile and joke with Keegan more.

Keegan entered the store and zeroed in on him. "Pay for the gas, would you? I need a pit stop myself."

"Sure. You want anything to eat?"

"Some chips maybe."

James grabbed a few snacks and drinks, paid their bill, then rejoined Rory at the SUV. Seeing her stretch, watching that mouthwatering body bend this way and that and her smile grow under the blaze of the afternoon sun, gave him the hard-on from hell.

"Hey, Rory, why don't you join me in the backseat for a while? Give me some company to make up for being such an evil woman."

She snickered. "You had it coming. You are an arrogant SOB, you know."

"But I'm pretty, so that makes up for my shortcomings."

She huffed. "You wish." She paused. "I saw you flirting in there with the girl behind the counter."

"Huh?" He'd joked with the cashier for all of two seconds before he'd left the store with his purchases.

Rory planted a hand on her hip and stared at him. "You don't even know you do it."

"Do what?"

“Flirt,” Keegan said from behind him. “It’s not his fault, Rory. People just seem to gravitate to him. I don’t see it, personally. He’s a huge pain in the ass. But he’s good when you want to get information. You should have seen Deputy Stanton falling all over himself to tell us all about you.”

“Is that so?”

James smiled. “Now, now. Don’t be jealous. There’s enough of me to go around.” He liked Keegan’s frown almost as much as he liked Rory’s annoyance. The hint of jealousy in the air was a boost to his ego. “Come on. Another three hours and we should hit Denver.”

“Where Uncle Bobby and Uncle Fred are currently hanging out. Funny, I never thought they’d leave North Carolina.” Rory sighed. “Okay, James. I’ll join you. Keegan’s driving is a bit wild, anyway. It’s probably better if I don’t see what he’s almost hitting.”

“Hey.”

James ignored Keegan and entered the backseat, but not before patting his back pocket, where he’d stashed one of the many condoms Keegan had purchased earlier.

God, he couldn’t wait to put his plan into action.

Twenty minutes into their trip, he scooted closer to Rory, who looked immersed in a book.

“Do you like it? I read it during our trip to Arizona last week.”

“It’s good.” Rory subtly shifted under his hand when he placed it on her upper thigh.

He leaned closer, as if to see what page she was on. When he grazed her hand to lower the book, he caught sight of her hard nipples and bit back a grin. He slid his fingers over hers and up her forearm.

She licked her lips. “Ah, James?”

“What’s that, sweetheart?” A glance at Keegan showed the man enrapt in his music, his eyes glued to the road.

“You’re crowding me.”

“Not as much as I intend to,” he murmured, hot to feel her pussy around him once more. Hell, they had time to kill. No better way to handle a boring road trip than to add some spice to the drive. “I’m sorry, Rory. Why don’t you sit like this and make it more comfortable for yourself?”

Before she could protest, he lifted her over his lap and straddled her over his waist. The motion put her face right in front of his, her lips so close, he could feel her breath.

“Can I kiss you, Rory? It’s all I’ve been thinking about.”

“Y-yes.” She leaned into him, and he inched a hand under her T-shirt. The slide of his palm over her warm skin urged him to move closer. His lips met hers, and he moaned into her mouth.

“Shee-it.” Keegan swore up in the front seat. “When you didn’t fight me for the keys after we stopped, I knew you were up to something.”

James said against her lips, “Just drive, cowboy. I’m busy back here.”

“You are such a dick.”

James ignored him and returned to her mouth, licking her lips and kissing her with a gentle touch, wanting to draw out Rory’s pleasure.

She moaned when he cupped her breast and toyed with the peak of her nipple. Grinding against him, she told him exactly what she wanted.

Him.

James smiled and deepened the kiss, adding his other hand underneath her shirt, thoroughly grateful for the SUV’s tinted windows. He unfastened her bra and rubbed her back, then circled his hands around her front.

“Your tits are so fucking pretty. I want to see them again, Rory. Show me.”

He leaned back and watched as she blinked her eyes open.

Rory put her hands on the hem of her shirt and looked into his eyes. "I think you're the pretty one, James." She kissed him on the mouth. "Your eyes are so dark and sexy, it makes me want to eat you up."

Keegan groaned from the front seat.

"But I don't want your mouth on me this time, Rory. I want that wet pussy. I want to feel you around my cock when I come."

Her breath hitched. "R-right." She lifted her shirt and eased out of her bra.

"Oh yeah. Look at these ripe berries." James ground her hips down over him and took her nipple in his mouth. The hard bud felt good. Every tease of his teeth and tongue had Rory rocking faster over him. The woman wanted him, and he reveled in it.

James sucked harder, then turned his attention to her other breast, kneading and stroking her globes while he ached to sink inside her. Making love in the car was frustratingly awkward, but so damn good. He wondered that he hadn't done much of this before.

Eager to feel her, he unbuttoned her jeans and dragged his finger down her belly, under her panties, and lower. With her legs around his waist, spread wide, he had perfect access, and he took full advantage.

James continued to feast on her breasts as he slid his finger between her folds and groaned at the hot evidence of her arousal. "Oh, baby. I need to be inside you. You're so wet for me."

"Yes. I want you. James, more." She gripped his hair, her arms around his neck, and rocked into his mouth. Her breasts were perfect, her nipples red and dark against the paler white of her flesh.

James let go of her nipple to fasten his lips to her mouth. When his tongue penetrated her lips, he shoved his fingers between her folds and up into her.

She cried out, her excitement muffled against his lips as she rode his finger. Then he added another and finger fucked her, wanting to feel her tighten around him, to know he brought her to bliss.

Rory gasped and pulled away from his mouth. "Wait."

"No." James shoved harder inside her, and she closed her eyes and moaned.

"I want you inside me when I come."

"Fuck. James, do what she says," Keegan murmured from the front seat. "Come on, please the little lady."

But Rory was already taking the choice from him. She clumsily lifted herself off him and hurriedly scooted out of her remaining clothes. Then she started on James. His shirt, his shoes, his jeans.

"Undressing in a car is not easy," he said on a laugh as his legs got tangled in his jeans. "Hold on." He removed the condom from his pocket at the same time a warm mouth engulfed his cock. "Shit. *Rory*."

She sucked him good, taking him closer to the edge than he needed to be.

"Hold on, or I'll come."

Rory released his shaft and licked her way to his balls, then sucked on them one at a time.

James thought his head would explode. Precum gathered at his slit. His balls were so hard, he worried he'd climax before he could stop himself. "Baby, I want this for you. Stop."

Desperate to still her talented tongue, he gripped her hair and tugged her up next to him.

To his delight, her eyes brightened with hunger. Sweet Rory liked being told what to do.

"Put it on me." He handed her the condom. "Slowly."

The little witch grinned at him. "Oh boy. What a big, thick toy. And all for me." She rolled the latex over him with deliberate slowness, brushing her breasts over

his belly, and cupped his balls with those featherlight touches that excited him to no end. She'd barely rolled it to the base of his shaft before James leaned forward and yanked her over him.

He thrust up inside her without pause and swore as he felt her so hot and tight around him.

