

Beautiful Trouble Publishing

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To the lovely ladies of BTP, thanks for this opportunity. This is for my own Celtic honey, now everyone will know how sexy redheads are.

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This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

Chapter One

Sophia Wallace was raised with a belief that you really shouldn't hate. Her mother explained it was a waste of energy for something you don't care about, whereas her grandmother told her that as good Christians, they didn't hate—they had God for that. Her mother's belief was based on energy and chi, because they wouldn't be Californians if they didn't have some New Age beliefs. Her grandmother's, on the other hand, was based on, well, crazy—but that was her grandmother, and explaining crazy would just get off topic.

She'd really tried hard over the years not to hate, but with all honesty, deep breathing and praying were not going to sway her from hating weddings. She hated her sisters' weddings, her cousins', and if her father wasn't such a stickler for making her mother an honest woman, she was sure she would've hated her own parents'.

Yep, she thought she had hating weddings down until her soon to be ex-best friend Hannah Sims—now Hannah Sims Madison—decided to tie the knot.

Gah.

Hannah, Ms. I'm-Going-to-Become-an-Attorney-to-Save-the-World-but-Instead-Have-Become-a-Cog-in-the-Corporate-Machine, was marrying Avery, Mr. I'm-a-Big-Shot-Lawyer-who-Helps-Billionaires-Hide-Their-Assets-from-the-Government-Because-All-Those-Lazy-Liberals-Want-to-Waste-It-on-Those-Lazy-People-who-Should-Just-Get-a-Job.

Gah.

Hannah, who lived on a kibbutz until she was twelve and rode a bike in Los Angeles because she wanted to reduce her carbon footprint, was marrying Avery, who grew up behind the Orange Curtain in Newport Beach and thought carbon footprint meant having a leak in your exhaust.

Gah.

What she hated the most about this damn wedding, though, was not the fact that Hannah allowed love to make her a complete and total sellout. She could overlook that because, well, love does weird shit to people. Sophia didn't hate the fact that she had to wear a "burnished rose," the designer's term for pink that looks like it has been rolled in shit, taffeta floor-length bridesmaid gown. One, because Hannah paid for it, two, it wouldn't be a wedding if the bridesmaids actually looked good, and three, even she

knew desert-colored cammies and steel-toed work boots were not good for all occasions.

No, what Sophia Wallace hated the most without a shadow of a doubt was the damn matchmaking. All shifters ever thought about was finding their mate or finding someone else's mate. It was bad enough her grandmother was convinced that her ovaries had atrophied because she was over thirty and still hadn't mated and popped out cubs. A shifter wedding took all that pent-up desperation to keep the species alive and raised it to the next level.

Hannah pleaded with her to be civil. Which she was highly insulted by, because she was always civil, until someone said something stupid, and then she just became annoyed. Of course she couldn't help that the annoyance resulted in her ripping the person a new one. A shifter wedding tried every last nerve in her body, because there were only so many times she could say she had a boyfriend, was a lesbian, a tranny, or had six months to live.

Okay, maybe she was being harsh. Human weddings weren't that bad. An open bar, so-so food, and a DJ spinning disco classic could be tolerable. She never had to worry about matchmaking, though, because prey really knew when to avoid a predator.

No such luck at a shifter wedding, and if one more wannabe Alpha came up to her, she swore she

was going to whip out the military regulation taser she had hidden under her dress in a leg holster and, well, stop being so civil.

Riley Oliver hated weddings. He hated weddings mostly because he believed they were stupid and another example of shifters trying to mainstream. He felt shifters didn't get married, they got mated. Which doesn't require the entire Pack and those your Pack had formed an alliance with to be fed for free. It also didn't require forcing your friends and Pack mates to have stilted conversation with the oddballs your mate called friends and family.

When Avery introduced Riley to Hannah, he thought it was a good choice, even though she seemed like a total hippy. She was cute, with an okay body and a funny personality. They actually really fit each other. It was just unfortunate her Pack was made up of a bunch of misfits.

Especially Sophia Wallace, her Pack mate and best friend—the female was certifiable. Which he thought was a shame, because she was actually pretty cute. Close to six feet, she didn't make him feel awkward when he was standing next to her. The bridesmaid dress she wore complemented her nut-

brown skin and athletic figure, and when she chose to smile she was actually quite beautiful. Yep, pretty cute—and super crazy.

“Riley, you’ve got to help me out, man. Sophia just told Chad she didn’t think they would work out because she’s a preoperative tranny. Can you please keep her occupied for a while before she does something crazy?” Avery pleaded through clenched teeth.

“Why do I have to occupy her? Why not just tell the guys to leave her alone?” Riley said, without hiding his annoyance.

“*Because* you’re my best friend and best man. *Because* I need you to take care of shit I’m too busy with my wedding to handle, *and* because I didn’t rat you out in third grade when you pushed Ralph Zimmerman’s face in the school toilet,” Avery said, getting agitated.

“Jesus, Avery, chill out. I’ll go talk to her, but I would like to put in my ‘I told you so’ right now. Matings don’t require weddings,” Riley said, with a disgruntled edge to his voice.

“Yeah, yeah. Just go occupy her until we sit down for dinner,” Avery replied, turning to leave.

Riley rolled his eyes as Avery rushed off to placate some other guest at this cluster fuck he called the happiest day of his life. Turning toward the

direction he'd last seen Sophia, he began walking toward her and the unfortunate pack mate of his who was on the prowl.

God, he really hated weddings.

Chapter Two

Sophia's fingers were slowly hitching up the side of her dress so she could taser the moron in front of her when she saw Riley, Avery's best friend, walking toward her. With the way his eyes narrowed at her movements, she almost thought he knew what she was up to.

"So do you make it down to the OC often?" Moron asked.

"Fortunately, no," she said, with as much indifference as she could muster. Chad, Brad, Ken, or whatever his name was just couldn't get a hint even if she painted it across her forehead.

"Hey, Brad, I think you might be thirsty. Go get yourself a drink," Riley said, as he came closer.

She tried really hard not to roll her eyes, because even though Riley was doing her a good solid, he had to be all wannabe Alpha about it.

Gah.

She absolutely hated male shifter posturing. All she needed was for Brad to start growling and peeing on her.

"Um. I'm not thirsty, Riley," Brad said, with a confused expression.

“I think you are, Brad,” Riley replied, with an exacerbated sigh.

“Well, I know I am, and if you’ll excuse me, there’s a fifth of Jack waiting for me at the bar,” she said, shoving her way through the two males. Copious amounts of alcohol were the only way she’d even begin to make it through this fiasco.

“Hey, Sophia, wait up,” Riley shouted behind her.

She sped up at the sound of Riley’s voice closing in on her. She wasn’t going to outright run, but briskly walking was good enough for her.

“Sophia, I’m talking to you,” Riley growled as he grabbed her arm.

“Don’t grab me,” she said through clenched teeth, pulling away from Riley’s grip.

“I’m trying to talk to you,” Riley said, reaching for her again, closing into her space.

“Talking involves using your mouth, not your hands, and if you grab me one more time it will be your last,” Sophia replied, unconsciously getting into a fighter’s stance.

Growing up around shifters, she was used to the males thinking they could try and dominate her. “Try” being the operative word. She was raised with the knowledge that male gender and a larger size didn’t

guarantee dominance. A mother and grandmother who barely hit five feet made sure of that.

Staring into the emerald green eyes of Riley Oliver, she nonverbally let him know she would be willing to teach him some of the lessons she'd learned from her mother and grandmother. Granted, she wasn't a wilting violet at almost six feet tall, but with her heels on Riley still towered a good three inches over her, making her actually feel small.

He wasn't hulking with muscles like some of the males in attendance, but Riley's swimmer physique of lean, toned muscles was impressive. Okay, she could admit that if she wasn't so annoyed, and this was another context, she would find Riley attractive. His height and body were already a plus, but the strong masculine lines of his face, striking green eyes, and wavy red hair that looked artfully messy, cut with enough length to run fingers through, helped to complete the package.

Even so, he was an asshole, and she wouldn't flinch from messing up that handsome face or busting those firm full lips if he didn't step back.

"Okay, hands are no longer touching. I was just trying to save you, but it looks like you have it under control," Riley said, raising his hands and sounding as if he were trying to get her not to jump off a ledge.

Asshole.

Giving him her best frosty look, she spun around and continued to head toward the bar.

God, she hated weddings.

Riley was tempted to just let her go. The look she gave him when he reached out to stop her from running off like some mad woman almost made his balls shrivel up. For a moment there, he was pretty sure she was going to shift and rip out his throat. Hell, he was convinced she probably could have done it with her bare hands.

Unlike a lot of male shifters, he didn't go for all that dominance bullshit. He treated people with respect, and if they couldn't handle that, then he would handle them. He didn't need to piss on every corner or challenge every shifter to some death match. They weren't animals, at least not all of the time.

He knew a lot of guys got turned on by playing dominance games with the females they dated, but not Riley. He wasn't interested in being mauled as foreplay. Some biting and scratching was okay, but anything that would have him visiting the Pack's doctor was a no-no.

It was too bad she was crazy, though, because even now with the death glare she gave him, Sophia

was pretty hot. When not shooting laser beams, Riley knew Sophia had the quintessential puppy-dog eyes. They were a deep chocolate brown framed by thick lashes that drew people in.

Her soft brown curls were piled on top of her head, which highlighted her angular jaw that was softened by her button nose and lush lips, which prevented her face from appearing too masculine. Also, her body was definitely a work of art. He knew she had long, lean legs to go with her height that balanced the best ass he'd seen in a long time, firm and high with just a little bounce.

Sighing, Riley began walking toward the bar where Sophia was taking shots of whiskey. He was going to need copious amounts of alcohol to get him through this.

God, he really hated weddings.

Chapter Three

Sophia knew Riley was going to follow her even before he sat down next to her. He had that stubborn look about him.

Assholes usually did.

“I think we may have gotten off on the wrong foot, Sophia,” Riley said from next to her at the bar as he signaled the waiter.

The one consolation of this whole situation was the full bar Avery’s parents had in their ginormous ballroom. This was not the little wet bar in your family’s rec room. No, this was the type of setup that would make Hemingway weep. As a carpenter, she appreciated the craftsmanship that went into the actual bar she was leaning against. The dark-grained wood felt expertly polished under her hands.

Aside from the odd fix-it jobs she did in her carpentry business, woodworking was her true passion. She could take a hunk of wood and turn it into a work of art. She didn’t even mind being the only female on the job most of the time. Sophia knew she was good and let her work speak for itself. Running her hands along the bar surface, she craved her standard attire of tank top, desert cammies, and steel-

toed work boots at the thought of what she could make with materials like this.

Now that her professional interest was piqued, she gave the area another onceover. The space actually looked like something out of an English gentlemen's club from the Victorian era, which contrasted with the Louis XIV style of the rest of the room. She initially wanted to say something smug about the nouveau riche and their mishmash of architecture, but the floor-to-ceiling selection of her favorite alcohol shut her up.

Throwing back another shot of Jack, she peered over at Riley. With his profile to her, she couldn't help taking in the masculine beauty of his face. With his crisp black tux cut in a classic style and the way his neatly trimmed wavy red hair looked like burnished fire in the light, he was old Hollywood all the way.

She really wanted to know what angle he was using, though. It wasn't as if they were hostile toward each other. Actually, the couple of times Hannah had mingled with her and Avery's friends, she and Riley had been civil.

He didn't say anything stupid to annoy her, and she didn't have to rip him a new one.

"I don't know what you mean, Riley?" she said, pouring from the bottle of Jack she had the bartender leave, because it was just going to get old having to

wait for him to refill it, and everyone knew she wasn't at her best when something worked her nerve.

Riley sighed and turned so he was facing her. "Okay, I should've said I felt like I'd gotten off on the wrong foot when it comes to us."

"I thought you were a lawyer?" she asked, trying to look innocent.

"I am," Riley answered, with a puzzled expression.

"Well, then what's with all the 'I' statements? You sound like a shrink," she said, sipping her drink.

"What are you talking about?" Riley asked, with a furrowed brow.

"You're using 'I' statements. 'I feel.' 'I think.' It's stuff shrinks do, or people who've had a lot of therapy," she said, trying to hide her smirk in her glass.

She knew she wasn't being fair, but after all of the Chads, and Brads, and Kens, she was itching to give someone a good ribbing.

"I'm actually trying to have an adult conversation with you," Riley said, through clenched teeth.