"Fuck, oh fuck." He couldn't stop, and neither could she. James gripped her hips tight as he slammed her down over him time and time again, but Rory rode him, easing his way inside her with each thrust of her slender hips. He let go of one hip to pinch her nipple while he sucked her neck, leaving a mark. "I'm going to come so hard inside you."

Rory responded by shrieking as she clamped down and came around him.

"Your cunt is so hot, so tight," he gritted through his teeth as the last shred of his control slipped away. "Yes, Rory. *Yes.*" He stabbed up into her and froze as his climax tore him from everything tame and threw him headlong into the extraordinary.

It was several moments before he realized the music had stopped, Rory lay over him panting and kissing him everywhere she could reach, and Keegan had pulled the vehicle to a standstill.

"What?" he croaked and glanced at Keegan in the mirror.

"I nearly had a wreck trying to watch you two and the road."

James stroked Rory's back and kissed her. "She's so sweet. So pretty." *So ours.* The thought came unbidden. "Where are we?"

"Off the main road, but who the fuck cares?" Keegan unbuckled his seat belt, exited the vehicle, and joined them in the backseat. He shoved James and Rory over, the pair still connected in more ways than one, and slammed the door shut. "Now it's my turn."

## Chapter Eleven

Keegan couldn't believe James had fucked Rory in the backseat of the damn SUV. Talk about torture. Keegan's balls were bluer than blue. He ached, his dick pressed so hard into the back of his zipper, he feared he'd have a permanent mark.

To see Rory naked, riding his best friend, turned Keegan inside out. He hadn't been kidding earlier. He wanted her in his life. As much as he wanted James.

He glanced at the pair, aroused to see James still inside Rory, his cum no doubt filling the condom inside her tight pussy.

"How do you want to do this?" James asked, his voice thick, his eyes sleepy and so fucking sexy-looking after he made love.

Keegan leaned close and kissed James, imagining he tasted Rory as well. He felt her mouth on his neck, her hands under his shirt, on his belly and chest. The touch of his lovers couldn't compare to anything, and he wanted more.

Keegan broke off the kiss and cupped James's head. He stroked his cheek, then kissed Rory, taken with the studied contrasts of his lovers. Rory was so much softer, so much lighter and less intense. His attraction to her was so overwhelming, he could barely see through the light of lust around her. Until James moved Keegan's hand and sucked on his finger.

The dark needs of desire made themselves known all too clearly.

Tearing his mouth from Rory's, he rasped, "If you two don't quit fucking with me, I'm gonna come in my goddamn jeans. I'm so hard, it ain't gonna take much to send me over."

James released Keegan's finger and slowly lifted Rory from his lap. "We're not making great time after Rory's locket, cowboy," he teased.



“Fuck you.” Keegan glared at him.

“So I guess we’d better get you off in a hurry, hmm?”

Rory chuckled. “He’s grumpy when he’s horny.” Her long blonde hair curled over her breasts, and suddenly Keegan had to have her in his hands.

He gripped her hair and tugged her mouth to his again.

While he kissed her, he felt James at his fly. Keegan arched his hips up to help James in his quest to undo them. And then he felt James pull him out, leaving the jeans around his upper thighs, his balls tucked between his legs. His cock was free, but he felt stifled, uncomfortable, and so aroused, he ached.

Rory trailed her lips over Keegan’s mouth to his neck. She bit him as she continued her path to his chest and sucked on his nipples.

He groaned and tugged her down by the hair, where he knew she was headed. Anticipation made him light-headed.

“She’s going to suck you dry,” James whispered and stroked her back and flank as she lay half over him and flattened the rest of herself over Keegan. “You’re thick, Keegan. That long, fat cock is so full. Look at your balls, sandwiched so tight under that rod. Bet they’re hard little knots, aren’t they?”

“Shut up, James,” Keegan groaned, not needing that sexy voice to get him more aroused. Rory’s mouth was killing him. “Lower, darlin’. Wrap those lips around me. That’s a girl.”

He shoved her head down, liking the control, until she licked his slit. Hell, he wasn’t controlling anything. A slave to his hormones, to his cock. And to the two sexual demons sitting next to him, bent on driving him out of his mind.

James leaned forward and licked Keegan’s nipple. “Pay attention, cowboy.”

“Fuck.” He jolted when Rory’s mouth eased over his cockhead and lower. Fire danced through his balls and up his spine.

“Watch.” James leaned back and stroked her ass cheeks, then spread them wide. “It’s hard to reach, so my tongue won’t fit. But lick my finger and watch.”

Keegan opened his mouth and took James's finger inside, tasting Rory's sweet cum. He sucked hard, unable not to imagine James's cock up her cunt. In Keegan's mouth...

"I can't believe how hard I'm getting again. Incredible what you two do to me." James withdrew his finger. Then he ran it down Rory's back to her ass, resting it at her hole.

He rimmed her, describing in detail what he planned to do to her once they had her locket back. Rory moaned and sucked harder, up and down, absorbed in Keegan's cock like it was a treat she intended to devour.

"Oh Christ. I'm gonna come, darlin'. Swallow my load. Fuck." He pumped, felt the back of her throat, and lost it. Cum streamed from his shaft like a fountain, his climax so fierce, he yelled out as he came.

When he opened his eyes and could once again breathe, he felt Rory licking his cock and saw her humping the air as James shoved his finger in and out of her ass.

"Oh yeah," James said on a breath. "She likes it."

Keegan reached for her clit, not surprised to find it hard and wet. He rubbed it while James fucked her ass with that finger, and in no time, Rory came again, moaning their names.

Both of their names. Her lovers, Keegan and James.

Sheer satisfaction filled him as he felt her cream over his finger, and he lifted it to his lips while she watched.

"You taste good, darlin'. Like my favorite treat." He winked at her and glanced at James. "Just as good as that sweet cum getting ready to pour out of James again. You jerkin' off, GQ?"

"You're kidding, right? Of course I am. Her ass is going to be so good," he moaned, his hand moving in quick jerks. A glance to the floor showed the condom wrapped in a tissue.

Rory moved aside so they could both watch, and then Keegan gripped James's hand tight, wrapping it around his cock.

"Oh, fuck," James swore as he came, white jets of seed dripping down Keegan's fist. "Oh yeah, fuck." James panted and leaned back against the seat.

"So you think that put us too far behind on our trip?" Keegan asked as he smiled at Rory.

The stars in her eyes made him feel ten feet tall. That, and the fact he'd just held James through an orgasm. He'd never considered himself a kinky guy, but these three-ways with James and Rory satisfied everything he could possibly want in a sexual partner. Keegan didn't think anyone else would ever match these two in his bed.

Or his heart.

He stared at Rory as the realization dawned.

"You okay?" She smiled and cupped his cheek.

"Darlin', I'm just fine," he said in a gruff voice and accepted the tender kiss she gave him. She might not admit it, might not even understand it yet, but she belonged to them. Not him, not James, but *them*. And as much shit as he was going to get for taking not just Rory—their supposed locket thief—but James for a lover, Keegan couldn't find it in him to overly care. Not right now.

"Fuck me." James groaned.