Oooh, someone doesn't like to be teased, she thought. "Sometimes people use 'I' statements when they think they're talking to someone crazy. Do you

think I'm crazy, Riley?" she asked, using what her father called her puppy-dog eyes.

Riley just stared at Sophia, not really knowing what to do. Was she serious? One minute she was going to rip his arms off and beat him with them, and the next she was asking questions out of left field. Narrowing his eyes, he really didn't think talking to her was in his job description as best man.

Leaning over to get a glass from behind the bar, he took the bottle of Jack she was bogarting and poured himself two fingers full. Drinking it down in one swift move, he let the burn of whiskey settle in before he answered.

"Actually, yes, I think you're certifiable, Sophia," he said, staring into those deceptively sweet chocolate brown eyes.

He knew he was playing it cool, even though he braced himself for the attack. To his surprise, instead of having to restrain a berserk she-wolf, Sophia let out one of the sexiest laughs he'd ever heard in his life.

It had a smoky quality to it that reminded him of the whiskey they were both drinking, bursting with flavor and full of life. Actually, the way it transformed her face left him momentarily speechless. The rare

occasions he'd seen her smile didn't compare to how beautiful she looked when consumed with joy.

Sophia was pleasantly surprised that Riley didn't back down from her question. She was getting really tired of having to fake nice, and his smooth reply told her he didn't always have to do nice.

“Good one, Riley. Keep this up, you might distract me from how much I hate weddings,” she said, pouring herself another drink.

“God, I hate them too. Total waste of time,” Riley said, reaching over to take the bottle that was very quickly emptying.

She had to repress a desire to shriek like a little girl. Finally, someone else, a kindred spirit, who realized time and energy was better served elsewhere than by being at a wedding—for example, by going to the dentist to have a root canal or making a visit to the gyno.

“Yeah, well at least you don't have to worry about some male shifter trying to mount and mark you during the cake-cutting ceremony,” she said, shuddering at the thought.

“*Please*. I keep having to avoid eye contact with every single she-wolf present for fear her father will

have me cornered with the rest of his Pack demanding I ‘do the right thing.’” Riley snorted while swinging back another round.

She choked a little at the image of some of the crazy females roaming the reception. Which made her begin to laugh like a loon.

“God, that’s so sad and funny at the same time. Has anyone told you about the number of cubs per mating in their family yet? Or better yet, commented on how for your size, you could probably hold a litter. Like I’m some fucking dog.” She spat the last part out, thinking about how she regretted not decking that asshole.

“Fuck, that’s one of the most pitiful pickup lines I’ve ever heard,” he said, chuckling, and reached over to take the bottle out of Sophia’s hand.

Seeing as Sophia had dispensed with using her glass and was just drinking straight from the bottle, he didn’t want to make her feel awkward by not doing the same thing.

“*Please*—like you have anything better,” Sophia said, snatching the bottle back and drinking the last of its contents.

“Babe, trust, when I want a woman I don’t need a line,” he said, leaning in and whispering huskily into Sophia’s ear.

She wanted to be annoyed by the “babe” comment and Riley’s cocky behavior, but with him leaning so close to her she could smell the whiskey on his breath, combined with his own masculine cologne, she froze.

She wanted to blame it on the fact she was in a vulnerable place because of the hated wedding. Which forced her to use large amounts of alcohol to cope, making her susceptible to the nefarious deeds of unsavory men. She really wanted to believe that. She was willing herself at the very moment she turned her head to look into the emerald gaze of Riley’s very sexy eyes, but she froze, and whenever she froze her mouth felt it necessary to take over without the explicit direction of her brain.

“I’m not a whore!” Sophia blurted out.

“What!” Riley exclaimed, pulling away from her with a shocked look on his face.

She sighed and closed her eyes, still clenching the damn bottle of Jack that seemed so appropriate for her situation fifteen minutes ago.

“Wow, that didn’t come out right,” she said, turning toward Riley and trying not to hunch her shoulders with shame.

“Um, yeah, you think?” Riley said, giving her a look he probably gave to crazy homeless people with tin hats and a cat on a leash.

“Let me clarify. I meant that just because I could have sex with someone who hasn’t promised to take a bullet for me doesn’t make me a whore,” she said, hoping she was making more sense.

“Yep, that makes it so much clearer,” Riley replied, with heavy sarcasm as he slowly began to scan the crowd.

She knew she was losing him. Shit, where was her brain?

“I think you may have had a little too much to drink,” Riley stated, reaching over to take the empty bottle Sophia clutched like a life preserver.

Damn, just when he thought she was remotely normal, she had to go and ruin the moment. He was really enjoying swapping barbs and the whiskey bottle. Usually the females, both wolf and human, he associated with were either trying to catch him or trying to catch him.

He knew he was attractive and though not super wealthy, he was able to afford a house by the beach and a couple of acres of land inland for when his wolf needed to run. Being a partner at the firm he and Avery worked at, along with strong ranking in his Pack, sealed his eligible bachelor status too.

“Please—I haven’t even begun to drink. This has nothing to do with me being drunk. Okay, maybe a bit inebriated, but not drunk,” Sophia said indignantly.

“Hey, no judgment,” Riley replied, putting his hands up in the universal symbol of peace. Sophia was starting to get crazy eyes again, and he didn’t want to lose a limb.

Riley watched Sophia sigh and focus on him. This time, instead of looking for a quick exit strategy, Riley felt as if his entire body was on alert, particularly a certain appendage in his pants. The look she was giving him was pure sex.

Pure, sweaty, “I think my heart is going to explode but if I can just come one more time I will die happy” kind of sex. Riley couldn’t help leaning in toward her. The small smile that formed on her luscious lips let him know she saw the reaction.

“Let me try this one more time. I want to have sex with you, but I don’t really need to know anything more about you than do you have condoms or will I have to use my own. I don’t need a partner, mate, or fuck buddy, so this isn’t a ploy to trick you into fulfilling any of those roles. I hate weddings, and besides getting drunk, having sex is on the top of my list of things to do to get through this ordeal. I like to think of this as being liberated, but some small-minded people like to call it whorish. I’m really hoping

you aren't small-minded, Riley," Sophia said in a sexy tone.

Riley was shocked silent. He was trying to focus on all she said, but with her tracing his thigh with her index finger, all he heard was the word "sex"—more specifically, the two of them having sex.

"Uh," Riley grunted, with a glazed expression.

Sophia was used to people being shocked by some of the stuff that came out of her mouth, but this was pretty amusing. Riley was trying not to gape at her like a fish out of water, and she was pretty sure the only thing he'd heard was "sex." She only hoped he was shocked because he'd never thought he could get so lucky, versus being appalled and wanting to recoil in horror.

"Riley, do you want to ditch this and go have sex in one of the multiple guest rooms this house has?" Sophia asked, speaking slowly and drawing lazy circles on Riley's leg. Before she could even let her finger wander farther along the tight muscle of his thigh, Riley firmly grasped her wrist and was practically dragging her through the large ballroom of Avery's parent's house.

Okay, maybe she could rethink this whole “hating weddings” thing.

Chapter Four

Riley was a man on a mission. Once his big brain wrestled control from his little brain, he knew what he had to do. Grab Sophia, find a room, and fuck Sophia in said room. Okay, maybe the last one wasn't thought out properly. Fuck Sophia *repeatedly* in said room. *That* was what he was going for.

Working his way through the crowd, he led her out the ballroom and headed toward the grounds. The Spanish-style mansion had plenty of rooms he could use, but he was heading toward one of the guest cottages on the property. One, because he didn't want to be interrupted, and two, he didn't want to hurt the person who may unfortunately interrupt him.

"Riley, slow down a bit. I'm wearing four-inch stilettos under this dress," Sophia said, trying to tug her wrist from the death grip he had it in.

"You're wearing what?" Riley asked, coming to an abrupt stop and turning to face Sophia.

"I'm wearing four-inch stilettos, Riley—see, not great for running." She illustrated by lifting the hem of her floor-length dress.

To anyone else the innocuous black heels probably looked sedate or even chaste, but all he could

focus on was what Sophia would look like with nothing else on, just those simple black heels. More specifically, what she would look like bent over some piece of furniture while wearing those shoes, and him pounding her from behind.

With that image in his brain, and his little head beginning to wrestle control back from his big head, Riley took the only course of action available to him: he grabbed Sophia, threw her over his shoulder and took off in a run.

Sophia should've been upset about the way Riley dragged her out of the ballroom like a caveman. She should've been upset when he threw her over his shoulder like said cave man. She was really trying hard to work up those upset feelings, but the amount of liquid flooding her panties was making it difficult for her to concentrate on those little details.

She thought of herself as a liberated female, and even though she may have given the impression of being okay with casual sex, it wasn't something she engaged in very often. From a theoretical perspective she could see all the benefits of it, but theory and practice usually didn't mesh.

When she propositioned Riley she was working purely from theory in the hopes she would actually get to take her thesis for a test drive. Now that it was happening, she was at a loss as to how it would play out. Okay, that wasn't accurate—she knew she was going to be riding Riley's face in the near future, but everything else after that was a blur. Okay, that wasn't accurate either—once she finished riding his face she was going to ride his dick, and have her wicked sweaty way with him.

“Ouch!” Sophia cried out when she felt a sharp sting on her ass.

“If you keep fondling my ass like that, I'm going to throw you on the ground and fuck you unconscious. I like to think of myself as a little more classy than that; I'd prefer to throw you down on a bed and fuck you unconscious,” Riley said, delivering another swat to Sophia's firm backside.

She was momentarily stunned; she didn't even remember touching his ass. Looking down at her hands, she noticed they were latched on to his delectable rear end. When another swift swat was delivered, she removed her hands as if she'd been burned.

As partial rational thought returned, she was trying really hard to get upset about the light spanking, but the trickle of liquid in her panties was

now a flood saturating her pussy. Who knew her pussy was such a traitor.

“I have to put you down to open the door,” Riley said, lowering her.

Looking around, she realized they were at a smallish cottage on the property. She could hear the noise of the reception in the distance, but sitting farther from the house on a cliff, with the Pacific Ocean below, the cottage felt secluded from everything.

The outside was done in the same architectural theme as the larger house. Spanish-style archways and a burnt orange stucco exterior gave it more of a homey feel than just a simple guest cottage.

“This is nice,” she said, as she watched Riley rooting around the little porch for what she assumed was the key.

“What? Yeah, it’s okay,” Riley answered, a bit distracted.

She tried to keep riding her arousal high, but couldn’t help rolling her eyes. She loved how rich people took for granted the simple things.

“Got it!” Riley said, turning around to face her with a look of supreme joy on his face.

“Cool,” she acknowledged.

“What?” Riley asked, losing his boyish grin.

“Nothing,” she replied, feeling defensive.

Why was he asking her what? *Just open the damn door and get this show on the road*, she thought.

“Well, let’s see, you were practically ready to rip my clothes off, and now you’re all closed off,” Riley said slowly.

“God, you really are a shrink,” Sophia replied sarcastically.

“Actually, I’m a lawyer. Which means I’m adept at reading people. When they’re happy, when they’re sad, and when they’re trying to hide millions from their estranged wife, I’m good at reading people. Right now I’m reading that you might be changing your mind, and if you are, you don’t have to pick a fight with me—you can just say no. I might really want to throw you up against the wall and pound into you until you only know my name and Jesus’, but I can control myself.” Riley delivered his little speech with controlled tension in his frame and voice.

All she could do was stare at Riley with shock. She should’ve been annoyed by his tone and statement. She also should’ve been ripping him a new one. She should’ve been doing a variety of things that let him know she was not a female to trifle with, but what she did do was hike up her dress, leap into Riley’s arms, and proceed to kiss him like he was providing life support.

Riley was worried there for a second when he turned around and Sophia had an annoyed look on her face. He was serious about not forcing her to do something she didn't want to do, but it would have been really hard for him to walk away. Cold showers for eight hours kind of hard. But now, with her kissing him like she was searching for the Holy Grail in his mouth he knew, he was back in the game.

Fumbling with the door, he pushed his way through the entryway, and barely had the door shut before he was sprinting toward the largest room of the cottage. He'd picked this particular cottage because of its location so close to the ocean. The large bay window in the back offered a great view, and the room he was currently heading to had a small deck attached that hung over the cliff.

Trying hard not to slip on the tile floor, he pushed the door open and attempted to extract himself from Sophia's grip.

"Babe, this would go a lot faster if you didn't have that dress on," he said, coming up for air.

"Um, oh God yes!" Sophia exclaimed, pulling suddenly from him and stepping out of his embrace.