"Thought we'd already done that." Keegan chuckled. "Now how about you drive so I can spend some alone time with my Sunshine here?"

Rory blushed, and James cracked his lids open and smirked. "Sunshine?"

"Look at that beautiful hair."

James nodded. "That fits. And it's better than *darlin'*, because now she'll know you didn't really forget her name."

"Funny, James." Rory grinned, apparently liking the attention. The blush on her cheeks struck him as sweet, and Keegan nuzzled her neck.

James sighed. "Well, let me get dressed and dispose of the condom. I hate a mess."

"Freak." Keegan teased.

"Back at you. Figures the only reason I get to drive is because you're distracted by a pretty girl."

"Thanks, James," she said wryly. "Glad to know I'm good for something."

Keegan smiled. "Sunshine, if you were any better, I'd a had a heart attack. Your mouth is lethal."

She blushed.

He took off his clothes while James dressed. "No, Rory. You stay naked. Yeah, just like that."

"Don't blame me if we get arrested," James warned, "because no way will I be able to focus on the road and not on you two."

"Deal with it, GQ. I did."

"You pulled over to the side of the road, asshole," James muttered as he left the backseat and entered the front. He shoved the disposed condom into the bag they'd been using for trash, then set off down the road.

Keegan made good on his promise and kissed and hugged Rory, offering comfort and affection, until he finally couldn't stand it anymore. Something flew over the front seat into the back.

"Use it before you cry like a baby. Honestly, Keegan. Do I have to do everything for you?" James winked at him in the mirror and continued to drive.

Keegan picked up the foil package and grinned down at Rory. "Your call, Rory. You want it quick, or long and slow?"

"What do you think?"

A woman after his own heart. He prolonged the sensual torture and made her beg for it. But he knew it wouldn't be long before she had him begging again. And he looked forward to it.

\* \* \*

Rory wanted to go directly to her uncles, but calmer heads prevailed. As Keegan sat with her in their hotel while James remained on-site, keeping an eye on her uncles at their monstrously large house, Rory paced the hotel, still feeling pleasantly sore.

She didn't think she'd ever had so many orgasms in such a short span of time before.

Keegan sat kicked back in a chair, his booted feet on the table and his hat cocked back so she could see his beautiful silver eyes. God, she liked him and James so much it hurt.

"We should join James and go in *now*."

Keegan shook his head. He sat with his arms crossed over his chest, his biceps bulging with strength. "Nope. James needs to scout out the enemy before we go in. Trust me, darlin', we know what we're doin'. We've done this dozens of times before."

She sat on the king-size bed in a huff. "I'm going stir-crazy. Distract me. Tell me about you and James."

Keegan blinked. "What do you want to know?"

*Everything*. "What did you two do in the FBI?"

"A lot of what we did was classified."

She sighed.

"So I'll tell ya." He chuckled. "James spent a lot of time in the service as a U.S. Marine. I grew up on a farm, but I found I liked law enforcement. Had my share of run-ins growing up."

"I'll bet."

He grinned. "Small stuff, but I liked guns, the thought of justice. Wild West, you know?"

She nodded.

“So I became a cop for a few years. I joined the bureau about the same time James did. We kinda clicked.” At her look, he amended, “I don’t mean sexually. That’s all new to me. I mean, we were great friends from the beginning. He’s charming and polished and smart. I’m rough around the edges, stronger than a bull, and smarter than he is, though he won’t admit it.”

They shared a laugh.

“We were both a little different. Power calls to power, that’s something we were told a lot in the labs where they tested us. And maybe that’s why James and I took to each other right off. I don’t know. We worked some interestin’ cases, I can tell you that. Terrorists, a few coups we diverted. Guarded some weird-ass ex-SEALs who could change—ah, never mind. Point is, Uncle Sam used us for a lot of stuff no one ever heard about.”

“But did the government make you what you are, or were you always like this?”

“Handsome, intelligent, and irresistible?”

She snorted. “Yeah, right. I meant telekinetic.”

“Oh, that.” He shrugged. “I could always move stuff with my mind. My family knows, but I don’t do any of my weird stuff when I visit. They’re great. They love me, but they don’t deal with anything not normal. We’re a great bunch of pretenders.” He took off his hat and rubbed the back of his neck.

Rory thought he looked a little sad. “Maybe that’s why you like James so much. He doesn’t seem to hold back with the truth.”

“You got that right. From the get-go, he never hid his talent. Would snap his fingers and offer a light to anyone with a smoke. He’s a smart-ass, for sure. And the best damn partner I ever had.” Keegan coughed and cleared his throat. “This sex thing between us, it’s strange, but not. I mean, I always thought James might swing both ways. Things he’d say, the way he looked at guys sometimes. There were rumors. But he never makes a big deal about it. He keeps to himself, mostly.” Keegan paused. “I never knew he wanted me like that.”

“Is it hard to know how he feels?”

Keegan’s broad grin should have warned her. “Honey, it’s always hard.”

“I meant, will it be difficult to deal with now? Will you guys stay together or what?”

Keegan didn’t answer right away, and she feared the worst.

“I, ah, I haven’t thought about it too much. I guess I’m more like my momma than I thought. Pretending this will all be the same when we get back.” He caught her eyes. “Kinda like you been doin’.”

“What?”

Keegan sat up. “Come on, Rory. You like us. Admit it.”

“Sure I like you.” Her heart beat faster.

“You don’t want to leave us.”

“I—That is... I don’t—What?”

His eyes narrowed with satisfaction. “Well, if it makes you feel any better, I don’t want you leavin’ us either. James is hooked on you, I can tell. And the little bastard is hooked on me.”

“Little? He’s bigger than I am,” she sputtered, not sure how to respond. Was she that transparent? That pathetic?

Keegan stood and crossed to her. He hugged and kissed her, then rocked her against his chest, dancing to a tune only he could hear, but one that soothed her all the same. “Darlin’, I don’t want to lose you. James and I have a life in Bend. We’re with folks who understand us, who know what it’s like to be different. People like you.” He tilted her chin up so he could see into her eyes. “There are a few places downtown where a jewelry shop run by a woman who knows her stuff would do right well. And you know, James and I have houses big enough to fit all three of us.”

She stilled, and he did as well. Rory pulled back. “What are you saying?” But she could see it in his eyes. The notion both thrilled and scared her.

“Rory. Sunshine, I think I love you.” When she would have spoken, he put a finger over her lips. “Hush. I know I’m rushing you, and James will have me by the balls if he thinks I scared you away, so you can’t say nothin’.” His accent thickened, betraying his worry. The sight of this huge, dangerous man afraid of losing Rory astonished her. “I know this is all sudden. We just met and all, but I know you, Rory. I feel you.” He held her hand against his heart, looking so earnest, her eyes welled.

“Shit. No, no. Don’t cry.” He raised the hem of his shirt to wipe away her tears. “Rory, baby, don’t. I’m sorry.”

“No.” She wouldn’t let him step away. Instead she held tight, afraid to let go, afraid to move away. She hadn’t felt so connected to anyone since she’d lost her parents. The fear of going through such a loss again was enough to make her want to run, but she knew the minute she did, she’d know that sadness once more. This big hunk of cowboy holding her had already captured her heart.

The fact that her locket, the very item that had protected her through thick and thin for so long, was missing and she hadn’t yet had a nervous breakdown should have told her what she suspected to be true. But she had a hard time finding the courage to say it.

Instead, she hugged him tighter.

“Shh, it’s okay, Rory. You never have to worry with me and James around. I promise.”

She didn’t know how long they stood together, her head against his chest, his hand stroking her hair, when his cell phone rang.

“Damn. I have to get it. It might be James.”

He stepped away to the table and answered it. After a few terse comments, he hung up and grabbed his hat. Keegan turned back to her. “Time to get your locket, Rory. No matter what, you remember I’m here for you. And so is James. You can always count on us. Okay?”

“Okay.” She didn’t have to think twice about trusting him.



Rory put her hand in his and followed him out the door.

When they found James half an hour later, he sat hunkered under a large pine some two hundred feet from her uncles' property line. He had a pair of binoculars trained on the guards patrolling the grounds.

Situated far enough away from the other houses in the posh neighborhood, any uprising that occurred would take a while to report. And given the distance from the nearest law enforcement agency, Rory figured her uncles could clean up any mess and hide the evidence before the authorities set foot on their property.

Terrific.

"Hey you two." James waved at them to join him. "So I've watched Fred and Bobby Landers for over two hours now. They've been fighting more over that damned locket than the stash of illegal arms in the back of that covered pickup." He handed his binoculars to Keegan and pointed to a dark blue truck in the drive.

"Shit." Keegan shook his head. "Looks like the guards are carrying semiautomatics. Rory, just what are your uncles into?"

She shrugged. "Last I saw them, a whopping ten years ago, they'd been up to scamming old people out of their retirements and stealing the rich blind. They're usually much more subtle than guns. Larceny and the big con, yeah. But the guns don't make sense."

James's phone buzzed, and he glanced down at it. He brought the device closer to his face and swore up a blue streak, though in a hushed voice. This far away, they wouldn't be detected, but it never hurt to be cautious.

"What's wrong?" Keegan leaned in close to him.

The three of them had their heads together when James told them the big news.

"Your uncles are not only in trouble up to their stupid necks, they're trying to pull the ultimate scam. That house belongs to Joe Laponte. Laponte is one of the

leaders of organized crime here in Denver. And he's not going to be happy when he makes bail tonight and finds his house, and his men, have been conned by your uncles, who, by the way, are *not* his business partners. Somehow, Bobby and Fred convinced Laponte's second-in-command that they're Laponte's cousins from out East."

"Shit." Keegan shook his head. "Are we sure they aren't really working for him?"

"Laponte's real cousins are holed up in Boulder and singing like nobody's business right now. A friend of mine hooked me up with the intel, so I know it's good."

Rory couldn't believe this. Her uncles weren't that insane, were they?

"But why hit Laponte?" she asked while she put out her psychic feelers. She understood instantly. "They're there for the diamonds."

James sighed in disgust. "Laponte supposedly stole over ten million in antique jewels from the Hastings Museum last month."

"That was in all the papers," Rory murmured, doing the math. "So my uncles want the gems, but they need a way to get them. And no crime boss is going to set the cops on them without getting in trouble himself."

"They should be afraid of Laponte." Keegan looked angry.

"They won't be. Not with my locket in hand." She nervously scooted back from them, aware the time had come to tell them what she really knew about it. "Ah, guys? There are a few things about the locket I should tell you."

Keegan sat back on his butt next to James, their expressions mirror images of suspicion.

"Ya think?" he asked.

"Spill it," James ordered. "Now."

## Chapter Twelve

Keegan swore as he inched closer to the house with Rory hot on his heels. The woman was going to drive him to an early grave, he could feel it. Nice time to tell them that the locket, in the wrong hands, could do fucking mind control.

Apparently, a few people in Rory's bloodline could bond with the locket in such a way that it enhanced and, in some cases, like Rory's, *added* a bonus psychic ability to its user. Rory knew gems. She could find them anywhere, said they called to her, and the locket enhanced her sensitivity to them. But when wearing the locket, she could also protect herself from outside threats by calling on her inner energy and directing it out, like her psychic blast back in that cave in Jackson Heights.

Her Uncle Bobby could manipulate minds, and with the locket, he'd taken over Laponte's friggin' household. Fred, according to Rory, couldn't do much more than see visions of the past. But with the locket, who knew what else he might be capable of?

So now he, James, and Rory had to drag her uncles out of the house, grab the locket, and run like hell.

A simple grab-and-go, Jack had said. *Simple my ass.*

Still, Keegan had to admit he preferred this danger over helping Monica Salazar with her repetitions. He grinned, wondering how Rory would handle other women coming on to him. Then his grin faded as he wondered if he'd done the right thing by being so open with her in the hotel. He'd admitted how he felt, and from what he knew, honesty was usually the worst policy.

He stopped and crouched behind one of the cars that was positioned close to the back door of the garage.

“Where the hell is Laponte?” one of the guards asked the other. “I don’t trust his cousins.”

“Me neither. Then again, I don’t trust Laponte.”

Keegan glanced over his shoulder at Rory, who nodded. Then he called on his telekinesis and easily slammed the guards into each other, knocking them out. He did the same as he moved through the house, his stealthy entry too easy for his peace of mind. He heard several small explosions outside and knew James was doing his thing. He’d already burned up the security feeds, snowing the cameras. The pickup holding the guns should now be on fire, in addition to the pool house and garage. No way for anyone to drive off and alert more help.

Rory remained right behind him, his sexy shadow.

“Can you do it?” he asked, prepared to set himself up as bait as they climbed to the second floor.

“Yeah, but you have to make it quick.”

He nodded. They continued down the hallway and stopped when they heard her uncles arguing. Keegan peeked around another corner to see Bobby and Fred Landers in a luxurious bedroom done in golds, reds, and browns.

“Dammit, Bobby! Let me have that locket! I can tell you if he’s got anything else in here. I’ll be able to see it.”

“Yeah, and take off with my share of the loot. Forget it.” Bobby scrunched his face, but nothing happened.

“I told you the locket’s power won’t work on me. I’m blood, asshole.”

Bobby pulled back and coldcocked his brother in the face. Fred dropped like a stone, cupping his nose and moaning. “How’s that for blood.” He snickered. Bobby moved toward a painting on the wall, presumably the hidden safe, then stopped. He

gripped the locket when it jumped under Keegan's telekinetic tug. The damn thing should have flown off Landers's neck, but it didn't.

Bobby yelled, "I can feel you thinking. Come on out, and no shooting. You can't hurt me."

*Shit.* Keegan had no choice as his muscles involuntarily moved to follow Bobby's orders. He left Rory hiding behind the half-open door and entered the bedroom.

"You alone?"

Keegan nodded. "I'm alone in the house. My partner is setting off bombs outside." Another shook the house.

"Dickhead. Do you know who you're fucking with?" Bobby sneered.

"Do you? Laponte made bail. He's on his way home as we speak."