He tried to control himself as Sophia peeled out of the floor-length bridesmaid dress. Black stilettos, black lace bra and panty set, thigh highs and a...taser in a holster on her leg?

“Why are you wearing a taser in a holster on your leg?” Riley asked, trying to hide his shock at the bizarreness this woman continued to bring.

“Um. Oh, I wanted to be prepared,” Sophia said distractedly as she tried to unhook her bra.

“Prepared for what?” Riley asked, getting a bit nervous.

“Don’t worry, if I was going to use it on you I would have done so already. Now stop talking and get your pants off,” Sophia demanded as she pulled her bra off.

A little voice was telling him this could be a very bad idea, but currently he was hypnotized by the splendor that was Sophia’s breasts, and, well, higher-level brain functioning was becoming increasingly difficult.

“Riley, the sooner you get your clothes off the sooner you get to these,” Sophia said, cupping her breasts in her hands. “And this.” She illustrated by releasing one of her breasts and pointing to the apex of her legs, simultaneously giving him the wickedest smile he’d ever seen on a woman.

Chapter Five

Sophia liked watching Riley watch her. Unhooking her holster, she placed it on the bedside table. It didn't hurt that the watching was happening in what could quickly become her fantasy bedroom. With vaulted ceilings and large bay windows that seemed to wrap around the room, she felt like she was actually outside.

The furniture was minimal, which helped draw the eye to the scenic view of the ocean outside the windows, but the bed was a complete work of heart. The mission-style frame was a deep cherry color that glowed in the natural lighting of the late afternoon. The thought of riding Riley with the sunset over the water as she clutched the headboard caused goose bumps to form on her skin.

When a soft rumble began to vibrate in her chest, she realized her wolf was trying to get into the action as well. Which was pretty strange because contrary to what other shifters expressed, she and her wolf half rarely interfaced with each other. Unless it was her wolf urging her to shift after a prolonged period of being in her human form or her urging her wolf not to eat bunny babies while out in her shifted

form, there was no communing with self or conflict with her beast side.

Well, that was before she had someone like Riley in a room like this, looking as if he were going to devour her in one bite. Her wolf was practically panting and trying to get her to turn around and assume the position. She was starting to slip off her shoes when she was stopped by a strangled-sounding comment coming from Riley.

“No, keep them on,” Riley whispered with awe, staring at Sophia with a mesmerized gaze.

“Okay. Should I keep my panties on, or do you want to have the honor of taking them off?” Sophia asked, toying with the thin waistband of her boy-cut black lace panties. She was a firm believer she could have sexy panties without a small strip of fabric cutting off circulation to her ass. From the avid look on Riley’s face, she assumed he was a believer too.

“Keep them on,” he requested with a husky quality to his voice.

Riley began prowling toward Sophia while divesting himself of clothes as he got closer.

Once he was stripped down to his black boxer briefs, she could see the very prominent bulge of his erection. Looking him up and down, she was pleased to see she’d been right about his body. The sinewy muscles of his arms and legs partnered with his

washboard abs made her want to lick him all over. When he stepped closer, she ran her hands over his torso and along his chest and stomach. The fine red hairs on his chest tapered down to a trail that disappeared into his underwear.

Suddenly overcome with a nervous energy, she looked at him. Never a snob about her intimate partners' looks, she knew Riley was one of, if not the most attractive male she'd seen naked in person. He looked like some type of Celtic warrior, and she was pretty sure she was about to be plundered.

"So the cuff does match the sleeves," her mouth said, without consulting her brain.

She tried really hard not to groan because of the lame statement.

"You do know that was pretty lame," Riley replied, with a sexy smirk and twinkle in his eyes.

Resting her head on his chest, she tried to stop the hysterical laughter that was bubbling inside of her. She was a Bad-Ass Chick; she didn't go all gooey and silly around gorgeous men. Okay, that wasn't true, there was the time she saw George Clooney at LAX, but there had to be exceptions to every rule.

"God, that was pretty lame, wasn't it?" she asked, running her hands along the muscles of Riley's back.

“That’s okay. I can get into a woman being lame now and then,” Riley murmured into her hair as he gently stroked his hands along the sides of her waist.

“You’re an acrotomophile?” she asked, laughing at what she was pretty sure was going to be an obscure joke, but she just couldn’t help herself.

“No, I don’t get off on amputated women,” Riley said, with a chuckle and light swat to Sophia’s backside.

She stared up into Riley’s face with complete awe. Very few people ever got her inappropriate humor, but Riley’s quirked lips and slight roll of the eyes let her know he did. She could feel her wolf struggling to wrest control from her. It was both scary and strangely exciting to be so in sync with her wolf when it came to the wicked, wicked thoughts she was having about Riley.

“Riley, I need you to fuck me like fucking is being outlawed,” she growled softly.

Riley didn’t think he could get any harder or more turned on by one of Sophia’s random changes in subject, but the erection he currently had was proving him wrong. Looking into her eyes, he could tell her wolf was getting a front row seat of their action. The

deep chocolate brown was reflecting the light bouncing off of the windows, and the feral look in them screamed predator.

He didn't realize his wolf was making an appearance either until he answered Sophia's soft growl with one of his own. Unlike most shifters, he and his wolf pretty much avoided each other unless there was something necessary they both needed, almost like they were college roommates. His wolf definitely never made an appearance during sex. When let out to play, his interests were mostly hunting or showing some moron a physical reminder of what disrespecting him or his resulted in.

In this moment, though, he had to hold his wolf back from flipping Sophia around, ripping off her panties, and mounting her like the dominant male he was.

His wolf might want to have it fast, but Riley wanted it nice and slow. He wanted to savor Sophia, have her spread under him, over him, to the side of him, up against the wall and propped on the few pieces of furniture in the room. His wolf was just going to have to wait his turn.

Stepping back from her, he slowly lowered himself to his knees and brought his hands to rest on Sophia's hips. His head was at a perfect angle to her full breasts. Slowly raising his hands, he gently began

to fondle the soft globes. They fit perfectly into his large hands, not so small he was afraid he would crush them, but not so large he didn't get to enjoy rolling them around in his palm. Riley was fascinated by the color contrast along her breasts: she had a slight tan outline that made him think of chocolate swirl ice cream.

"I'm guessing you don't sunbath topless?" He asked, rubbing his thumb along the tan line.