Bobby paled. "Yeah? Well, so what? I'll be out of here before he comes back. Now where's my niece?"

Keegan scoffed. "You think we'd bring her with us here?"

Bobby relaxed. "That would be remarkably stupid, and you don't strike me as stupid."

"She's hot, I'll give you that. A pretty little piece of ass, but she was a means to that." Keegan pointed to the locket around Bobby's throat. To his surprise, the stone in the locket had turned a dark red. "My client wants that back."

"Who? Stallbridge?" Bobby shrugged. "He can have it back. For twenty million."

"What?"

"Owen Stallbridge can well afford it. If he wants his precious locket back, he has to deal with me." Bobby squinted at him, and Keegan's mind hazed. "You'll tell him that, won't you? And you'll report back to me everything that happens upon your return. After you kill Rory Taylor. Do that mind thing I can see in your head. Tear her apart, and feel free to make it hurt."

No way in hell would Keegan hurt Rory, but he found himself saying yes all the same. He fought the tendril of icy control wrapping around his brain to no avail. James, Rory, his family and friends, everything faded but obeying Bobby Landers. He could see what mattered to him in the distance, but he couldn't grasp it enough to focus. And knowing it made everything so much worse.

"Good." Bobby beamed. "Now hold my brother down and open that safe."

Keegan exerted his will on Fred easily enough. With his mind, he tore the painting from the wall and saw the steel box behind it. Because he fought the compulsion to obey, it took every ounce of strength he had to break the safe. His brain hurt, and a trickle of blood ran from his nose.

"The door?" Bobby said and pushed hard at Keegan.

With a flick of Keegan's wrist, the steel door flew off the safe.

"Finally." Bobby removed a velvet bag from the dark interior. "Now help me leave. You're my protection, Keegan Price. Yeah, Ed Jackson ran you the minute you took off with Rory. I know your name, and I know the asshole you're working for. So don't let anything harm me."

"No problem." Keegan followed his feet in the opposite direction of where he wanted to go. He trembled as he put one foot in front of the other, and he prayed Rory would remain hidden.

But when Bobby moved to leave the room, Rory stepped forward, and Keegan watched himself go for her throat.

Rory watched in horror as Keegan's eyes watered, his nose bled, and he reached for her. He was struggling, she could see it, but he couldn't combat the locket. Not like she could.

In a calm voice, just as she felt his whisper hands close around her neck, she said, "Keegan, I won't harm my uncle; I swear on my mother's grave."

He let her go and sagged to the ground. "Thank God."

“Wait!” Bobby screeched. Before he could say anything more, a ball of fire exploded in front of his face, and James rushed through the door.

Rory silently thanked him as she tore the locket from her uncle’s neck. In her hands, the chain simply unfastened. The stone became a bright bold blue once more, and the tainted energy of her selfish relative rushed out of the locket as she directed a surge of power at Bobby and tossed him across the room.

He hit the wall hard and slid to the ground, ironically right next to Fred.

Conscious of the screams and sirens growing louder outside, Rory rushed to Keegan. James took the other side of the large Texan, and together they helped muscle him outside and away from the compound.

Keegan looked totally done in, though he did his best to help them escape. They came to a ten-foot wall at the south end of the compound. Earlier, Keegan had lifted them over it.

Rory closed her hand around the locket, relieved to hold it once more. “I’ll get us over, but hold on. My aim isn’t that good.” She felt the echo of her mother’s love deep in the stone and, to her surprise, a wash of masculine lust and affection that felt like Keegan.

When he’d held the locket around his wrist, he’d left an impression the locket apparently liked.

James grabbed on to her while still managing to hold Keegan upright, and her focus fell once more to the task at hand. Using the power the locket lent her, she boosted the three of them over the wall, where they landed hard on the other side.

“Let’s get to the SUV. Hurry.” James dragged Keegan with him, swearing the whole way to the vehicle. “For once, I get to drive without an argument.” He winked at Rory. “Maybe we should knock him out all the time.”

She smiled, but to her horror, tears started to come.

“Oh, baby, it’s okay.” James wiped a tear and gently sat her on the backseat next to Keegan. “Don’t worry. He has a head like a rock. He’ll be just fine.”

James jumped into the driver's side and took off. Away from the mess her uncles had made, away from danger and trouble. And onto a path that would bring her closer to a place she wasn't sure she could ever really call hers, no matter how much she wanted to.

As James drove, he tried to get over the fear he'd felt when Keegan had been forced to obey Rory's uncle. The plan to retrieve the locket had been risky, knowing what Bobby Landers might do to Keegan and Rory if they failed. Using Keegan to kill Rory would be Keegan's ultimate nightmare.

James knew his friend had made huge mistakes when they'd joined the PWP. The drugs given to them to increase their abilities had also made it harder to control them. Sadly, a few scientists had died because they hadn't stopped pushing when Keegan had begged them to.

James should have felt worse about their deaths, but he didn't. Those men had been all about the bottom dollar, wanting proof that their pharmaceuticals could make gods out of men, with no regard to their test subjects. Hell, he'd burned a few to make his point, but he'd at least been able to scale back enough to leave them alive. Keegan hadn't been so fortunate.

But at least this time, all had ended well. He glanced in the rearview mirror and saw Rory lying against Keegan, his arm wrapped around her, holding her tight. A perfect picture. His lovers together, at peace. Happily ever after.

He inwardly denied the fantasy, blaming his cousins for making him into such a romantic. He'd be lucky if Keegan still acknowledged him when they returned. And it wouldn't surprise him if Rory fled the moment they made their next rest stop and never came back.

Just because James loved the hell out of both of his partners didn't mean they loved him back. He knew Keegan liked him, but love for a man, from his cowboy, was asking a lot. And for Rory, a woman betrayed by her own family and left to fend for herself for so long, trust would be something she might never know.



Tired and heartsick at the thought of losing these two people who meant so much to him, James drove deep into the night. But as fast as he drove, he couldn't outrun tomorrow.

He kept behind the wheel for fifteen hours straight. Keegan slept most of the way, reviving only once at a rest stop to use the bathroom. Rory asked for little, content, it seemed, to keep watch over the slumbering giant.

When he couldn't drive anymore without fear of falling asleep at the wheel, James pulled into a small hotel a few hours from Bend and booked a room for the three of them. After checking in with Jack, he fell into bed beside Keegan and Rory and closed his eyes. Sleep claimed him in an instant.

He had no idea how long he'd been out of it when warmth and lust filled him with the need to touch. Still exhausted, he gave himself up to sensation and let the dream carry him.

James moaned and thrashed in torturous ecstasy. He couldn't see, but he could feel wet suction around his cock and a prodding at his ass. Something thick and hot pushed inside him, and he gave himself up to the intensity of it, going with the pleasure as he surged inside the heated perfection of a wet mouth.

The fuck was intense and unforgiving. Relentless. It didn't take much before James woke, exploding into Rory's mouth. A low groan behind him, as well as a fierce grip on his hips, told him where to find Keegan.

"Rory?" James felt groggy and not yet there, somehow standing on his feet yet bent over at the waist at an impossible position.