"God no. Have you ever had a sunburned nipple?" Sophia answered breathlessly as she clutched his hair in her hands.

Chuckling, he put as much of Sophia's right breast as possible into his mouth. Pulling back slowly so his teeth could gently scrape on her skin, he stopped once he captured her firm berry brown nipple between his teeth. As he bit down, he squeezed Sophia's left nipple between his fingers for double stimulation.

Sophia always thought women were over-exaggerating when they talked about feeling as if they were going to die from sexual pleasure. She'd had orgasms, good orgasms, even great orgasms, either by herself or with a partner. What Riley was doing to her, though, was not sex. It was some type of sexual torture the writers of the Kama Sutra kept hidden away

because they feared their techniques falling into the wrong hands.

She knew the panties she had on were useless—she was so wet they were probably going to disintegrate. Hell, at the rate he was going, she was pretty sure her shoes were going to be ruined because of the leakage factor. She couldn't even begin to describe the tap dance the muscles of her inner walls were doing.

“Sophia.”

Sophia's eyes popped open when she heard her name growled by Riley. Looking down, she noticed that his were a vibrant green with flecks of gold in them. She was pretty sure their wolves were having some type of silent conversation, because Sophia let out the most desperate whine she'd ever heard in her life.

So much for being all cool and liberated; she was hanging on by a thread. She should've been disgusted with herself because it all occurred just from him suckling and fondling her breast, but it was so good that she let it go.

“Sophia, I wanted to take my time exploring your body and pleasuring you, but...” Riley didn't quite finish what he was saying, but the pained expression on his face pretty much filled in the gaps.

“After. Now fuck,” she demanded with choppy breaths.

Wow, that was not her voice. She knew she was in control of her body, but it seemed her wolf had gained the power to speak. She would’ve been upset by the presumption of her other half, but Riley was emitting a growl she could feel all the way to her bones.

She barely blinked and he had her flat on her back with her panties, shoes, and stockings off. He’d also somehow divested himself of his boxer briefs, and the unobscured view of him was breathtaking.

“Fuck,” she said, with a breathless whisper.

“Wait,” Riley said, pulling from her and shifting off the bed.

“What?” She was all kinds of confused now. Her wolf was going to rip him to shreds if he thought he was stopping and she was going to help.

Riley must have read her mind, because a sexy smile spread across his face.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean I was going to stop. I just have to get a condom,” Riley apologized, with a boyish grin.

“Then this is unnecessary commentary, and you need to hurry it up,” she told Riley, while sitting up so she could get a good view of him as he searched for a condom in the bedside table drawer.

Pulling out a handful and dumping them where they would be in easy reach, Riley opened a packet and rolled the condom on.

Sophia had thought she was turned on before, but when she saw Riley's aroused penis she felt like her body was going supernova. She could practically feel her wolf licking her chops. The length and girth of his penis guaranteed she was not only going to leave a very happy female, but she would have the walk to prove it. She was so excited all she could do was lay back and open her legs as acceptance of the gift he was bringing.

Turning to face her, Riley froze when he saw Sophia sprawled out on the bed.

"Let your hair down," he said, climbing up on the bed and positioning himself between her legs.

"Why?" Sophia asked, while digging her hands in his hair.

"Because you shouldn't be the only one who gets to pull hair when you come," he said, leaning down and nipping softly at her kiss-swollen lips.

Riley thought the condom break had helped him get things under control, and he was planning on taking his time again. But when Sophia let go of his

hair and stretched her body under his in a blatant invitation as she pulled out the pins confining her riotous curls, he snapped.

It wasn't her movements that brought his earlier uncontrollable lust surging back up. Nope, it was the unmasked challenge in her eyes that was part her and part her wolf. So he did the only thing he could do—he met her challenge for challenge.

Chapter Six

It'd been two weeks since Sophia had started practicing the gospel according to Riley. Two weeks since she'd learned her body was built for sex, fast and sweaty sex, slow and sweet sex, sex in water and sex on dry land. Yet, with all the sex she'd had over the two weeks, the thought of their first time still got her the most excited.

When she leaned back to take the pins out of her hair, she knew both she and her wolf were looking out at Riley. Challenging him to do things neither had known they wanted until that very moment. The smirk that formed on her face dared him and taunted his wolf as it stared back at her through his eyes.

As he leaned over her on his forearms, she was disappointed by the thought he was going to pass on her challenge, but then Riley surged forward with such strength she was practically rendered blind. He wasn't joking when he said he wasn't going to be able to hold back. As she wrapped her legs around his hips to give him better purchase inside of her, and dug her nails that were shifting into claws into his shoulders, all she could do was keen out her pleasure in a high-pitched yell.

She knew he had to be channeling his Celtic ancestors in that moment, because he was conquering her body with pleasure. Though his strokes were hard and fast, he managed to shift so he was not only hitting her g-spot on the down stroke, but also tapping her clit on the up. She clenched her internal muscles on his magical dick and was pleased to hear the groans of pleasure he made.

When he flipped her over and pushed even deeper inside, she reached for the headboard and gave herself over to the pleasure he was creating. The feel of one of his calloused hands on her hip and another on the back of her neck had her spinning out of control.

Pushing back as he pushed forward, she was in a sexual fury. She vaguely remembered screaming his name and other words that made even her blush in retrospect. When he reached around and lightly thumbed her clit, she couldn't hold on any longer; a tingling sensation began in the very base of her womb and quickly turned into a drum line.

Her inner muscles were spasming so strongly from mini orgasms that she almost didn't think she was going to make it through the big one that was building up with such force inside of her. Almost, because when that big one hit, she felt it could have put the Northridge quake to shame. She was so wrapped up in pleasure she didn't have time to feel

embarrassed that her scream quickly morphed into the loudest howl she'd ever emitted in her life.

When Riley's orgasm hit and he began howling in sync with her, she was hit with such a strong aftershock, she thought she was going to pass out from lack of oxygen.

As Riley began to slowly ride out the last of his orgasm, she took in the huge gulps of oxygen her brain craved. Riley gently pulled out of her still spasming body and swung his legs over the bed. All she could do was collapse without much grace where she was.

"I'll be right back," Riley said softly, gently rubbing his fingertips along her sweaty spine.

Grunting acknowledgement was the only coherent sound her sex-saturated mind could make.

When she felt a warm cloth on her skin, she yelped, but was too tired to move.

"Sorry, but I hate lying in my own sweat," Riley said from above her.

Rolling over, she smiled up at the sheepish expression on his handsome face. She too hated lying around in her own sweat and really found sharing sweat with someone else to be totally gross. Okay, if that sharing occurred during a gold medal session she'd just had with Riley, it was okay, but the very nice gesture surprised her by revealing how similar they were.

“I hate sweaty bodies touching too. Well, post-coital sweaty bodies can be okay,” she told him with a wolfish grin.

The smile Riley gave her back momentarily unnerved her. Until she looked down and noticed refractory period was not in his vocabulary.

“Should we go slower this time?” Riley asked with a sexually charged stare.

“Later. We can go slow later,” she said softly, reaching out to pull Riley down so she could have a turn riding.

Actually, it wasn't until several hours later that they got to take it slow. When it did happen, she didn't think an orgasm could feel so right.

Lying in Riley's arms, she felt the most content she ever had in her life. She should've been scared by the thought, but with her body and wolf singing his praises, she let herself have the moment.

“We should go for a run,” Riley murmured against her temple.

“Um, that would be nice,” she absently replied as she rubbed her fingers along his chest.

“When do you want to go?” Riley asked, stroking her hip.

“You don't mean now?” she asked, looking up at him with confusion.

Rolling so she was under him, Riley gave her a quick kiss on her nose. “I think we have more important things to do than run,” he said, looking into her eyes. “I meant later. We should go for a run later.”

Looking back at him, she noticed he was watching her expectantly. Smiling, she leaned up and gave him a gentle kiss on the lips.

“Later sounds good to me.”

“I don’t think it’s funny, Sophia.”

“What?” Sophia said, with a startled yell.

“You’re not even listening to me, are you?”

At the sound of Hannah’s voice interrupting her thoughts, Sophia realized she’d zoned out while at lunch with her best friend, her sisters Jordan and Darcy, her mother Emma, and grandmother Margaret.

“She’s probably thinking of Riley,” Jordan said, in an annoying singsong voice.

“Wow, how old are you again, Jordan?” Sophia grumbled, spearing a tomato in her salad.

“Ooh, someone’s testy. Is it because you had to stop having sex for a whole hour?” Darcy piped in with a mischievous gleam to her eyes.

Sophia tried to give her sisters her best death stare, but they were both so busy high-fiving each other like teenage boys, they didn’t notice.

“Well, it doesn’t matter because it’s not like he’s going to mate her. Why buy the cow when you get it,

the dairy, and distributing rights for free,” her grandmother said from her end of the table.

“Thanks, Grandma,” Sophia said sarcastically.

“Mother, please not so loud—we’re out in public,” Sophia’s mother pleaded with a hiss.

“Thanks, Mom, the support is just overwhelming,” Sophia interjected, not even bothering looking at the two women.

She didn’t even know why she had to come to lunch, and it had nothing to do with the fact that she’d had to leave a very sexy Riley in bed. Everyone knew she hated eating at the overpriced restaurant her grandmother loved in West Hollywood.

“Well, Emma, I can’t help it if your daughter is a whore,” Sophia’s grandmother said indignantly.

“Takes one to know one, Grams,” Sophia fired back before she stuffed more of the rabbit food in her mouth.

“Are you getting smart with me, little girl?” Margaret stated with a menacing glare.

“God, I hope so, Grams, or all that money Mom and Dad spent on educating me would have been a waste,” she replied, meeting her grandmother’s glare.

A beat passed between them, and then Sophia’s grandmother began laughing maniacally.

“Sophia, please don’t antagonize your grandmother. Your aunt Catherine is out of town, and

your grandmother is staying with us,” Sophia’s mother said with a martyred sigh.

“I can hear you, little girl,” Margaret said abruptly, glaring at her daughter.

“I know, Mother, but you know how I feel about secrets,” Emma replied, buttering herself a roll.

“Keep it up. One day I’ll be dead, and then you’ll be wishing for lunches with me. The day you view me in a casket, you’ll think about all those times you took me for granted,” her grandmother said, preparing to work herself up.

“Don’t worry, Grams—we plan on cremating you so we don’t have to deal with all the pain of seeing you in a casket,” Darcy interrupted Margaret, before she could really pick up steam.

Margaret gave everyone the stink eye and went back to her meal.

“Girls, all I ask from you is to do the humane thing and put me down,” Emma said, looking beseechingly at her daughters.

Sophia and her sisters rolled their eyes at the dramatics only their mother and grandmother could create. Sophia knew it was all for show, because the two were practically joined at the hip.

“Anyhoo, what were you talking about, Hannah?” Sophia asked, trying to redirect the conversation.

“You going off to have dirty sweaty sex with the best man, and both of you missing the reception at my wedding,” Hannah said with a huff.

Okay, not that much redirection. Sophia grimaced.

“Plus you’ve been AWOL for the last two weeks,” Hannah continued with a petulant pout.

“You’ve been on your honeymoon.” Sophia sighed.

“He must have a magic dick, Hannah.” Darcy snickered.

“Yeah he’s worked his magic on her,” Jordan replied with a chuckle.

“Thank you, Tweedles. Your wit is always so astounding,” Sophia said, wishing she were closer so she could kick her sisters with her steel-toed work boots.

“Well, when you butt your business out in the street, you can’t be upset when someone kicks it,” her grandmother said with a knowing tone.

“Grams, why don’t they get in trouble for using dirty language—shouldn’t that be against some rule?” Sophia asked indignantly.

“No, because they’re mated,” Margaret said with sincerity.

“That makes no sense,” Sophia replied, confused.

“Yes it does,” her grandmother countered.

“No it doesn’t.” Sophia was trying really hard to respect her elder and all, but this was just not making any sense.

“Sophia, you can’t argue with crazy,” Emma said sharply, trying to end what was going to be a futile argument between her mother and her daughter.

Sophia worked hard not to squint her eyes, particularly when her grandmother gave her a triumphant smirk. Sighing, she was picking up her fork to continue eating when she felt her phone vibrating in the pocket of her cammies. Pulling it out, she saw there was a text from Riley, and she couldn’t help smiling at the naughty things he wrote.

“Let me guess—Riley?” Hannah asked with a knowing smirk.

“How do you know it isn’t one of my customers?” Sophia asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

“Because if that’s the way you look when reading a customer’s text message, you must be in another business besides carpentry,” Jordan quipped while nudging Darcy next to her.

“Ha, ha, ha.” Sophia was pretty sure she was going to develop astigmatism from all the eye rolling she was doing today.

“So what did he want?” Hannah asked, looking expectantly at her.

She realized they were all giving her the same look; she tried to suppress a groan, and every mated female she knew gave her the same look. She fondly called it “Look, you’re not too old to get mated, so hurry up and mark this one before you are.”

Knowing they weren’t going to let up until she answered, she responded with a huge sigh. “We’re going running on his property.” Okay, maybe the edited version.

“In your wolf form?” Hannah asked incredulously.

“Well yeah, why would I go running around in human form in the middle of nowhere?” she replied, bewildered.

Looking around at her closest female relatives and best friend, she had to work really hard not to get annoyed.

“Come on, guys, it doesn’t mean anything. We’re shifters, which means we shift, and when we shift we go running. It’s not that big of a deal,” she said, tapping down another eye roll.

When they all began to look at each other with knowing smirks, she really thought she was going to lose it.

“I’m serious. We both just like hanging out and doing stuff with each other. We’re not looking for anything permanent.”

“Sure you’re not, sweetie,” her mother said in the same soothing tone she used when Sophia needed to do something she didn’t like.

“I’m serious, Mother—I don’t even believe in weddings, and matings are just a patriarchal construct male shifters use to control female shifters’ sexuality,” she replied, with a nod of her head. “Hannah, come on, you saw me during your wedding. I practically broke out in hives at the fitting. Plus Riley and I are too opposite to actually have this work out,” she pleaded for her friends’ support.

“Um-hmm. Of course you are,” Hannah replied, patting Sophia’s hand.

“I’m serious. It really isn’t that big of a deal,” Sophia practically screamed at the women nodding their heads and smirking.

“I really hate weddings,” she said desperately.

Chapter Seven

Six months later

Alexis reached out blindly for her phone. She couldn't tell what time it was, but she was convinced it was way too early for her to be up.

"Hello," she said, once she was able to determine which end was up on her phone in the dark.

"Hey, Alexis, did I wake you?" a voice whispered on the other end.

"Sophia?" Alexis asked, still feeling groggy.

"Yeah, who else did you think it was?" Sophia asked with a sharp tone.

"Oh I don't know, maybe a telemarketer, because they're the only idiots who would call someone at..." She pulled her phone back to look at the display screen. "Three in the morning," she finished, raising her voice. Only the females in her family seemed to have the unique ability to drive her crazy.

"Oops, I forgot about the time difference," Sophia said distractedly.

"Okay, now that we've reestablished that New York is three hours ahead of Los Angeles, what do you want?" She couldn't help snapping. She'd been

working twelve-hour days for a huge Manhattan society wedding, and tonight was the first eight hours of sleep she was going to get in a long time.

“Ouch, someone isn’t in a good place,” Sophia said snidely.

“I swear by all that is holy, Sophia, if you don’t tell me what you want I will hang up on you,” Alexis hissed through clenched teeth.

“I’m getting married,” Sophia said with a huge sigh.

“What!” Alexis screamed into the phone as she sat up in bed.

“Wow, I’m pretty sure I’ve lost the ability to hear in my right ear,” Sophia grunted into the phone.

“This is a joke. I swear to God, Sophia, if you called me up in the wee hours of the morning for one of your stupid practical jokes...” Alexis just let the threat hang in the air.

“It isn’t a joke, Alexis,” Sophia said, with another sigh.

“Oh my God, you’re pregnant!” she said excitedly.

“What! Why the hell does everyone think I’m pregnant?” Sophia asked indignantly.

“Well, there was that time Daddy and Pop-Pop said the only way they were going to get you married and mated was if you were pregnant and there was a

shotgun involved,” Alexis replied, smirking into the phone.

“Oh yeah, forgot about that, but I’m not pregnant, and yes I’m getting married, even though I’ve already been mated for like three months...” Sophia trailed off.

“What! Why didn’t I know about this? I’m supposed to be your favorite sister, remember. Hello, the non-crazy one,” Alexis shouted, letting some of her hurt feelings come through her words.

“Calm down. Calm down. That’s why I’m calling you now—I kept the mating thing secret. Now Mom and Grams are going to make it their mission to drive me insane if I don’t do the proper thing and have a wedding. Hence why I’m calling my favorite sister, because I’m afraid if you don’t plan this there will be blood and carnage, lots of blood and carnage.”

“Oh my God, this is so exciting!” Alexis squealed.

“Yeah, well, you can carry the sentiment for the both of us. You also have a month to get this thing off the ground,” Sophia replied, with a businesslike quality in her voice.

Alexis began calculating things in her head at the mention of time.

“What’s my budget?” she asked expectantly.

“How should I know; ask the parental unit. So this means you’ll do it, though?” Sophia asked, with barely masked anxiety.

Alexis thought it would be great to drag it out, just to hear Sophia squirm on the other end, but she was her favorite sister and it wouldn’t be right.

“Of course I’ll do it, silly. I’ll give you a call later, after I wake up, so we can start the planning process. A month really isn’t that much time,” Alexis couldn’t help admonishing her sister just a little.

“Okay. Sounds good. I’ll call you later. ’Bye,” Sophia ended the call abruptly.

Even though Alexis had said she was going to go back to sleep, she couldn’t—she was too busy thinking about all the things she was going to have to help her sister with. There was securing the caterer and florist, and she was going to have to reconnect with all of her party-planning friends in L.A.

Alexis hopped out of bed and headed to her bathroom with ideas buzzing in her head.

God, she loved weddings.

****JE****

JANET ECKFORD

Like most great superheroes (or super-villains, depending on who's telling the story) Janet Eckford lives a double life. By day Janet is a mild-mannered crusader for justice (or nefarious deeds, depending on who's telling the story) and by night an indestructible creator of prose (or pathological liar, depending on who's telling the story) while munching on her favorite cookies—oatmeal raisin. A native West Coaster who hails from the sunny state of California Janet, has loved the romance genre ever since she convinced her dad it was required reading when she was eleven. Janet believes love shouldn't have a color code and strives to create stories that represent that belief.

Send her your praise and adoration and she will return it in kind.

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