Then Keegan kissed his neck and withdrew from him. Those damn whisper hands.

Cum dribbled down his legs as the bastard walked away. "Shit. You fucked me while I was half asleep?" James shivered as a wet streak trickled down his leg. "And without a condom?"

Rory licked his balls and rubbed the cum into his thigh. "We decided we're not going to use them anymore. For my part, it's not the right time for me to get pregnant. And just as soon as we get back, I'm going on the pill."

James opened his mouth but said nothing. Then he closed his eyes and tried to wake up. When he opened them again, he saw Rory still on her knees, stimulating his cock anew. Keegan reappeared behind him, wiping up the mess he'd made with a warm, soapy rag.

"Sorry, lover. We couldn't wait." Keegan gave him a big smile. "But while you've been sleeping, Rory and I had a long talk."

"Ah, you want to let go of me now?" He tried to move but couldn't.

"No." Rory stood, and Keegan eased his hold enough to allow James to stand upright, no longer bent over. To his confusion, Keegan took up where Rory let off, massaging his cock, balls, and anus with his whisper hands.

"You're getting thick again," Keegan whispered in his ear. "Have I ever told you how much I get off watching you come? Seeing that cock when it's ready to burst?"

Rory watched them with hunger. Her breasts were full, her nipples hard and swollen. She ran her fingers down her belly and played with her lower lips, then shoved a finger inside.

"Shit. I have to be dreaming this, right?" James watched her play with herself and leaned back into Keegan's cock as his lover ground it against his lower back. "You getting hard again?"

"Oh yeah. There's something we need to do, you and I."

"Keegan?"

Rory's fingers stopped moving. "I want you to say it first; then I will." She sounded uncertain.

Keegan ordered her to continue. "You keep rubbing that clit, Sunshine. I've got this." Keegan nuzzled James's neck, so affectionate.

James knew he couldn't be awake. Keegan was never soft with him, never loving. They fucked and cared for one another. Hell, they'd been partners for years, but this?

"Keegan," she moaned. "I don't want to come yet."

"Keep rubbing." Keegan rounded James to face him and looked down at James with smiling eyes. "Fuck, you're hot. You're sexy, a great partner, and...oh hell. I'm just gonna say it." His voice was thick, that syrupy Texan accent James loved hearing. "I think I'm in love with you two. You and Rory. And if that don't beat all, I don't know what does."

James stared in shock. "Are you shitting me?"

"I wish," Keegan said glumly, and behind them Rory chuckled. "Woman, you'd better be close to coming. I want you nice and wet."

"Sure thing, cowboy," she said softly.

"Fucking you is incredible." Keegan ran a hand down James's chest and encircled his stiff cock with a large, calloused palm. "You're a guy, but I get off watching you fuck. Rory is, well, she's special. We both know that." Keegan kissed James, his lips soft and slow. "I love her, James. As much as I love you. We're all connected. And Rory said the locket likes us."

"Do I get to talk here?" she asked, a hint of bite in her tone.

"Baby, you even think about arguing with me and I'll put you in that leather-and-collar combo I showed you earlier, the one you *know* you want to wear."

"Leather-and-collar combo?" James couldn't process it all, especially when his dick spiked again. "What the hell went on after I fell asleep?"

Rory let out a breath. She shoved Keegan aside and kissed James so thoroughly, he was poking her belly with his arousal in seconds. "James, I care for you so much. You and Keegan. And I'm scared to death this is all going to blow up in my face. But"—she paused and swallowed hard—"I'm willing to give us a try if you are."

James stared down into her sunny features, captivated by the brilliance of her gaze. "Rory, you have to know how I feel about you. I want you with us, honey. But are you sure you know what you're getting into?" He gave his cowboy a wink. "Keegan's a pain to deal with on a regular basis. It takes a whip and a chair to keep him in line, especially around our boss."

"Hey!"

"Keegan, would you release him so he can move already?" Rory murmured.

James groaned when the blood rushed through his stiff limbs. "But I love him. The hardheaded cowboy holds a special place in my heart. Just like you." James kissed her back, showing her how he felt without words. "Can you accept both of us, Rory? In your bed and in your life? No others, just us."

Keegan cleared his throat. "And, uh, us together? That's okay with you too?"

Rory grinned up at James and winked, and he knew everything would be all right. "Well, you haven't shown me everything I wanted to see yet. But we're getting there."

Keegan joined them, widening the hug. "Honey, we'll stuff you full. I told you that was what this was going to be about. James in your ass, me up that pussy. You're going to crash hard when we're done fucking you."

She kissed him. "I can't wait. But I was talking about James fucking *you*. It's such a turn-on to watch you getting yours."

Keegan blinked hard and turned red, and James couldn't help the sly smile he felt all the way to his toes. "Oh yeah, Rory. You and I think alike. I'm an ass man, you know."

"Do tell." She kissed him again. "Better yet, show me."

Rory didn't know where she'd gotten the courage. Maybe from Keegan daring her to accept him and James. Maybe from seeing how her uncles had almost ended what could have been. Or maybe it was the sudden burn in her locket, reminding

her of how much her mother and father had loved one another, despite their screwed-up families. The locket could sense things that fit Rory. Diamonds and sapphires, rubies and emeralds. James and Keegan.

She couldn't help herself. She loved James and Keegan against all rational explanation. She wanted to see where they might go, together. And she had nothing to lose but her heart, since without them in her life, she didn't have much of one left anyway.

She let Keegan draw her down on top of him on the bed.

"Uh-uh, Sunshine. Sit on my face."

She loved his nickname for her. But she didn't know about—"*Keegan*."

He chuckled as his whisper hands settled her over his lips. A long, strong stroke of his tongue later and she forgot her embarrassment and rode his mouth with sheer pleasure. He sucked and licked, bringing out the sexual Amazon inside her who wanted more.

James straddled Keegan behind her and circled his hands around her body to rub her breasts, stinging her nipples with pinches as he sucked her neck and turned her head to kiss her mouth.

Overwhelmed with sensation, she could only feel as her men, her *lovers*, gave her such pleasure.

Then Keegan used his whisper hands to gently push her and James back. "On my cock, now." He looked up at her with wet lips, his eyes dark with need. "Let me fuck that cunt, Sunshine. So deep, until I'm coming inside you."

She nodded, and James helped position her on top of Keegan. Thick, he stretched her as she took him to her womb.

James disappeared and returned soon enough. He bent her over Keegan and prodded her ass with something slick. "Easy, Rory. A little at a time."

He worked her slowly, first rimming her, then pushing his finger in little by little. When she felt him stroke inside her, she couldn't believe how stuffed she felt. He pushed against Keegan through her, and her cowboy jolted.

"Christ, you two are killing me. I'm singin' in my head so I don't come too soon. But it feels so fuckin' good inside you, Rory. And James, touching me through you. Oh man."

She leaned forward and kissed him, and felt James insert a second finger inside her. He stretched her, scissoring his digits to make penetration easier. After a while of torturing her and Keegan, James removed his fingers to replace them with something bigger.

"It might sting a little," he said on a breath as he breached her.

She gasped. "*A little?*"

He chuckled and worked her slowly, prolonging Keegan's agony even as he made it easier for Rory to accept him.

And then both her men were all the way inside her, stuffing her full.

"Fuck, Rory. You're so good, baby. So tight." James moaned and pulled slowly out, then slid back in with a gentleness that should have relieved her.

Instead, it annoyed her. Rory's body needed more. Keegan gritted his teeth, straining as he thickened inside her, and his frustration only increased her arousal. Rory was hungry, sexually ravenous, and so close to the pleasure she sensed James held back. "Come on, James. Do it. I need to come." She felt taut, sandwiched between them and on edge, impossibly turned on each time James moved, and the burn lit her core with carnal desire.

"Me too," Keegan rasped, his voice low and rough, his muscles straining. "I'm gonna shoot hard up in you, Rory. *Fuck*, I want to see you come around me. Let me feel it, darlin'. Drench me."

She couldn't hold on, not with James pumping her and Keegan fucking her. They moved in sync, pulling her inexorably over the edge. As she cried out and came, she watched Keegan release, saw his eyes widen and his mouth open.

Ecstasy bombarded her nerve endings as white-hot pleasure showered her in a gasp-inducing orgasm.

Then James shoved hard one final time and stilled. He groaned her name and flexed a few more times inside her to finish spending.

Keegan finally stirred and looked up at Rory and James with a huge smile on his face. "Man, I love watching you come, GQ." He winked at Rory. "And you too, Sunshine. But about that thing with James and my ass, I think we need to talk a bit more about that."

## Chapter Thirteen

“That’s right, Monica. Ten more.” Kitty stood with Monica Salazar while James and Keegan worked with a few of their favorite, happily married male clients on the other side of the gym. Their gazes met, and they tried to hide their smirks as they heard Kitty reading Monica the riot act because Monica was too busy ogling the many men pumping iron instead of hitting her own workout. Only Kitty could get away with her tone, because the empath worked her clients, getting them to accept her harsh measures because they felt good about her sincerity. Kitty genuinely cared that they made the most of their efforts.

“So this weekend, I’m thinking we should take Rory to Smith Rock.” James helped Mike select the right weights for his next curl and checked off a block on his clipboard. “Three sets, Mike. You know what to do.”

They’d been back a week, and so far, so good. Rory had agreed to meet with Jack’s super-secret client today. So while Keegan and James made small talk, their woman confronted Stallbridge by herself. It made Keegan more than a little upset that Jack continued to play games with them, not acknowledging what they already knew to be the truth: they worked for the millionaire. Though James had a point—what did it matter who they worked for, as long as the work was legit and paid well?—Keegan had a hard time getting past the principle of the thing. That, and the fact Jack annoyed the fuck out of him.

In a low voice, Keegan growled to James, “I still don’t know why that dick won’t come out and admit who’s paying the bills. Not like we don’t already know.” Keegan glared at Jack as the bastard moved behind the mirror.

As usual, Jack ignored him.



“Wonder if the boss feels like working off his ’roid rage later?” Keegan grinned, loving the notion of tossing Jack Keiser around the underground gym for a while. Jack not only didn’t trust them with the truth, but he’d given them a hard time about Rory before Kitty had stepped in and soothed everyone’s tempers.

“He’s not on steroids, you idiot. Jack’s tense, and he works off his burn with weights. I mean, it’s not as if the poor guy has any other outlets, you know?” James said under his breath, then returned to Mike to correct his form once more.

Keegan nodded. “Good point. I’ll be right back.” He walked away, having caught sight of a blonde ponytail bouncing toward them.

Rory beamed with happiness, her locket still secured around her neck. She wore shorts and a tank top and sneakers, her normal workout wear when at the gym. He knew she wouldn’t be able to visit as much when her business took off, but he didn’t mind the distraction, overjoyed that the woman planned on staying.

“Hey, hot stuff. Nice to see you looking so pretty.” Keegan kissed her on the cheek and threw an arm around her, wanting everyone to know who she belonged to. James complained that his attention was over-the-top, but since Rory didn’t seem to mind, Keegan didn’t much care.

James had a more subtle way of touching her and looking at her, but so far, no one had made any comments about the three of them. Jack had known right off. Their boss had looked at the three of them the moment they’d returned, then rolled his eyes. The others had teased, but none of them commented beyond calling Keegan and James a lucky pair of bastards. Of course, Keegan and James hadn’t yet let the others know just how close the three of them really were. Keegan could only imagine how much shit he’d take then.

To his surprise, he looked forward to it. He wanted everyone to know James was his, and he finally felt sure enough about his decision to share the truth.

Keegan walked Rory away from the main gym toward the employees’ lunch room and closed the door behind them. “Well?”

She threw herself into his arms and kissed him with such intensity, he thought about locking the door and fucking her against the wall where they stood.

Obviously feeling his erection, she squirmed in his hold. "Not here, you big oaf." She flushed. "Jeez."

"Well, what the hell do you expect me to do when you molest me like that, darlin'?" He cupped his cock and groaned. "Have pity, Rory. I feel stressed."

"Yeah, right. I'm not buying that, not after last night." Her pink cheeks entranced him.

"Damn. You sure are pretty." He leaned forward to kiss her again when the door behind him smacked into his back. "Ow."

"Move it, lughead." James entered. "Okay, Rory. What happened? How did it go with Stallbridge? And have you decided yet where you want to live?"

Rory looked from James to Keegan and blurted out what she'd been feeling for days. "I love you two, do you know that?" By the smug expressions on their faces, they did. "Jerks."

James had the nerve to look wounded. "Now baby, is that any way to talk to your favorite man?"

Keegan shoved him aside. "It's okay, James. I don't mind."

"Funny." James grinned at them both.

It constantly amazed Rory how well they got along. James and Keegan complemented each other to a tee. At first, here in Bend, she'd wondered if she'd fit in. They had friends, work, and a comfortable ease with one another that felt so natural. Yet they needed her. These big, strong men actually wanted her softness, her feminine buffer to provide them with the physical and emotional ties they craved.

She smiled at them. "Let's sit down." The three of them swallowed up a table. "Keegan, are you getting bigger?"

James leaned back to try to get a look at his crotch, and Keegan slapped him on the back of the head.

James snickered. "Yeah, he is."

"No. You're just seeing me in shorts more than jeans. I'm always this handsome and buff. Wanna do it now?"

Rory giggled. Christ, she hadn't giggled since she was four. After clearing her throat, she ran over the events with Stallbridge, wanting to announce her big decision. "So I met him, and he's a really nice guy." Her men frowned, and she hurriedly continued. "He's also my fourth cousin. Can you believe that? When his warehouse was broken into last year, the thieves unearthed paperwork about some old Stallbridge heirlooms that had been stashed away in the warehouse. That's how Owen found out about the locket."

"Owen?" James and Keegan crossed their arms over their chests as one.

"That's so cute. It's like you're twins," she teased, laughing when Keegan scowled at James and slapped his hands down on the table.

Keegan frowned. "So Owen. He's leaving you alone, then?"

"He was concerned about the locket, not sure if the stories surrounding what he'd researched about it might be true. So I showed him."

"What?" they asked at the same time.

"I know. I wasn't going to. I was going to lie like a champ, but there's something about Owen I liked. He made me feel safe, the way you two do. But nothing sexual." She scrunched her nose. "Owen's tall, strong, and handsome. He has the same color hair as I do. And we kind of looked alike. Kissing him would be like kissing my brother."

"Good," Keegan said. "Because you ain't kissin' anyone but me and him." He nodded at James.

"Not to put too fine a point on it, but yeah, what he said." James winked at her.

"Sure, sure. I know. So I showed Owen what the locket could do, and I told him all about my mom and dad, and how it had always given Mom a sense of peace." She paused. "I let him try it on."

Keegan's and James's eyes widened.

"The locket kind of gravitated toward him. When he put it on, the stone glowed. Then the locket opened."

"Hell, it opened?" James stroked his chin. "For all that you guys have been calling it a locket, I never saw a hinge or a crack in the gold. Honestly, it looks more like a pendant." He and Keegan leaned closer, and Rory knew what they saw. The seam had vanished after opening that one time.

"So what was in it?" Keegan asked.

"Two small pictures of a man and a woman. The man looked enough like Owen to be his twin. But the pictures were old, like tintype. I don't know. According to Owen, the couple are his and my great-great-great-grandparents, Owen and Adele Stallbridge. The original Owen found a strange rock rumored to come from the sky, and he fashioned this locket out of it. Supposedly the metal is alive, because it bonded with Adele and Owen in a way that's not normal at all."

Keegan whistled. "So you're related to those snobby rich people, and you have an alien living in your locket."

James rolled his eyes. "Keegan, stop being an ass for two seconds." He turned to Rory. "You happy, honey?"

She smiled. "Oh yeah. I talked to Owen for hours."

"You were supposed to be back at two," Keegan grumbled, but he looked pleased.

"He's a very nice man. He has a sister a few years younger than him, around my age. I think she does some kind of business that involves travel. But Owen was very interested to learn more about me, and he wanted to meet you two."

"Oh?" James said quietly.

“I told him about you both, about how much I love you.”

Keegan blinked. “Come again? Sunshine, you still won’t commit to livin’ with us or settling here. But you told some rich ass—ah, some rich guy you’re doing the both of us with no problem?”

She blushed and scowled at him. “Well, I admit part of it was a test. I expected him to look at me like I was crazy, but he just smiled and offered congratulations. Then he mentioned he owns a few of the commercial properties on Wall, and that relatives get a big discount.”

She finally came to the important part. “So, I was thinking.” She hoped they’d agree to this. “Instead of us living in your house,” she said to Keegan, “or yours,” she said to James, “why don’t we look into the house I just bought? It’s big enough for all of us, and it’s closer to the mountains. I know it’d be a longer drive to work, but—”

Keegan lifted her out of her chair with his whisper hands, startling a squeak of shock out of her.

James beamed. “Honey, that’s the best news I’ve had all day. I don’t even want to know how much you paid for it.”

She laughed as she settled between them. “That stash I mentioned I’d collected over the years? Guys, I know rocks and stones. The diamonds and rubies I sold Owen are worth a lot. A lot, lot. But I gave him a family discount because he traded me a really cool house.”

Keegan groaned. “Does this mean we owe him now? Or you? I don’t know about leechin’ off you. We make money, but it ain’t that great. Maybe we—”

A ball of fire suddenly danced in front of his face.

James glared. “Shut up, right now. No macho displays of testosterone. No beating your chest and being the man. *We’re* in this together, Keegan. Rory likes the house, and I like Rory. She wants us. You want to screw with that right now?”

Keegan looked shamefaced. "No, but Rory, we don't want you for your money. I don't like you bein' loaded."

"I'm not." Well, she kind of was, but only because Owen could legitimately get her top dollar for the stones she'd gathered. Then again, she couldn't afford to give up work altogether. "Look, I have enough to put us into a great house with a bit of land. The rest will go into my business." And some nice furniture, a car, maybe a new hat for Keegan, and a new suit for James...

Keegan breathed out a sigh of relief. "Good. I want you to need us, Sunshine."

"I do." She relaxed into the hug he gave her, then pulled back. "And I want you to think about something. If we do this marriage thing, like you two are bugging me to, then there has to be a long engagement. We just met, remember?" But she had a hard time reminding herself of that. The love she felt when she was with them overwhelmed her fears. Life wouldn't be perfect, and she knew there would ups and downs, but without them, she didn't know what she'd do.

"You're mine, Rory. And so is he." James drew her close for a kiss. "I'm perfectly content to be yours and his in name only. I'm less of a traditionalist than the cowboy is."

She knew he meant it. With James, Rory had never gotten anything but the truth. With Keegan too, she admitted, just in a much more straightforward way.

Keegan's eyes gleamed. He leaned closer to kiss both of them. "I have the rings back at my place, but I was hopin' you'd help me if you wanted stones set in them. That's your deal, anyways, Sunshine."

James started. "Rings?"

Keegan grinned. "Yeah, smart-ass, rings. You don't know everything, do you? I bought one for you, me, and Rory soon as we got back. Got to make an honest man out of you too, or I'll never hear the end of it from the nimrods around this place when the truth gets out."

Rory laughed. "Oh wow. This is so perfect. Kitty bet me ten dollars you'd be too much of a, ah, a coward to announce to everyone how you really feel about James."

She could see the love and relief on James's face. He'd said little, but she knew he still worried about his relationship with Keegan. Heck, she did too.

Rory cautioned, "I'm in, you know that. But like I said, we need to take this slow. I want us to be sure."

"As slow as you want, Sunshine. Don't matter much to me." Keegan gave a loud whoop and slapped James on the back. Then he kissed Rory again. "No rush. In fact, we can hide the rings when we visit my folks at Thanksgiving. Give you plenty of time to adjust to the thought of me and you. And you," he said to James. "I need to break the folks in gently to being with a guy, and hell, a threesome ain't gonna go down well, I know it. But I'm not going to hide how I feel about you two forever."

James looked at Rory, who nodded her agreement. "Fine. But we wear the rings when we go to Maryland for Christmas. My family is going to love you two. But not as much as I do." James looked like he wanted to burst.

"Now hold on a minute. There's just one thing we need to take care of before this is official." Rory tried to look serious. "My saying yes is conditional on that thing we talked about last week."

Keegan frowned. "Thing?"

She glanced from him to James and grinned.

Dawning comprehension widened James's smile. "Rory, if I haven't said I love you enough, from the bottom of my heart, let me say it again. I love you."

"I know." She kissed him and turned with him to face Keegan.

James ran his hand over her hip, his breathing heavy as his gaze lingered over Keegan's fine form. "Remember what I said before, Keegan? About me being an ass man?"

Keegan groaned, but the tenting shorts he wore said he wasn't as opposed to being on the receiving end of James and his loving as much as he protested.

Rory grinned. "Now, cowboy, before I say yes, let's talk about you getting yours..."

THE END



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## Marie Harte

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic, but especially all things romance. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling. Twenty-three years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers.