

Resisting two magical mischief makers definitely wasn't in the job description.

Vanessa Darby, a bounty hunter and tracker for the Veil Alliance League, figures things can't get any crappier than her car breaking down on a deserted highway. Until the two dimension-hopping renegades she's been assigned to capture lure her to their magical love nest in the woods and entangle her in a web of seduction.

How the hell is she supposed to resist a pair of gorgeous male pookas who possess a wicked talent for bringing the sexy?

Rand and Braeden have searched more than three centuries for their one true bond mate. Now that Vanessa's been dropped into their arms, they have no intention of giving her up. Even if it means agreeing to her terms: If they can't persuade her within forty-eight hours that the three of them belong together, they'll give themselves over to the authorities. But convincing a woman who doesn't believe in love, or the concept of forever, is no easy feat. Particularly with one doozy of a dirty secret from their past waiting to trip them up.

Warning: Two hotter-than-should-be-legal pookas sexin' it up with each other and the stubborn woman they love. One magical hotel in the woods that isn't exactly what it seems. And a unicorn who will forever tarnish the image of the species.

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Vanessa Unveiled

Jodi Redford

Dedication

To my mom, who has always encouraged me to never ever give up on my dreams. And to my wonderful editor, Sasha, for helping me make those dreams come true.

Chapter One

"Why can't these damn veil-jumpers hole up in Maui for a change?" Teeth chattering, Vanessa Darby tightened her grip on the steering wheel of her rented SUV. The fact that her fingers could actually move was a good sign. She'd half-suspected they'd frozen in place three hours ago when the heater crapped out.

Her breath a visible cloud, she reached for the temperature control knob and gave it a furious flick. A cold blast of air shot through the vents. "You piece of *shit*." Growling, she banged the dash. She was so tearing a new asshole in the jerk back at the rental kiosk who lined her up with this lemon. The headlights glanced off a highway marker in the distance. She clicked the high beams, illuminating the sign. *Copper Harbor fifteen miles*. Thank God. The northern Michigan town was the last known sighting of the two renegade pookas she'd been assigned to capture and drag back to their home dimension. Hopefully her luck would take a turn for the better, and Rand Quinlan and Braeden Whyndham would still be camped in the vicinity. Because if they weren't, and she was forced to ride out another seven hours in this freezer-on-wheels, there was a good chance she'd go apeshit on someone's ass.

An ominous *thunk* came from the engine and the steering wheel jolted the same instant the gas pedal suddenly went soft, refusing to cooperate. With a clanking groan, the SUV puttered to a slow stop. She stared at the bright red check-engine light glowing on the dash and waited for her head to officially explode. "I don't. Freaking. Believe this."

Gritting her teeth, she rammed the gears into park and switched on the hazard lights before popping the hood release. She shoved open the door and an arctic gale nearly ripped the metal from its hinges. This was going to be fun. And possibly the stupidest thing she'd ever done. Fumbling around with a dead engine while stranded on a deserted highway in sub-zero temps? Yeah, definitely deserved to go down in the record book of epically bad ideas. Probably even more moronic than the time she'd chased after that cranky unicorn in Houston without a backup battery pack for her electro-cuffs. Her left ankle still bore the faint outline of a crescent moon scar, thanks to the son of a bitch chomping into her before it trotted off. All that crap about unicorns being cute and cuddly? Total bullshit.

Another wind gust that she swore flew straight in from the Arctic tundra buffeted against her and she staggered. "Jesus, I can't feel my cheeks." On her face or her ass. Eyes stinging from the tears that were undoubtedly crystallized to her eyeballs, she stalked, stiff-legged, toward the front of the stalled vehicle. She wrenched the hood up and propped it securely with the safety bar. Leaning forward, she surveyed the

engine. Nothing seemed to be smoking or leaking fluids. All the belts and hoses appeared to be connected and in working order.

Too bad the same couldn't be said for the useless hunk-of-junk car.

Balling her fists, she resisted the strong urge to kick the nearest tire. "Shit, shit, *shit*." She sucked in a deep breath, praying for patience. Okay, things could be worse. At least she wasn't stuck out here in a damn blizzard.

Something cold drifted across her forehead and clung to her upper eyelashes. A snowflake. It was quickly joined by another. Then another. She tossed up her arms. "Oh yeah. *Now* my night is complete."

"Do you always bitch this much?" The deep baritone came out of nowhere, making Vanessa yelp. She whirled, automatically reaching for her stun gun. Her fingertips brushed the empty holster riding against her hip. Damn it. The gun was there a second ago.

"Missin' something?" A seductive chuckle rippled through the night.

An electric sizzle tingled at the base of her spine—a common precursor to an Otherworlder crossing her path. God knows the shivers whispering over her skin couldn't have anything to do with that velvety bedroom voice lurking in the shadows. *Yeah, and I'm the Queen of Sheba.* "Show yourself."

"As you wish." Phosphorescent blue eyes materialized directly across from her, near the side of the highway. A snort sounded, followed by a billowing puff of air that haloed the dark outline of an equine head. The heavy clop of a hoof striking the pavement broke the stillness. "In the mood for a little midnight run, darlin'?"

She stiffened at the mocking challenge in the male's voice. "Damn it, do *not* make me—" A growl leapt from her throat when the horse gave a sassy flick of its tail and galloped down the side of the embankment, its golden mane flowing gracefully.

Great, a chase. Fan-frickin-tastic.

Well, at least her quarry hadn't bitten her ankle. Yet. Digging deep for her sorely depleted patience, she pivoted toward the SUV and slammed to a jerking halt as she stared at the empty roadway. She backed up before spinning in a slow three-sixty. Okay, the stun gun might have been a coincidence, but the vehicle? No way in hell she could have misplaced that. Which left only one possibility.

That damn horse was one of her pookas, and it just stole her car. *Shit*. Highly doubtful something like that was covered in the rental agreement. To add insult to injury, her electro-cuffs were in the glove box. Hell of a lot of good that did her. A taunting whinny carried on the wind, making her blood boil.

"I'm going to really enjoy kicking his ass." Scrunching her tasseled knit hat securely over her ears, she sprinted across the highway.

Low scrub pines formed a dense barrier to the slope leading down to the forested terrain at the base of the ridge. Praying she wouldn't fall and break her neck, she dodged the thickest of the greenery and hurtled through the rest. By the time she reached the bottom, the nylon shell of her parka sported a few rips and the

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lower legs of her jeans were thoroughly soaked thanks to the thick patches of snow that dotted the hillside. Her lungs burning from exertion and the frigid temps, she bent at the waist, gasping for air. Soon as she returned to Cali, she was so renewing her gym membership.

The soft nickering of a horse re-energized her faster than a jolt of caffeine. *Got you now, you thieving son of a bitch.* Straightening, she loped in the direction she'd heard the noises coming from. She tromped through an overgrown avenue of pines and stumbled to a stop on the other side, convinced that the sight before her must be a mirage. Or maybe she *had* broken her neck on the trip down the hill, and she'd just wandered into some twisted outpost of the afterlife. One where apparently a high-rise hotel in the middle of the woods was perfectly ordinary.

The possibility of her being dead or daydreaming disintegrated when she spotted the damn stallion. He winked at her before turning and trotting happy-as-you-please through the automatic sliding glass doors. She recognized a challenge when she saw one. Giving the exterior of the hotel a wary glance, she approached the structure with extreme caution. Okay, odds were good that she was about to walk into a trap. But what other choice did she have? That damn pooka had no doubt stashed her car somewhere in that building, leaving her stranded. And weaponless.

Grumbling, she scanned the forest floor for anything that might give her a fighting chance in the event of a sneaky ambush. Her best option seemed to be the thick, sturdy branch protruding from the underbrush near her foot. Rubbing her mittened hands together to encourage circulation, she stooped and grabbed the improvised weapon. "I really need to consider switching careers."

Despite the numerous times she'd made that empty threat, there was no chance in hell of that ever happening. Being a tracker wasn't just her job, it was the core of her identity. Without it, she'd just go back to being a freak who saw and felt things others couldn't. Gripping the stick tight, she crept to the front entrance. Peering up, she noticed the gilt-lettered sign above the doorway. "Between the Veils. Cute." The sliding doors opened with a welcoming ding.

Entry number 5,606,201 for the book of epically bad ideas. Shaking her head, she stepped into the lobby. And blinked.

Okay, she really wished she could say the first thing that nabbed her attention was the enormous pyramid-shaped fountain that spouted sparkling, champagne-colored water. But that would be a huge, fat lie. Dazzling as the water feature was, it didn't hold a candle to the buck-naked guy standing in front of it.

In all her twenty-seven years, she'd never seen a more perfectly sculpted male body. Golden skin that appeared silky to the touch spanned a broad chest and shoulders. His impressive pecs were smooth, but a smattering of dark blond hair arrowed down his washboard abs, creating a happy trail that led to the most lickable looking cock in all creation.

Vanessa snapped out of her dazed trance. The last thing she needed to be concentrating on at the moment was a lickable cock, for God's sake. She widened her stance and adopted her best badass scowl,

making it clear that she meant business. Unfortunately, it was damn difficult to look properly threatening while wearing a hat with mini pompoms.

The blond god arched one eyebrow. "Is that a big stick in your hand, darlin', or are you just happy to see me?"

Oh yeah, she was most definitely going to enjoy kicking his ass.

"That's pretty damn cheesy, Brae. Even for you."

The chuckle that sounded behind Vanessa had her grinding her teeth at her stupid lapse in judgment. Fuck. She knew better than to stroll into a situation without first checking her blind spots. It was all that damn pooka's fault. Him and his distracting, giant cock.

"Forgive Braeden's less than witty repartee. He's usually not that...oh bloody hell, yes he *is* usually that oafish."

"You didn't think I was so oafish last night when your dick was tunneling down my throat."

Vanessa choked on a stunted cough. *Okay. Didn't see* that *one coming*. Despite her best intentions, she stared at Braeden's mouth, imagining it working over a nice, hard cock. She had no idea what the pooka standing behind her looked like, but if he in any way matched up with that delicious, lilting brogue...*oooh, mama*.

Son of a bitch, there she went again. If she didn't stop thinking about hard dicks and naked, sweaty man love, she was going to end up neck-deep in a shitload of trouble. She tightened her grip on the stick. "Here's how this is going down. I'm giving you exactly five seconds to return my car or I start playing piñata with someone's head. *Capisce*?"

A heavy sigh sounded from Braeden's cohort. "I'm afraid that's impossible. The valet just retired for the night."

She growled low in her throat. All the research she'd dug up on pookas was proving to be true—the shape-shifting mischief-makers really were aggravating little bastards. The blond standing by the fountain grinned and rubbed a hand over his belly, the lazy motion drawing her focus back to his stiff cock.

Okay, maybe *little* wasn't an appropriate term. She bit the inside of her cheek, the burst of pain managing to corral her thoughts back in line. "I'm a tracker for the International Veil Alliance League, and you're hindering my orders to bring you in."

"We know who you are, darlin'. In fact, we've been anxiously awaiting your arrival." Braeden took a step toward her and she brandished the stick in warning.

"Come any closer and I'll crack you one."

"Won't that defeat the purpose of bringing us in alive?"

She bared her teeth. "Oh, I won't kill you. But nothing says I can't break a few of your bones."

Braeden's smile turned cocky. "Don't think you wanna do that."

She narrowed her eyes as he drew closer. "Give me one good reason why not, pooka boy."

A frisson of air stirred across the nape of her neck like a soft caress and her sensory nerve endings went haywire. Caught off-guard by the sensation, she whipped around. She'd expected to find Rand Quinlan standing directly behind her, so discovering he was leaning against a marbled column at least ten feet away from her left her completely discombobulated. It didn't help that he was every bit as yummilicious as his accent promised. Hair darker than midnight swept low across his brow and just brushed the collar of the crisp, white linen shirt that molded to his expansive shoulders and accentuated his sun-bronzed complexion. Eyes the color of melted chocolate pinned her in place.

Energy snapped and sizzled through every nerve synapse in her body. The surge of power was like nothing she'd experienced. Raw and elemental. Sexual. Her knees shook and her nipples tightened. A flush of heat rippled beneath her skin, building to a slow ache between her thighs. Her clit throbbed.

Holy hell. A strangled gasp broke past her lips as the beginning waves of an orgasm crested to a sharp, sweet peak. She dropped the stick.

A smoky laugh floated from Rand. "How's *that* for a reason?"

Chapter Two

Rand watched the woman before him sway in place, her panting breaths and dilated pupils hinting how close she hovered near climax. Every cell in his body hungered to strip that gods-awful ugly jacket and the rest of her clothes from her luscious limbs and sink deep inside her. Only then would he mentally push her past the edge. She'd come hard, her pussy vising around his cock. Sweat crawled down his neck as he imagined how warm and silky she'd feel. Wet. Clinging. He groaned and a pointed cough intruded on his fantasies. Shifting his gaze to Braeden, he noticed his lover shaking his head, amusement curving the corners of his mouth.

Damn. With great force of will, Rand reeled in the magical threads he'd begun weaving around Vanessa. Almost instantly, the pink bloom riding her cheeks dissipated. Her breathing still shaky, she reached up and shoved trembling fingers through the auburn curls peeking from beneath her hat. Prolonging her sexual fulfillment was a necessary evil, but it didn't stop the twinge of guilt that gnawed at him. He knew all too well the agony of being denied the ultimate release. Still, an hour or two for Vanessa didn't begin to compare with the three hundred years he and Braeden had endured, thanks to the curse Fiona had pinned them with all those years ago.

"W-what the hell was that?"

He met Vanessa's wide-eyed stare. "Let's just call it a very advanced form of foreplay."

"Well, stop it."

Her surliness made him grin. "In case you failed to notice, I did. Or perhaps that's what's got your panties in a twist? We could always remedy that, if you wish."

The rosy hue returned to her cheekbones. Only this time he suspected it had nothing to do with extreme arousal. Pity.

"I wish for you to return my car so I can drag both your asses back to your home dimension."

He clucked his tongue. "Sweetest, you really need to start doubling up on the St. John's Wart, or whatever the devil you humans use to enhance memory. I told you your vehicle is temporarily unavailable."

"I think the herb you're looking for is Gecko biloba. Though why anyone would want to eat anything made out of geckos is beyond me." Braeden shuddered.

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"It's Ginkgo." An irritated noise sprang from Vanessa as she tossed up her arms. "And why are we talking about plants?" She adopted the squinty-eyed stare she seemed remarkably proficient at. "I'm on to you two. No amount of ridiculous blabbering is going to distract me from my job."

Braeden crossed his arms over his chest. "Did she just call us ridiculous blabberers?"

"So it seems."

"Well, shit." Braeden drew out the word in his typical lazy drawl, making it sound more like *shee-et*. "Do you suppose that's an insult?"

Her expression downright homicidal, Vanessa took a quick step toward the stick lying on the floor. Concerned for his and Braeden's kneecaps, Rand shot a bolt of energy at the piece of wood, sending it flying into the fountain.

Vanessa awarded him a baleful glare. "You can play games with me all night. It won't do a bit of good. Your asses are still getting hauled in."

He gave a slow smile that turned her murderous expression into one of wariness. Hot anticipation rolled through him. Oh, the endless fun he would have with this woman. "Sweet Nessie. There's nothing I'd love more than to play with you all night."

Fire once again flashed in those vibrant green eyes. "What did you just call me?"

"Nessie. It suits you so much better."

"No, it doesn't. It's the name of a stinkin' monster that lives in a loch."

"Actually, his real name is Gerald." Braeden shrugged, his grin unapologetic when Vanessa sent him an incinerating look.

"I don't care if his fucking name is Moe. Now are you going to come willingly or not?"

Rand took a step closer to Vanessa, unconcerned by the flicker of warning that flashed across her face. Without the stick or weapons he'd found in her vehicle and holster, she presented little threat. "It depends."

Her chin jutted upward. "On what?"

"You."

"Me?" Confusion softened a bit of her bravado.

"Yes. You're the reason we're here, Ness-Vanessa."

The perfect arch of her brows instantly slashed toward the bridge of her nose. "Let me get this straight. You illegally jumped the veil, putting yourselves at risk of prosecution and punishment, because of me?" He nodded and she slammed her hands on her full hips. "Okay, I'll bite."

He gave her a wolfish smile. "Lucky me. Do I get to choose where?"

Her cheeks flamed scarlet again. "I meant *why*. Or more to the point, what the hell do I have to do with you breaking the law?"

"You're our mate."

Dead silence greeted his response, followed by exactly thirty seconds of hysterical laughter from Vanessa. Bending at the waist, she sucked in great gulps of air and wiped her watering eyes. "Oh man. If I had a dime for every time someone told me that..."

"You'd have ten cents?" Braeden countered.

Her squinty look returned, and Rand sighed. "I believe what our skeptical little mate is trying to say is that she doesn't believe us."

"Darn tootin"." Vanessa nodded with enough emphasis to make her curls bounce. "Runaways in your position will try anything to avoid capture."

"You're forgetting one minor detail, sweetest. We came to you."

A hint of doubt crept into her eyes. Unable to resist the allure of touching her a second longer, he closed the distance between them and brushed the pads of his fingers across her cheek. Her skin felt softer than velvet and smelled like spring itself. Desire, thick and heady, sluiced through his veins. The only other individual who'd elicited this level of reaction from him was Braeden. There'd been other lovers, dalliances, but nothing could compete with the intoxicating need of claiming a true bond mate. Now that he'd found Vanessa, no force on this earth or any other would stop him from pursuing her.

No matter the eventual cost.

Vanessa returned his stare, her pink tongue coming out to moisten her lips. He tracked the motion, his cock throbbing as he imagined her licking along the length of his shaft, her tongue soft and teasing.

"M-maybe you realized you didn't stand a prayer of escaping," Vanessa stuttered, breaking through his vivid fantasies. "So you decided to lure me here in hopes of pulling a fast one on me."

"I give you my word that's not the case."

She reached up and swatted his hand away. "Pookas are notorious tricksters. I'd be a fool to take your word on anything."

He inclined his head. "Very well. I propose a compromise then."

She bit her lip. The sight of those pearly white teeth sinking into her lush bottom lip made him give in to a silent groan. Great Titania, if he didn't bed her soon—

"What kind of compromise?"

"Forty-eight hours. If Braeden and I haven't convinced you of our sincerity by the end of that time, we'll willingly turn ourselves in without a fuss."

She scowled. "Forty-eight hours! I'm scheduled to drop you off at detainment no later than tomorrow night."

Braeden left his station next to the fountain to join them. "So you'll be a little late. They'll understand."

"Please. Have you met my bosses?"

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Rand trailed his palm along her arm, letting his thumb graze the outer swell of her breast through the jacket. "We'll make it worth your while."

Her lips parted, her breath growing wispy. She gave a disdainful snort that was clearly a ruse to cover her discomposure. "There's something else that's just not jiving." She waved toward Braeden. "If he's sucking your cock, what the hell do you need me for?"

Both he and Braeden sputtered in laughter. She gave them the stink eye. "What? It's a valid question."

Rand scrubbed a hand across his mouth. "Of course. We just weren't expecting you to ask it."

She stacked her arms in front of her. "Trust me. Cockasaurus over there talks about giving you the deep-throat special, and I'm left with a few questions regarding my role in things."

His lips twitched. On the other side of Vanessa, he spied Braeden frowning down at his dick. "The fact Braeden and I are mated lovers doesn't in any way diminish your importance to our union." Sweet goddess, that was the understatement of the year.

"Union? You mean the three of us...together..." Vanessa's face went an entirely new shade of pink.

"That is usually how it's done."

"Not in my world, buster. Around here, we're lucky if two work it out."

He didn't fail to notice the faint edge of bitterness souring her tone. Was she thinking of a former lover? Or worse, a *present* one? Before he could press her about it, she jerked away from him. "Sorry, but this *compromise* isn't going to work."

"Why?" The devil inside him couldn't resist baiting her. "Afraid you might enjoy it?"

"Sorry to burst your bubble, but I'm not willing to risk losing my job—not to mention the wrath of my bosses—for some pooka sandwich action."

Stubborn girl would be the death of him. Caging his impatience, he returned to leaning against the column. It was the only way he could guarantee that he wouldn't resort to throwing himself at Vanessa's feet and begging her to throw him a bone. Or specifically, begging her to lick *his* bone. "Very well. But I'm afraid you'll still have to wait."

"Why?"

"We have company outside."

She swiveled toward the glass doors. "What the...?" Her loud gulp echoed off the walls. "Where the hell did those bears come from? And why are they wearing bibs and holding forks?"

"They're hungry, apparently."

"You son of a bitch." Her boots clacking on the marble floor, she stormed at him. She jabbed a shaking finger in the center of his chest. "Get rid of them. *Now*."

"Have you ever tried to chase off starving grizzlies? Not an easy task, believe me."

"*Arghhhh*." Her frustrated scream reaching an octave only small rodents could hear, she spun and stalked in the direction of the fountain. She halted, did an about-face, and strode to him, her expression fierce. "Forty-eight hours. That's it. The second your time is up, I'm hauling your asses in."

He met the challenge in her eyes and forced a smile. Forty-eight hours from now, her heart would belong to them.

Even if it killed him.

Chapter Three

Exactly when did this night go way left of normal? That was the question Vanessa kept mulling over as she paced in front of the fountain. The fact she even had to wonder was insane, considering that nothing about her life was remotely normal. But this? Two maddening, infuriating, and yes, sexier-than-should-belegal pookas insisting she was their mate?

Yeah, welcome to bizarro land.

More than likely she'd nailed it when she'd accused Rand and Braeden of conniving to weasel their way out of incarceration. Because the whole notion of soul mates and love that lasts forever? Only an illusion. And if anyone was an expert at seeing past the veil of illusion, it was her.

The sound of an approaching whistle broke through her disgruntled musings, and she turned just as a train chugged into the lobby. She stared, completely bemused, as the locomotive slowed just long enough to allow a group of elves, a family of Sasquatch and a chupacabra sporting a three-piece white disco suit to disembark before rumbling through the wall and disappearing.

She started forward, intent on solving the mystery of this hotel by speaking to the Otherworlders, but a hand suddenly cupped her shoulder, making her jump. Spinning, she eyed Rand, her traitorous nipples tightening. Yes, he was aggravating as hell, but there was no denying that the breathtakingly gorgeous pooka oozed sexual magnetism. He'd more than proved his prowess with that little stunt he'd pulled earlier. Her clitoris pulsed at the reminder of her almost-orgasm. He hadn't even touched her. How mind-blowing would actual sex with him be?

Correction, sex with him and Braeden. The throbbing in her clit intensified, and she stifled her moan. Looking to get her mind off sex, she swiveled back in the direction of the elves and their motley band of traveling companions. They'd vanished. "Damn it." Irritated that she'd missed her shot at interrogating the Otherworlders, she pinned Rand with a glare. "What's the deal with the train?"

"It comes through occasionally and unloads guests." He shrugged as if that were a perfectly logical occurrence. "Are you ready? Housekeeping is just about finished tidying up our room."

She gaped at him. "What do you mean by our room?"

He gave a nonchalant shrug. "We assumed you wouldn't mind."

"Well you assumed wrong. And speaking of your partner in crime, where the hell is Braeden?"

"He's already upstairs, giving the maids a hand."

Yeah, more like giving them an eyeful, if he was still gallivanting around naked. Determined to track down someone and find out for herself the situation with the lack of room vacancies, she shoved her hands in the pockets of her jacket and took an angry march around the perimeter of the fountain. Frowning, she stared at the vast expanse of empty space between the pyramid and the four towering walls that made up the interior of the hotel. "Okay, I give. Where is the damn check-in desk?"

He made a great show of looking around. "Odd, it was here just a second ago. Guess you're stuck with us after all."

Somehow she controlled the urge to fish the stick from the fountain and brain him. "How convenient."

Cupping her elbow, he steered her toward the adjacent wall. A recessed door she hadn't noticed earlier slid open, revealing a mirrored elevator. He gestured for her to precede him inside. Soft, sensual music accompanied them on the ride up. Being confined in the cramped space only added to her hyper awareness of Rand. To make matters worse, every once in a while she'd catch him watching her, his dark eyes filled with an intense hunger that made her breath quicken. She half-expected him to rip her clothes off and toss her to the floor of the elevator, where he'd have his wicked way with her.

How pathetic did it make her that she wished he would?

The elevator coasted to a smooth stop and the doors popped open. Rather than exiting into a hallway as she'd expected, the conveyance had delivered them directly to what she assumed was their room. Only it was like no hotel room she'd ever encountered. A massive arched entry led into a large living space filled with tropical plants. Groupings of oversized cushions in vibrant shades of fuchsia and aquamarine provided intimate seating arrangements amongst the exotic blooms. The gentle cooing of doves drew her attention to the dozens of birdcages and jewel-toned glass lanterns suspended in the overhead canopy of foliage.

"Perfect timing. The maid just finished up."

She tore her gaze from the cages and gaped at Braeden. He'd donned a pair of white harem pants that hung low on his hips. The sexy look suited him and fit in perfectly with the whole Arabian Nights vibe the room exuded. She wrinkled her nose. "How is it that I keep missing these supposed staff members?"

Braeden chuckled. "Guess you're too slow, darlin'."

She grunted. "Or more likely, they don't exist." Fingertips brushed the nape of her neck and she jumped before shooting a look up at Rand.

His eyebrow took on a cocky slant but he didn't comment on her edginess. "I took the liberty of stashing your suitcase in the bedroom. Perhaps you'd like to change into something more comfortable?"

"My suit—" She plunked her hands on her hips. "Wait a minute. You went rifling through my car?"

"I figured you wouldn't want to wear the same thing for the next two days."

"Damn presumptuous of you, particularly considering you didn't know for certain I'd agree to stay."

His smile falling way short of innocent, he dropped his hand and squeezed her left butt cheek. Before she could do anything more than jerk in response, he removed his hand and strode toward another arched doorway in the distance. She stood there fuming and he sent her an amused glance over his shoulder. "Coming?"

She glared at his back before shifting her focus to Braeden. "Is he always this bossy?"

"Darlin', you haven't even seen him at his best." His laugh smoky, Braeden sprawled onto one of the plump cushions and stacked his arms beneath his head.

Grumbling, she stalked after Rand. She caught up with him inside the bedroom, her heart rate spiking as she surveyed the wicked, decadent surroundings. *Holy sweet mother of God*.

It wasn't so much the enormous platform bed and the collection of wrist and ankle restraints resting atop its black silk sheets that caused her pulse to skitter out of control. Okay, they were a little responsible. But the shelves loaded with various vibrators, oils and assorted kinky paraphernalia definitely made her question her sanity in agreeing to ride out the next forty-eight hours in this room.

"Your luggage is over here."

Tearing her shocked stare from the huge pink vibrator shaped like a rabbit, she crossed to the tufted ottoman Rand gestured toward. Sure enough, her tweed suitcase waited on top. She unzipped her jacket and shrugged free of it before reaching down the front of her turtleneck. Meeting Rand's interested stare, she held up the small key dangling from the silver chain around her neck. "Pickpockets never think to look there."

His full, sensuous lips curved upward. "Then they're missing a golden opportunity."

Ignoring the sinful promise in his eyes and the responding surge of moisture between her thighs, she slipped the chain off and inserted the key inside the tiny luggage lock. It clicked into place and she flipped up the hinge tabs, springing the suitcase open. She peered down at the articles of clothing neatly folded inside, her temper threatening to detonate. "Where the hell are my clothes?"

"I threw them away."

"What?" A haze of fury obscuring her vision, she pawed through the skimpy garments. She pulled out a red lacy corset that had circles cut out of the nipple area. "Where are my pajamas, you son of a bitch?"

"Are you referring to those atrocious flannel things?" He shuddered. "Sweetest, something that ugly doesn't deserve to touch your skin."

"And this does?" She waved the corset in his face. "Half of it is missing."

He dug inside the suitcase and extracted a red G-string that matched the corset. "Here you go."

"That isn't what I—" She broke off with a growl and tossed the garment onto the ottoman. "Why am I even wasting my breath?" Running impatient fingers through her hair, she glanced about. "Where is the bathroom?"

Rand pointed toward the farthest wall, where a shimmering curtain of aqua silk rippled in invitation. "Just beyond there." He coughed pointedly when she began to walk away. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

She pivoted and found him holding the corset and G-string. "Yeah. In your dreams, buddy." Jaw clenched tight enough it ached, she stormed toward the curtain. It fluttered aside as she approached, revealing an opulent sanctuary on the other side. Her grumpiness evaporated the instant she entered the bathroom. *Oh wow*. Mouth hanging wide open, she gaped at the huge glass mosaic bathing pool occupying most of the room. A small waterfall cascaded down one side, constantly feeding a brilliant stream of champagne-hued water into the pool. Fragrant pink blossoms floated on the water's surface, perfuming the air with pure ambrosia. "Damn, maybe I *did* die and go to heaven."

Tempted as she was to strip down and dive right into that steamy oasis of bliss, she reluctantly settled for availing herself of the toilet. She stepped back into the bedroom just as Rand was shrugging from his shirt. Her breath lodged in her throat. All annoyances aside, he was simply beautiful to behold. His sculpted shoulders were powerful, delineated with sleek muscle tone. A series of intricate symbols inked the right side of his breastbone, drawing attention to his firm pectorals. Like Braeden, his torso was hairless except for the sprinkling of dark hair that traversed his chiseled abs and disappeared beneath the waistband of his charcoal trousers.

He turned toward her, his well-defined stomach muscles flexing. "Is the bath to your liking?"

Despite her best intentions, she couldn't stop ogling his chest. She imagined licking over those delicious curves and hollows. Imagined sucking the hard nubs of his masculine nipples against the roof of her mouth. An intense throb leapt in her clit. She swallowed, corking her whimper. "Y-yes. It's fine."

Disappointment shadowed his expression. For some weird reason, guilt over her less than gushing response settled in the pit of her belly. "No, that's not true."

Rand's face fell another fraction. "You don't like it?"

"Actually, it's amazing." She sighed. "I could easily spend the next forty-eight hours just soaking in that pool."

His eyes darkened. "A delightful way to pass the time. Braeden and I could join you. Soap you from head to foot, paying thorough attention to every inch of you in between."

She visualized their hands stroking her everywhere, wet, soapy palms gliding over her breasts and pussy. Her nipples beaded. Rand licked his lips and she realized he could easily see her body's reaction through the thin knit of her turtleneck. He stepped toward her and she backed up, the backs of her knees hitting the ottoman. "I—I think maybe we'd better go join Braeden before he wonders what happened to us."

Rand continued walking toward her, his gait confident and predatory. "He's not wondering. He knows exactly what's going on in here."

"Nothing is going on in here." She prayed her declaration didn't sound as weak as it felt.

"You're wrong, sweetest. I'm seducing you."

She gulped. "Well, it's not working."

He stopped directly in front of her, so close it was a miracle she didn't suffer a third-degree burn from the intense heat radiating from his bare chest. The earthy scent of forest and the underlying, potent musk of aroused male drifted from his skin, playing havoc with her hormones. She wanted to bury her nose in all that warm flesh until she was lightheaded and giddy. And then she'd lick and nibble him everywhere.

Rand's fingers curled around her chin, his thumb brushing the dip beneath her bottom lip. "I don't believe you."

"I don't care what you—" The remainder of her denial fell victim to the lush pressure of Rand's mouth against hers. Every energy storehouse in her body began lighting up like a bank of slot machines that just hit payload. His lips coaxed hers open with more ease than she cared to analyze and his tongue met hers in a slick glide. Her hands braced against his chest—purely to keep from crumpling in an undignified heap, of course—and Rand's rumbling groan vibrated beneath her fingertips and inside her mouth. He tugged her closer, one palm moving to the nape of her neck and the other low on her tailbone. Her breasts pillowed against him, and the insistent bulge of his erection nudged just above her pubic bone. The knowledge that all that separated her from his cock were a pair of zippers and some flimsy fabric nearly had her panting.

Rand's tongue stole another slick caress before he sucked her bottom lip between his teeth. His animalistic growl brought a new gush of wetness between her thighs. "You can't lie to yourself, Nessie. You belong with us."

His arrogant assertion acted like a cold dash of water on her desire. She shoved away from Rand and glared up at his passion-flushed features. "I belong to no one. And I told you not to call me by that ridiculous name."

"You're the most stubborn twit I've ever known." Tunneling his hands through his dark hair, he granted her a scowl. "You need a good, long fucking, you know that? Maybe it'd manage to dilute some of that vinegar in your attitude."

She bared her teeth. "My attitude is fine. You're just pissed because I'm not falling at your feet and begging you to rut away at me. Sucks to realize you're not so irresistible, doesn't it?"

And with that big fat lie hanging between them, she stalked from the room.

He was going to make her eat her words. Amongst other things. Smothering his snarl, Rand dropped onto the cushion beside Braeden. "Went that good, huh?" Slashing his gaze sideways, he met Braeden's sympathetic look. "Humans are exasperating creatures, but that woman takes it to a whole new level."

"Yet you want her with every breath inside you." Braeden chuckled in response to Rand's glower. "I know because I'm suffering the same affliction. She's like a decadent treat I've waited my entire life to unwrap, and the continued wait is damn near killing me."

Braeden's choice of words stirred a gloomy brew of worry within Rand. He'd known all along the risk they took pursuing Vanessa. Hell, the delicate nature of their predicament was the only thing that'd kept him from staking a claim on her the first time he'd spotted her five months ago, on that fortuitous and fated day he'd noticed her outside the Veil Alliance's detainment center. But he didn't have only himself to consider. Would his heart be able to take the loss of Braeden if Vanessa rejected their bond?

For that matter, would his heart be able to take the loss of Vanessa?

Apparently reading his morose thoughts, Braeden cupped Rand's cheek. "We promised each other no regrets over doing this."

"I know. I just—"

Braeden's mouth stopped any further protest. He licked the seam of Rand's lips, his groan husky. "I can taste her on you."

A fierce throbbing coursed through Rand's cock. Braeden's innocent pronouncement prodded more wicked fantasies of delving deep inside Vanessa's dripping slit. He'd pull out slowly and offer his cock to Braeden for a lingering taste before plunging to the hilt in her pussy again and again. Until she was shaking and coming, his name a constant scream upon her lips.

A nip along the underside of his stubbled jaw brought him crashing back to the present. Braeden's hand trailed low on Rand's abdomen. "Your skin is on fire. You need sex. Bad."

Braeden was right. The ferocious demand boiling inside him wouldn't be appeased by anything less. He clamped a hand on the back of Braeden's neck, dragging him up for a lush, openmouthed kiss. Their tongues tangled and sparred, amping his insistent desire to full blast. "Take off your pants."

"Not yet."

"Yes. Now." Rand hissed the command through clenched teeth.

Braeden's mouth curved in mischief before descending over Rand's stomach. "Patience is a virtue."

"Fuck that."

"No, fuck me."

"My thoughts exactly, you idiot."

"All in good time."

Rand growled low in his throat. "Tease."

Braeden gripped Rand's zipper, tugging it down. His cock sprang free and Braeden's laugh caressed over the taut, swollen head before his mouth followed suit. The suction was perfect and sublime. He rocked

his hips, his hand riding the back of Braeden's head. A faint rustling noise slipped past the edges of his awareness. Lifting his focus from his lover's bobbing motions, he locked stares with Vanessa. Her pupils were huge and dark, her nipples straining against her top. His cock pulsed, swelling inside Braeden's mouth, earning an appreciative moan from his lover.

"I—I'm sorry. Didn't realize..." Her hard swallow echoing in the room, Vanessa started to turn tail and run.

"Stay."

Her foot hovering in mid-spin, she gaped at Rand. "What?"

"Watch. You know you want to."

Her cheeks grew redder than the anthurium blooms behind her. "That's ridiculous. I have no interest in—" She broke off when Braeden reached inside Rand's pants and played with his balls.

She was going nowhere. His smile grim, Rand gripped Braeden's head, guiding the direction of his mouth. "Fuck, yes. Like that." Just because he hadn't climaxed in three hundred years didn't mean he didn't enjoy the hell out of an expert blowjob. And when it came to sucking cock, Braeden was a fucking pro. "You like that hard dick between your lips, don't you? Only thing you enjoy more is feeling it slide deep in your ass."

Both Braeden and Vanessa groaned. That was all the encouragement Rand needed. He pulled free of Braeden's mouth. "Lay on your back."

His eyes glazed with lust, Braeden rolled over and reached for the waistband of his harem pants. Shoving Braeden's hands out of the way, Rand tugged the silky material over Braeden's hips. Fisting his lover's engorged, rosy shaft, Rand leaned over and engulfed him in one downstroke of his mouth. He heard Vanessa's sharp intake of air and his balls tightened. The one benefit of the curse preventing his and Braeden's climaxes was they could go at it all night like a pair of horny rabbits—something they'd indulged in on more than one occasion. Right now, he intended to use that to his advantage.

Kicking off his trousers, he slid his hand beneath the cushion and fumbled around for the tube of lubricant. His impatient fingers captured their quarry and uncapped the lube before squirting a healthy portion into his palm. Braeden studied the amount of lubricant and cocked an eyebrow.

"I'm planning on riding your ass for a while. Don't need you complaining tomorrow." He took his time lubing up his cock and Braeden's rear passage, knowing full well he was providing one hell of a show for Vanessa. It aroused him to no end imagining how wet her pussy must be, watching him prepare to fuck Braeden. He grazed the head of his dick against his lover's puckered opening, teasing them both. And Vanessa. He didn't fail to notice how she'd shuffled a bit closer, her eyes riveted on them. Gripping Braeden by the hips, he thrust into his ass in one slick glide.

Braeden's head fell back, the cords in his neck tensed. "Fuck."

He chuckled. "I'm planning to. Give me a second." Balancing on his knees, he braced Braeden's muscular calves with his forearms and sank deeper. The sound of panting reached his ears and he looked up to find Vanessa staring at them, her lips parted. Holding her gaze, he fisted Braeden's cock and shafted his ass with steady strokes. "You could join us, you know. Braeden sure as hell wouldn't mind. In fact, I bet he'd love nothing more than for you to straddle his face and grind that sweet pussy against his mouth."

A rapturous groan shuddered from Braeden. Rand pumped his cock deeper. "Our boy here is all about the oral. The thought of eating you while I fuck him is a dream come true, isn't it, Brae?" Looking down, he found Braeden already zoned out on the fantasy. It wouldn't take much to lure Vanessa into it as well. The right words, perfectly woven, and she would be his.

Calling upon every ounce of his magical energy, he mentally reached out to her. "Imagine it, Vanessa. His tongue running little figure eights up and down your slit, teasing you. Fuck, you need it bad—that tongue deep in your pussy." She gasped, and he smiled. *Got you*. "Your clit's wet and swollen, begging for attention. Don't worry, sweetest, Braeden's on his way there."

"Oh *God*." Vanessa wobbled, her hand shooting for the trunk of the nearby ficus tree. She steadied herself but her legs still trembled. "How...?"

"You feel him, don't you? His lips tugging softly. Suckling. He can't get enough of you."

A hungry moan ripped from Braeden, verifying the statement. Rand was entangled in a web of his own making, on the edge and desperate to give his mates the releases they craved. The furious defeat that always swamped him thanks to the curse he and Braeden suffered still taunted him, but this time a spark of hope lit the darkness. They could satisfy Vanessa, and be one step closer to unity.

"It's building inside you, sweetest. The biggest orgasm of your life. Nothing's going to stop it now. Braeden's tongue is flicking your luscious little clit like crazy..."

Vanessa gave a strangled cry.

"...making you come so hard you could pass out."

Her entire body bowed in a stiff arch and her nails dug into the bark of the ficus. Eyes rolling back in her head, she slumped against the tree trunk, breathing fast and ragged.

Rand watched the dreamy glow of satisfaction soften her features while she slid to the ground, and he made a promise to himself. The next time she came like that, it would be around his cock.

Chapter Four

Vanessa woke in the middle of a strange bed, sandwiched between two naked strangers. For an awkward moment, she wondered what the hell she'd gotten up to the night before. But then her previous evening's adventures came flooding back in Technicolor detail. Stifling her groan, she inched her way off the mattress. Neither Rand nor Braeden budged. Then again, not too surprising considering how they'd spent most of the night. That much sex was bound to tucker a man—or a pooka—out.

Recalling all the naughty acts she'd witnessed, sweat crawled over her skin. To say Rand and Braeden were lusty and uninhibited in their lovemaking would be a huge understatement. Still, despite their best efforts to convince her to join in, she'd held her ground. She deserved a damn medal for her willpower.

She stretched and grimaced as every bone in her body creaked in protest. That damn sprint down the hill last night had finally caught up with her. She glanced toward the aqua curtain and contemplated a fast dip in the pool. Her muscles practically screamed *yes*, *yes*, *yes*. After a quick peek to ensure Rand and Braeden were still zonked out, she rifled through her suitcase for a change of clothes. The purple miniskirt and midriff-bearing sweater were way more revealing than what she'd normally choose to wear, but they weren't nearly as provocative as the rest of the garments. Tossing the red G-string on top of her armful of clothing, she ducked into the bathroom and tiptoed to the pool. She tested the temperature of the steaming, swirling water and shivered in pure pleasure when toasty warmth lapped at her fingers. Setting her fresh change of clothes on the nearby slipcovered lounge chair, she hurriedly stripped and hopped into the pool.

Ooh mama. The blissful cocoon of heat that enveloped her was almost as mind-blowing as the orgasm she'd experienced last night. An extra burst of heat that had nothing to do with the temperature of the water rippled through her. How sad was it that the most amazing sex of her life hadn't even involved physical contact?

Spreading her arms out, she floated onto her back, bobbing amongst the sweet-smelling flowers. It'd been at least a year and a half since she'd indulged in sex with anyone other than BOB—her battery operated boyfriend. Yeah, sometimes she craved a little flesh-on-flesh intimacy, but at least with BOB she never had to worry about it being freaked out over her ability to interact with the Otherworlders, or leaving her when the going got tough. Because one way or another, they always left. It was the fucking story of her life.

Her heavy thoughts were enough to ruin the idyllic tranquility she'd briefly discovered. Plunging her legs beneath her, she stood and trudged through waist-deep water to the steps leading from the pool.

Grabbing one of the fluffy towels stacked by the chaise lounge, she quickly dried off and got dressed. She returned to the bedroom. Rand and Braeden were still sawing logs, but they'd rolled closer to each other on the mattress. Their heads rested on the same pillow and Braeden's leg was flung over Rand's. The sight of them stabbed an odd, tiny ache of longing deep in her heart.

What would it be like to belong to each other like that? To feel compelled to always touch and hold your loved one, even when asleep? She shook her head. "You're getting sappy, you moron."

Grumbling at her own idiocy, she tugged on her boots. They clashed with the rest of her outfit, but what the hell could she do about it? She tromped into the garden-like front living space. Thanks to a brief investigation the evening before, she knew Rand hadn't stashed her car anywhere inside their hotel room. Not that she'd expected him to make it that easy for her. Of course, even if he had, she still would have been faced with the problem of driving the car out of the room. Pretty damn doubtful the SUV would have fit in the elevator. And while the idea of doing an Evel Knievel through the walls and down into the lobby sounded super cool, it was probably a stunt best left to the experts. Or those with an insane death wish.

She made a beeline for the section of wall where the elevator had earlier dropped her and Rand off, half-convinced she'd have no luck hailing the conveyance. Considering the way things operated in this damn Alice-in-Wonderland hotel, it'd be a miracle if she didn't end up trapped here forever.

She almost fell over in shock when the wall slid back and the elevator doors popped open with a cheery ding. Jumping inside before the thing decided to disappear again, she scanned the mirrored interior for the button keypad, but found none.

That made no sense. Hadn't there been one yesterday? She gritted her teeth. Damn it, this is what she got for being too preoccupied with Rand's scrumdidilyumptious body. The elevator started descending and she quickly grasped the gold-plated handlebar to keep from falling. Hopefully the thing had a better idea of where they were going than she did.

The elevator slid to a stop and she stumbled out into the lobby. Despite knowing she had better odds of running into Elvis than a staff member, she rounded the corner of the enormous fountain. A flash of white moved to her right. She spun, fully expecting to encounter the receptionist or the mythical valet attendant. Possibly even Mr. Saturday Night Fever chupacabra. Instead, she practically smacked headfirst into a unicorn.

Correction, *the* unicorn. The son-of-a-bitchin' one responsible for the full set of teeth marks tattooed on the outside of her ankle. "*You*."

The unicorn backed up a step and blinked at her before its eyes went comically wide. "Shit." With a clatter of hooves, it dashed in the opposite direction.

"Get your ass back here!" Her throat scratched raw from her fierce bellow, Vanessa barreled after the fleeing creature. It charged toward the far wall. Just when she swore the insane unicorn was going to crash into the plaster and drywall, a shimmering archway materialized. The unicorn bolted through the opening.

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Not giving herself a second to rethink the wisdom of jumping through a possible mirage, she followed suit. A long hallway stretched in front of her. Boots pounding on the carpeted aisle, she attempted to close the distance between her and the unicorn, but the little ankle-biting bastard powered up its gallop. Ahead, a door yawned open. Its powerful back legs kicking like twin pistons, the unicorn leapt past the doorway. A solid wall appeared, cutting off the faint strains of a mocking ninny.

Vanessa dug her feet in, a string of profanities bulleting past her lips as the wall loomed closer. *Bam.* Grunting at the impact, she bounced backwards, her legs flying upward and her butt smacking into the floor. Dazed and winded, she wobbled up onto her elbows. "Ow." Man, she was really racking up entries for the record book of epically bad ideas.

Rubbing the arm that'd suffered the brunt of the collision, she hobbled onto her feet and glared at the pristine expanse of wall. She couldn't say for certain, but she swore she detected the muffled clip-clop of hooves and the opening bars of Jimmy Buffett's "Cheeseburger in Paradise".

After wasting at least ten minutes trying to find a way to trigger the door to open, she admitted defeat and headed back the way she came. The hallway stretched on and on for what seemed forever. "This can't be right." Sure, she'd been running before, which partly explained why it'd taken her less time, but she wasn't *that* fast of a sprinter. Panic beginning to creep in, she scanned her surroundings for any familiar landmarks. It all looked the same. One long-ass hallway leading to…nowhere. How could that be? It had to eventually take her back to the lobby, right?

Right? Adrenaline surging through her bloodstream, she ratcheted up her pace to a full-speed dash. Ignoring the painful stitch in her side and the unpleasant jarring in her knees, she bolted down the hall. Her gaze darted left and right, desperately seeking the exit. She was so caught up in her panicked quest that she didn't notice Rand until she plowed into him. He tugged her against his chest, where she willingly collapsed, gasping.

"Damn it, Nessie, you nearly gave me a heart attack."

She continued clutching him, labored breaths sawing from her lungs. "Th-that makes t-two of us."

He shoved a sweat-dampened lock of hair away from her eye before cupping her cheek. Concern softened his previously fierce expression. "Are you all right?"

She nodded. "J-just give me a sec." Rather than honor her request, he swept her up into his arms. Caught unawares, she clung to his neck. "Whoa, what are you doing?"

"Taking you back upstairs." He peered down at her, the dark fire once again crackling in his eyes. "Where you should have been to begin with, damn it."

"Are you saying I'm not allowed to leave the room?" If she hadn't been concerned with tumbling out of his arms, she would have smacked him upside his arrogant head. "I don't know how things work back in your home dimension, but this is a free country, buster. Keeping women trapped prisoners in hotel rooms is a federal offense." At least she was fairly certain it was. If not, it damn well should be. "You're not a prisoner, Nessie. But this isn't a place you should gallivant about without a chaperone. As you've no doubt discovered, it's not exactly designed with humans in mind."

"Boy, that's putting it mildly."

"Then you see the wisdom in not leaving the room without me or Braeden to accompany you?"

She slumped against him in reluctant acquiescence. "Fine. Not that it matters anyway. Come tomorrow night, we'll be on our way to the veil detainment center and this weird place will be a distant memory."

Rand's furious strides slowed and beneath her palm, his neck muscles tensed. "Why are you so determined to leave us? You're our mate, Nessie. We belong together."

She squinted up at him. "What did I tell you about that stupid pet name? And you're only saying that because I brought up the detainment center. Admit it."

He returned her narrow-eyed stare. "Is your stubbornness a genetic trait, or are you just naturally bullheaded?"

Though she tried not to let his question bother her, her expression apparently betrayed her. Rand jerked to a halt, guilt seizing his features. "Sweetest, I didn't mean it. You're not really that bullheaded."

She snorted. "Please. We both know that's a big, fat lie."

"Then I don't understand. What did I say to upset you?" He shifted her in his arms when she attempted to break their locked gazes. "I can't make it right if you don't tell me."

"It's nothing. Drop it."

"I'm going to drop you if you don't spill it."

"You wouldn't dare." She sighed when he cocked one dark eyebrow in challenge. "Fine. The truth is I have no clue about my genetics, because I have no family. Now can we please get off this subject?"

He frowned. "Everyone has a family."

"Well, not me." She tucked her cheek against his chest in an effort to escape his penetrating stare. The last thing she wanted to do was get into a conversation about her past. She'd spent too many years burying those god-awful memories to begin dredging them up now. "Are you going to take me upstairs, or what? I've seen enough of this hallway to last me a lifetime."

For one worrisome moment it seemed Rand might try to argue more information from her. Instead, he clamped his mouth shut and strode forward. The shimmering archway appeared and he stepped out into the lobby. After a few tense seconds of silence inside the elevator, he glanced at her. "If you want to talk about—"

"No. And feel free to put me down at any time."

He didn't. A minute later the elevator deposited them at their room and he carried her into the kitchen. Braeden looked up from the batch of cinnamon rolls he was frosting. "Ah, told you she hadn't left us."

She jerked her gaze up at Rand. Wait, he really had been worried she'd split?

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Rand deposited her on one of the leather stools circling the massive center island. "No, but I found her trapped in one of the side hallways." Shooting her another scowl, he unbuttoned his shirt. "I'm taking a quick bath. Braeden has direct orders to truss you to that seat if you so much as glance toward the elevator."

Rolling her eyes, she watched him stalk off. "Definitely bossy."

"That's just his way of showing how worried he was about you."

"What, by snarling at me? Nice."

Braeden licked a glob of icing from his thumb. "We all show it in different ways. Rand glowers, and I bake. It's just the nature of the beast."

She scoped the platter of baked goods. "Jeez, that's a lot of cinnamon rolls. How could you possibly have had time to make all those? I wasn't gone *that* long."

"It's called pooka magic for a reason, darlin'."

"Ah." She eyed the nearest roll, her stomach growling. "Can I have one?"

Braeden's expression turned assessing. "I don't know. You were an awfully bad girl, running off like that. Think you need to convince me that you deserve it."

Judging from the wicked sparkle in his eyes, she had a good inkling of the type of *convincing* he had in mind. Sheesh, you'd think with the way he and Rand went at it last night, sex would be the last thing on his mind. She stared at his mouth, her brain conjuring the memory of the spectacular orgasm those lips had brought her, courtesy of Rand's hypnotic word imagery. Wetness built between her thighs and she bit her lip to keep from whimpering.

Braeden's devilish grin overtaking his gorgeous face, he scooped up one of the rolls and stepped before her, effectively caging her in the chair.

"What do you say, darlin'? A taste for a taste?"

Chapter Five

She groaned and Braeden leaned in to kiss her. Unlike Rand, Braeden's technique was leisurely and playful. He nibbled at her lips before running his tongue along the edges of her teeth. She gasped and he deepened the kiss, his tongue flicking the tip of hers before he sucked her tongue into his mouth.

Holy damn. Rand hadn't been exaggerating when he claimed Braeden was all about the oral. Scraping his teeth lightly over her tongue, he eased his head back. His cheekbones wearing a ruddy flush from passion, he held the cinnamon roll in front of her mouth. "You've earned a bite."

She pouted. "Just one? Talk about stingy."

He smiled. "We're not finished yet."

Her pulse kicked up several notches. Braeden ducked his head and kissed the side of her neck, his tongue dipping toward the indecently low neckline of the sweater. A waft of the sweet floral from the bath rose from his hair, competing with the earthiness of cinnamon. The odd combination of scents aroused her to no end.

Braeden's chin nuzzled between the cramped valley of her cleavage and a happy groan rumbled from his chest. "Mm, you taste a million times better than that sweet roll." He cupped her breasts through the fine knit of the top, the pads of his thumbs rolling in soft, massaging circles across her nipples. She squirmed in the seat, her fingers digging into the tensile firmness of his biceps.

"You're not wearing a bra." Satisfaction and lust turned his voice to gravel. He pushed the sweater up and latched onto a nipple. The wet warmth of his mouth engulfed her, sparking an electric pulse of energy to travel from her breast to her pussy. His tongue and teeth played over her nipple, bringing it to a stiff, hardened peak. Her clit throbbed in rhythm with each decadent tug of his mouth. If he kept it up, there was a good chance she'd come without his tongue even touching her pussy. Or her getting another bite of the damn cinnamon roll.

As if reading her mind, Braeden lifted his head and pressed the gooey treat into her hand for safekeeping. She sank her teeth into the icing, her groan going unchecked while he dropped onto his knees. He inched the miniskirt up around her hips before grazing his index finger along the crotch of her G-string, the slick sound of her arousal verifying how wet she was. "I've been thinking about this all night and morning. Wondering if you taste as delicious as you did during the spell."

She gaped down at him. "Y-you could taste me?"

"Yes. Didn't you feel my mouth on you?"

"Yeah, but I thought it was only in my head."

"No, we all benefited from Rand's spell." Chuckling, Braeden tucked his fingers into the elastic of the G-string. She lifted her rear end so he could drag the scrap of fabric down. His breath caressed the inside of her thighs before his mouth and hands followed suit. Just as he'd proven with the lazy thoroughness of his kiss, Braeden was a pooka who clearly enjoyed savoring his oral delights. By the time his tongue finally slid over her slick labia, Vanessa swore she was going to pass out from anticipation.

Fortunately she didn't. Because being unconscious during the oral love fest Braeden showered her with would have been a damn shame. His tongue traveled up to her clit and lightly danced over the swollen nub before journeying to her slit and plunging inside. Her hips bucked and she grabbed the beveled ledge of the island to keep from tumbling off the seat. "Oh *God*."

A groan sounded. It took her a moment to realize she hadn't produced the noise. Glancing sideways, she spied Rand standing in the kitchen entrance. He was naked and fisting his cock. Lust tightening his features, he dropped his hand and approached, the thick girth of his shaft jutting against his abdomen. She seemed incapable of tearing her focus from that magnificent erection. He stopped beside Braeden's hip and tangled his fingers in his lover's shaggy blond hair. Braeden's tongue slipped from her pussy and he rose to his feet before leaning in to kiss Rand. She watched the slick glide of their tongues, a shock of excitement careening through her when she realized they were sharing her taste. And enjoying the hell out of it, if Rand and Braeden's deep, mutual groans were any indication.

Breaking the kiss, Rand turned in her direction. His scrutiny lowered to her breasts. The dark intensity in his irises felt like a caress and her nipples pebbled in response. With zero preamble, he lowered his head and sucked her nipple into his mouth, scoring the turgid flesh with his teeth. A shuddering cry broke from her. Braeden started to hunker between her legs again but Rand clamped a hand on his shoulder, halting him. Releasing her breast, Rand slid her a smoky look. "I want to be inside you when Brae makes you come. To feel your inner walls rippling around me. Milking me."

Snagging her bottom lip between her teeth, she dropped her gaze to Rand's cock. A lush, decadent curl of heat unfurled low in her belly at the thought of taking Rand deep in her pussy while Braeden pleasured her with his mouth. There were a million reasons why giving in to that fantasy would be foolish, but damn if she could get her body to agree with a single one of them.

Unable to resist, she reached for Rand's cock, her fingers not quite managing to encircle him fully. Excitement—and a measure of trepidation—skipped through her at the idea of being impaled on that monster. Feeling the burn of Rand's inquiring stare lasering into the top of her head, she peered up at him. "I—I want to feel that too."

A sexy growl vibrating in his throat, he claimed her mouth. There was nothing playful, nothing leisurely about his hot, devouring kiss. Instead it was like flying directly into the center of the sun and trying not to incinerate into a smoldering pile of ash. His hand slipped between her thighs and stroked over her slit. He sighed against her lips. "You might not be lubricated enough to take me, sweetest."

"Are you freakin' kidding me? I've never been this wet in my life."

"Have you ever been with someone of my size?"

"Is that your way of trying to fish a compliment out of me?"

His mouth quirked at the corners. "No. But I don't want to hurt you."

"Okay, now you *are* bragging." She reconsidered the impressive shaft in her fist and silently amended her accusation. He had every reason to brag. What was it with pookas? Apparently they were all gifted with giant dicks. "I think I'm good to go, but if you insist on using some extra lubricant, I won't complain."

Rand disappeared into the front garden room. While he was gone, Braeden helped her down from the stool and undressed her, trailing kisses over each inch of skin he slowly revealed. By the time Rand returned to the kitchen, she was trembling with need. His eyes reflecting the fire within her, Rand traced his fingertips across the slopes of her breasts and her belly before combing through the triangular patch of auburn curls covering her mound. He traveled lower, seeking the source of her wetness. Lifting his hand, he licked his fingers clean of her juices. Witnessing the act and the rapturous bliss he displayed while performing it made her lightheaded, and she wobbled.

Moving behind her, Rand steadied her and pressed an openmouthed kiss to her shoulder. "I would love nothing more than to be inside you, skin to skin. You don't need to worry about disease or pregnancy. Both are impossible."

She knew he wasn't merely blowing smoke up her ass to get out of wearing a condom. Their DNA wasn't compatible for reproduction, and according to the research books, pookas were naturally disease resistant. Definitely a win-win situation. And truthfully, riding him bare would be beyond incredible. She swallowed hard. "O-okay."

His lips brushed the nape of her neck in reverence. "The gift of your body and your trust humbles me."

The stool scraped the tiled floor as he repositioned it before sitting. He grasped her waist and lifted her onto his lap. The hard length of his shaft snuggled between the cheeks of her ass, the position provoking another thrill of excitement. She'd never really considered the idea of anal sex all that appealing. Until now. Apparently Rand and Braeden were turning her into a shameless slut.

The pair of wicked pookas in question slipped their hands between her legs, each working their fingers inside her. She'd been so distracted by her naughty musings about anal sex, she hadn't even noticed they'd cracked open the lube. A greedy moan spilling past her lips, she undulated her hips, inadvertently aiding their preparation.

Rand's groan brushed her ear. "I can't wait to feel you clasping tight around me, sweetest."

That made two of them. Her desire doubled when Rand's knuckles bumped against her spine as he coated his cock with lubricant. He lifted her again and his shaft burrowed between her labia, the engorged head of his penis nudging her entrance. Braeden gripped Rand by the base of his cock, helping guide his penetration. The sight was enough to have her teetering on the edge of orgasm.

"Don't you dare come before I'm inside you."

She clenched her teeth. "Then you better hurry your ass up."

Chuckling, Rand pumped his hips, easing his way in. Every inch of him felt unbelievably hard and thick, stretching her to the limits.

"Damn if you two aren't the most beautiful sight I've ever seen." His expression a perfect complement to his husky tone, Braeden knelt in front of them and swirled his tongue over her clit. She jerked at the electrifying contact. Rand flattened his palm on her belly, keeping her anchored in place. Braeden's tongue slipped lower, stroking over where she and Rand were joined. A strangled gasp clogged her throat.

Rand's free hand molded over her breast, his calloused palm teasing her nipple. "You're perfection, Nessie. Better than any fantasy I could conjure."

Braeden hummed in agreement before journeying north again to suckle at her clit. Mewling whimpers escaping her, she struggled to rein in the cresting wave of her climax.

"It's all right, sweetest. Come for us."

Like a dam breaking within her, the orgasm crashed free of its restraints. She shuddered and cried out, every cell in her body awash with mind-numbing pleasure. The overwhelming sensations seemed to last forever. Just as they'd start to ebb, Braeden's tongue-flickering would intensify, wringing another orgasm from her. Then another. Until eventually it felt like she was trapped inside one long, continuous climax.

"Guys, show me some mercy here." Gasping on a choked laugh, she writhed in Rand's lap, trying to escape the sweet torment.

Braeden lifted his head and licked his lips. "Sorry, darlin'. You're too delicious to resist."

She couldn't help laughing at his unrepentant grin. "You both are going to spoil me. Even BOB doesn't give me that many orgasms in one sitting."

"Bob?" A dangerous note darkened Rand's tone.

"My vibrator."

Rand's hands once again relaxed against her. "Ah." His lips brushed the sensitive juncture where her jaw and neck met. "You know, there's a full stock of vibrators in the bedroom. Perhaps you'll give us a demonstration later?"

"Hmm...BOB might get jealous."

His chuckle caressed her skin. "Understandable. Goddess knows, you engender such feelings."

His pronouncement left her a little giddy, and she instantly felt like an idiot for the emotion. This was sex. Nothing more. All their crazy talk of soul mates was just that—crazy talk. Or more to the point, a seductive ploy to weasel past her defenses. As long as she kept things casual, she wouldn't lose the upper hand. She had to keep focused on that.

Chapter Six

They spent the remainder of the morning feasting on Braeden's scrumptious cinnamon rolls. At first it felt odd sitting around naked with two mouthwateringly gorgeous pookas. But considering Rand and Braeden now knew her body pretty damn intimately, donning the sweater and miniskirt seemed pointless. Plus it gave her full rein to ogle them freely, since they made no bones about doing the same to her.

It hadn't passed her notice that they were both sporting the mother of all erections, which left her a little bemused, particularly where Rand was concerned. She knew he hadn't come earlier, but he'd been just as hard then as he was now. Was that normal? Granted, she wasn't exactly an expert on anything normal, and she didn't have a ton of experience with sex partners that didn't require batteries. But she was pretty damn certain most males—pooka or not—couldn't maintain woodies of that stature for this long. At least not without a year's supply of Viagra.

Rand tore off a bite of cinnamon roll and fed it to her, his eyes going dark when she licked along the length of his index finger.

Then again, who was she to question the sudden lucky turn in her sex life? Rand offered her another bite of the decadent treat and she gobbled it down, smacking her lips in appreciation. "Okay, it's clear to me who must do the majority of the cooking back home."

A snort came from Braeden. "Are you kidding? He barely knows how to boil water. And he burns *everything*. Even soup. Tell me how that's even possible?"

"I'm not completely useless in the kitchen," Rand groused. "I clean the dishes, and the messes you always seem to make." He slid her a wry look. "It takes Brae five pans to make spaghetti, for goddess's sake. I think he does it just to give me more work to do."

She chuckled. "Wow, you two really are an old married couple."

"Hah, he's the old one." Braeden's chin jutted in Rand's direction. "Has me beat by seventy-five years."

She waggled her eyebrows at Rand. "If you were a female, I'd be calling you a cougar right now." An adorable red flush crawled along his cheekbones and she laughed. "Okay, all teasing aside, exactly how old *are* you guys?"

"Rand's five hundredth birthday is next weekend. I was thinking of getting those signs that say *Over the hill* and staking them all over our yard."

"Do it and I'm never sucking your cock again."

"We both know that's an empty threat." His mouth sliding into a smug grin, Braeden leaned closer to her. "Can't keep his damn hands off of me. It's been like that from day one. Miracle he ever lets me sleep."

"Don't listen to him. He's an incessant drama queen."

Listening to their banter, a weird compulsion came over her. She wanted—no, *hungered*—to know everything about Rand and Braeden. In the past, she'd never given any thought beyond bringing in her quarry. It was all a part of keeping things professional. She did her job and moved on. Nice and simple. But things were spiraling way past simple here. She was beginning to care, beginning to envision becoming a part of their lives. And damn if that didn't trigger every pathetic, hopeful fantasy she'd ever harbored, even while it scared the living shit out of her.

Rand sensed the exact moment the emotional shift occurred within Vanessa. An achingly sweet note of longing sang from her soul, calling to him. He glanced at Braeden, his mate's rapt stare verifying that he'd also received the summoning. Braeden jumped to his feet, but Rand shook his head in warning. It was too soon. Beneath Vanessa's soulful yearning, a dark specter of fear still lurked. He could detect it skulking in the shadows of her mind, guarding its treasure-trove of negativity. Until they discovered what fed that phantom its power, and destroyed it, they needed to handle Vanessa gently.

Well, not too gently. He fully intended to put those vibrators in the bedroom to good use.

"So how did you two meet, anyway?"

Dragging his thoughts from the wicked arsenal of goodies in the bedroom, he met Vanessa's curious gaze. "At the annual fairy ball held in Titania's honor."

Vanessa's eyes grew large. "The queen of the fairies? You've met her? What is she like?"

"Very old and very crabby. But she throws a hell of a party." Braeden began gathering the dishes and Rand quickly stood to offer a hand. Grunting, Braeden waved him off. "You owe me. Go on and finish telling Vanessa about how you fell in love with me at first sight."

It was Rand's turn to grunt. "You have a bloody warped sense of history. The way I recall it, you fell in love with *me* at first sight. Ditched that big-breasted druid right on the dance floor and followed me into the powder room, where I distinctly remember you offered to unzip my trousers with your teeth."

"The druid!" Braeden dropped one of the pans into the sink with a clatter. "Damn, almost forgot about good ole Martina. Too bad she always smelled like a damp basement and talked to trees."

Rand gave Vanessa a dry look behind Braeden's back. "And he wonders why I'm considered the charming one."

Vanessa's smile was so beautiful, it took every ounce of willpower he possessed not to yank her off the stool and kiss the living daylights out of her. "Your love affair started in a bathroom? How oddly romantic."

"There was nothing romantic about it. Brae was merely a horny little bugger."

Jodi Redford

Braeden tossed another pan into the sink. "Now who's spreading lies?" He peered over his shoulder at Vanessa. "Back then, Rand's skill at weaseling his way beneath any skirt was legendary. Clearly *he* was the hornier of the two of us."

"Debatable."

Vanessa cleared her throat with a pointed cough. "Judging from the way you both are now, perhaps you should just call it a draw."

Rand muzzled his laugh. "Very diplomatic of you."

She rested her chin on her upturned palm and eyed him. "I don't know how to phrase this in a way that won't sound incredibly nosy and blunt, but you both mentioned past *female* relationships. Does that mean...?"

"We were each other's first," he answered in response to the unspoken curiosity in her gaze. "I'd had no interest or attraction to other males before Brae. Other than him, I still don't. But when it comes to the calling of a bond mate, the heart doesn't get caught up in the sticky nuances of gender. It simply wants the person destined to make it whole." He locked her into his stare, knowing full well she'd see a reflection of the feelings he held inside his heart. She averted her gaze and he tried not to let the disappointment crush him. Thank the goddesses he'd never been one to back down from anything, because Vanessa Darby was the queen mother of all challenges.

Apparently reading the sudden tension in the room, Braeden tossed a dishtowel in Rand's direction. Taking the hint, he grabbed the cloth and joined Braeden at the sink. With the two of them working together, they cleaned up the dishes in record time, and with minimal complaints from Braeden regarding Rand's drying abilities, no less. Rand pivoted back toward the island, fully expecting to find Vanessa snickering over their little bicker fest. Her stool was empty, her discarded clothes and boots nowhere to be seen.

Paranoia and dread kicked up his heart rate. Surely she wouldn't attempt another unchaperoned stroll through the hotel. Not after what happened last time. Unless...

Recalling the wall of doubt she'd erected when he'd spoken of bond mates, renewed panic crashed through him. "Shit."

"What?"

Tuning out Braeden, Rand bolted from the kitchen. He was halfway to the elevator when he noticed Vanessa standing just beyond the entrance to the bedroom, her clothes and boots scattered near her feet. Relief instantly blanketed him. Changing course, he walked toward the archway. Vanessa remained so enthralled by whatever held her attention she didn't even look up as he approached. Halting behind her, he peered over her shoulder at the object she was busy inspecting, his mouth tugging into a grin. "Reconsidering my earlier suggestion, sweetest?"

Vanessa jerked and the double-ended dildo in her hand went flying. Her cheeks bright red, she glanced up at him. "I was trying to figure out if that's a baton or...something else."

"What do you think?"

She chuckled, her face still wearing its adorable tint of scarlet. "Um, that you and Braeden should provide *me* a demonstration?"

"Naughty girl." He nuzzled her hair, the soft note of jasmine filling his nose and firing his everpersistent hunger for her to full blast. "Tempting as that might be, I have a counter suggestion."

"Such as?" The innocence in her tone clashed with the sinful curiosity flashing in her eyes.

He slid his hands around her torso and cupped her breasts, his thumbs teasing her nipples. "Letting me fuck you."

"Hmm, didn't I already let you do that?"

"No. I just sat there while you had your lusty way with me."

"Poor baby. Must have been a hardship enduring all of that."

"Hard doesn't begin to cover it." Rubbing his cock against the dip of her spine for emphasis, he tweaked her nipples gently, making her squirm and gasp. "So what do you say?"

She turned in his arms and he lowered his head to steal a kiss. Before his mouth captured its quarry, she stood on tiptoe and licked the clan marks tattooed on his pectoral, catching him off-guard. An intense shiver ripped through him, nearly knocking him flat on his ass. She tossed him an impish grin. "I've wanted to do that since yesterday."

Braeden's devilish chuckle sounded behind them. "Uh-oh. She's discovered your weak spot. There'll be no living with her now."

Vanessa's eyes widened. "Weak spot? Do tell."

Rand groaned. "One more word out of you, Brae, and you're a dead—"

"The tats. They're extremely sensitive to the touch," Braeden explained, ignoring Rand's growl of warning. "Drives him fucking crazy when you play with them. And I do mean crazy."

"Really?" Vanessa's scrutiny returned to the symbols on his chest.

Not trusting the gleam in her irises, he stepped back, knocking into Braeden. His traitorous lover bracketed his arms around his waist, keeping him pinned in place for Vanessa's roving hands. Her fingertips skated over the tattoos, eliciting his helpless groan. Expression loaded with feminine triumph, she followed the swirling, metallic green curlicue design with her tongue. His head lolled back, the sensations skittering beneath his skin a mix of exquisite pleasure and pure torture. He didn't know whether to beg her to stop or continue. Not that it mattered. Clearly she possessed her own agenda. She lapped away at him like a mischievous kitten, her tormenting licks growing bolder thanks to Braeden's not-so-helpful encouragement. His breathing erratic, Rand locked his knees in an effort to keep from staggering to the floor in an embarrassing heap. "You both are going to pay dearly for this." He jumped when Braeden sucked on his earlobe. All thoughts of retribution fled as Vanessa's mouth descended. The tip of her wicked little tongue circled his areola, causing his nipple to harden. Along with other parts of him. As if his cock wasn't already stiff enough to rudder a ship, it swelled, bumping into Vanessa's belly. She wiggled against him—earning another of his groans—before she slid down his body, her mouth engulfing his cock in one swift stroke. Scalding pleasure washed over him. "*Fuck*."

Displaying no timidity, she worked him over, her tongue coasting along every ridge and vein of his shaft before she concentrated exclusively on the head.

"Damn, she might even be better than me." Braeden's husky laugh floated past his ear. "Darlin', don't forget to show his balls some proper love. You'll have him wrapped around your pinky."

Humming a response around his engorged flesh, she cupped his testicles and he quickly widened his stance to keep his knees from buckling. He directed a growl at Braeden. "Just wait till it's your turn, and I'm the one plotting your torture." An image sprang into his mind—Vanessa's pussy gripping his shaft while she sucked Braeden's cock. Lust bulleted through him. He wanted to make that fantasy a reality. Now.

Tugging from Braeden's hold and Vanessa's mouth, Rand stooped and pulled her into his arms. His mouth seeking hers, he straightened and walked them to the bed. He lowered her onto the silk duvet, his lips deserting hers to skim over her chin. Awarding her a nip from his teeth, he kissed his way down her neck, paying particular attention to the sensitive areas that made the breath catch in Vanessa's throat. Leaning up on one elbow, he caressed her breasts, his fingertips playing over their pebbled tips. The mattress dipped and he lifted his gaze. Braeden had one knee planted on the bed and he was lazily stroking his shaft while he watched them.

That wouldn't do. He had better plans for that cock. "Sweetest, our boy is in need of assistance." Gifting Braeden with an evil grin, Rand ducked his head and sucked Vanessa's nipple into his mouth. Her groan spilled free, echoed several seconds later by Braeden's. Rand abandoned his task and watched while Vanessa licked a slow path up and down the underside of Braeden's straining shaft. It certainly wasn't the first time he'd indulged in the decadent pleasure of sharing his lover with another. But the females they'd invited into their bed had never been a bond mate. Vanessa's specialness added a potent bliss he wouldn't have thought possible. Not in his wildest dreams.

Vision going hazy with lust, he trailed moist, openmouthed kisses down her quivering belly. He reached the apex of her thighs and breathed in her soft, feminine musk, his cock growing even more painfully hard. Her labia glistened with the evidence of her arousal. The need to taste her, to claim her, shook him to the core. Raising her hips so he could devour her while he watched her go down on Braeden, he buried his mouth in her pussy. She bucked in his grip and released Braeden with a gasp.

Rand halted his feasting. "Take him back in your mouth, sweetest." He waited for her lips to slide around Braeden again before licking the length of her slit. She trembled as he journeyed to her clit. He suckled at the nub with soft, tugging pulses, until she was writhing, her moans muffled by Braeden's cock. Sensing she hovered at the brink of orgasm, he rubbed the pad of his index finger against her hidden rosebud. She broke on a wrenching cry, her entire body shaking with the force of her climax. Seeing her swept up in the throes of release was one of the most beautiful things he'd ever witnessed, and it made him all the hungrier to possess her.

Determined to bring her to the highest pinnacle of pleasure, he pushed to his feet and strode to the nearby shelf of toys. After selecting a slim silver vibrator, a significantly fatter vibrating plug and a tube of warming gel lubricant, he returned to the bed. Vanessa lay in a dazed sprawl, her stare unfocused. Braeden stroked her hair with tenderness. Rand tossed the vibrators onto the mattress and popped the cap on the lubricant. There was nothing tender about the way he was feeling. He fully intended to fuck the daylights out of Vanessa and rock her world in the process.

Kneeling between her spread-eagled thighs, he squeezed a generous dollop of the gel on the tips of his fingers. "What's the biggest object you've taken in your ass, Nessie?"

She stared at him blankly and he nodded toward the vibrators. Her eyes widened as she took in the butt plug, and he reached for the slimmer vibrator instead. He lubed it up before applying more gel to his fingers. "We'll start with this first, and work our way up." He didn't immediately dive into her ass, but his hesitation was merely a token gesture. Not that he wouldn't have granted the request if she chose to refuse, because he most definitely would have. But he knew with everything inside him that Vanessa wanted that plug buried inside her when he fucked her. More than that, she wanted Braeden. She might not be willing to admit it yet, much less beg Brae to fuck her ass. But she would. Soon.

He worked one finger past her puckered opening, hot satisfaction burning low in his gut when she bit her lip, her breath quickening. Adding another finger, he stretched her, easing the way for the vibrator. She watched him the entire time he prepared her, her eyes never leaving his face. Reluctantly abandoning the snug haven of her ass, he gripped the vibrator and inserted it in one slick glide. He flicked the dial to *on* and she jerked, her fingers digging into the silk bedding. He leaned back and reached for her leg. Nuzzling the arch of her foot, he swirled his tongue over each of her curled toes before sucking them into his mouth. Her back bowing off the bed, she began panting. Releasing her toes, he licked his way down her foot again and bit the sensitive arch. She groaned.

"I'm going to fuck you while that vibrator is buzzing away in your ass. The stimulation is going to be constant and intense. But you can take it, sweetest. Furthermore, you crave it. The brief glimpse you had of that pleasure when you came moments ago is a mere shadow of what I can give you." He glanced at Braeden, who was staring at Vanessa with an equally hungry expression. "What *we* can give you."

She whimpered and Rand crawled over her, his hand sliding beneath her head, tilting her up to receive his ravenous kiss. Her nails dug into his back as his cock burrowed past the slick opening of her pussy. She was tight and wet, her inner walls vibrating around him. If not for the curse, he suspected he would have embarrassed himself by spending his seed right then and there, halfway lodged within her clasping channel. Rocking his hips, he sank deeper. Her cries coming faster, he pushed up onto his elbows and straddled her thighs, balancing his weight so that the only sensation she'd feel would be his cock gliding in and out of her pussy and the vibrator working its magic in her ass.

Her hands continued digging into the muscles in his back, her eyes going glassy. He heard Braeden's rough moan, followed by the scrape of beard stubble along his sweat-dampened spine as Braeden licked a path toward his tailbone. Braeden's teeth sank into the flesh of his left butt cheek, causing Rand's steady strokes to falter.

"I need a taste."

He didn't require an elaboration of Braeden's husky request. Easing from Vanessa's pussy, he knelt, his knees bracketing her hips. Braeden leaned forward and sucked the swollen knob of Rand's dick into his mouth. A delirious moan rolled from Vanessa. Rand smoothed a hand over her breast, his thumb and forefinger giving her nipple a light pinch that made her breath stutter. He fumbled for the larger plug and the tube of lubricant. Relinquishing Rand's cock, Braeden slipped the vibrator from Vanessa and tossed it aside before splaying his palms on her inner thighs, spreading her wide for the insertion of the lubricated plug. She flinched slightly when the plug's bulbous tip nudged into her opening.

"Relax, sweetest. We're almost there." Rand circled her clit with his thumb and coaxed the plug past the resistant band of muscle. "Good girl." He powered on the device and she clutched Braeden's shoulder in a death grip. Desperate to lose himself to the intoxicating pleasure of her body, Rand repositioned himself and grasped her hips, plunging inside her in one firm thrust. She cried out, the tight clasp of her pussy fitting him like a glove.

Rand closed his eyes, letting the carnal bliss of their joining wash over him for a moment before tucking her legs around his waist and gathering her into his arms. She clung to him, hugging him close as Braeden moved in behind her and kissed the nape of her neck. Her gasps muffled against Rand's shoulder, she shivered and trembled. He cradled her to him, his heart thudding rapidly with a chaos of emotions. Lust. Love. They wove together into an inseparable thread. He watched Braeden caressing Vanessa's back, the same emotions playing out on his face.

They'd opened their hearts to Vanessa. There would be no turning back from this pivotal moment. Brae's hands slid around to cup her breasts and she leaned back, offering her mouth to him in a lush kiss. The sight of their tongues tangling sent a fierce bullet of need through Rand and he pumped his cock deeper into Vanessa's slick channel, wringing a groan from her. Her hands dug into his biceps. "*Oh God*."

"Tell us what you want, sweet Nessie, and we'll give it to you."

She licked her lips, her breaths labored. "I-I want..."

Rand slowed his thrusts until he was barely moving, allowing him to feel each of the tiny muscles in her pussy gripping him tight. The exquisite sensation made it damn difficult to concentrate. "We need to hear you say it, sweetest."

"Together. I want the three of us together. F-for sex."

He gave a growl of victory. Though she'd felt it necessary to tag sex onto the end of her statement for clarification's sake, she'd soon see that she needed more from this union than just their cocks. While Braeden snagged the lube, Rand reached behind Vanessa and worked the plug from her ass. A moment later, the head of Brae's cock bumped Rand's knuckles and he helped guide his lover inside Vanessa's rear passage. She shuddered, her gaze locking with his.

He ducked and brushed his lips over hers. "We're going to make this good for you." *And convince you to never leave us.* With that silent promise suspended between them, he gradually withdrew from her before pumping inside again in a languid glide. The snugness of her sheath made his and Brae's cocks ride against each other, the friction mind-blowing.

Braeden's eyes became hooded, his jaw going slack. Rand powered up his strokes. "You feel me, don't you? And it's making you hot, knowing I'm fucking you both."

A whimper broke from Vanessa, her pussy clenching. Apparently Braeden noticed the telltale sign of her looming orgasm too because he pressed a sliding kiss along the slope of her neck, his hand insinuating between her and Rand's groins. His thumb rubbed over her clit. "You gonna come for us, baby? Milk our cocks at the same time?"

She replied with a strangled cry, her pussy performing the marvelous trick Braeden had just suggested. Her body shook and they both held her through the tempest of her climax until she slumped weakly against Rand's chest. He smoothed her sweat-dampened hair off her face and kissed her forehead. A sense of tranquility and fulfillment locked in place inside him. This woman was the missing piece he and Braeden had been searching for since practically the beginning of time. Now that they'd found her, everything would be okay.

No cruel fate would dare deny them a happy ever after.

Chapter Seven

"Oh yeah. I've definitely died and gone to heaven." Vanessa snuggled between Rand and Braeden on the bed, luxuriating in the solid wall of muscles and warm, musky skin surrounding her. A sexy, masculine chuckle feathered over her neck before Braeden nibbled her earlobe. Despite the fact she'd had more orgasms in the last twelve hours than she'd had all year, her nipples immediately beaded in response. A groan tumbled past her lips. "You're insatiable."

"Sorry, darlin'. You bring out the hungry beast in me."

"And me." His palm cupping her hip, Rand nuzzled her collarbone.

She sighed. "Sad to say, but I was talking about myself."

Rumbles of laughter broke from Rand and Braeden. Unable to resist, she joined in with a giggle. "I'm probably going to regret admitting that to you two horny bastards, aren't I?"

Braeden nipped at her shoulder. "Count on it, baby."

"Mm, I concur." Rand followed up his statement by combing his fingers through the curls covering her mound.

She tried to escape their lascivious onslaught, but the dirty rotten sons-of-bitches pinned her between them, hindering her attempt. Gasping, she managed to wiggle an arm free of their tangled limbs. "Whoa. Hold it, would you?" Her laugh bordered on a groan when Rand and Braeden each fondled one of her breasts. "I wasn't referring to that! I need to use the bathroom."

Their grins equally sinful, they released her and she scrambled from the bed. Once inside the bathroom, she took care of the necessary business of emptying her full bladder before crossing to the sink. She splashed cold water on her face and winced at the image reflecting back at her in the mirror. She looked like she'd just spent three hours screwing her brains out. *Probably because I did.* It occurred to her that she should feel like a big, dirty slut, but not even a trickle of guilt dampened the warm glow of satisfaction that permeated every cell in her body. She'd have plenty of time tomorrow to let her conscience berate her for sleeping with the fugitives she was supposed to be bringing in. For now, she planned to indulge in every fantasy she could think of with Rand and Braeden—and enjoy each wicked second of it.

As if they'd read her thoughts, the two naughty pookas in question sauntered into the bathroom. She gave them a mock glare in the mirror. "Just because I've let you guys defile me beyond decency doesn't mean you can bust in here while I'm tinkling."

"You're not tinkling. You're standing in front of the sink," Braeden pointed out rather unhelpfully. He and Rand stepped forward and crowded her on either side before herding her toward the pool.

Putting up token resistance, she allowed them to lead her down the steps into the swirling water. "Is this your way of telling me I'm stinky?"

"No, you smell good enough to eat." Rand buried his nose in her hair before coaxing her deeper into the water. "Brae and I talked it over though, and we've decided its way past time to induct you into the pleasures of pool sex."

"Oh really."

Braeden reached for her hand, his devilish smile too delicious for words. "We're only thinking of you, darlin'."

Snorting, she followed him toward the edge of the pool, where a cache of sea sponges and luscious scented soaps waited. Rand joined them, and soon she found herself the lucky recipient of the most thorough scrubbing of all time. In between attending to her, Rand and Braeden also lathered up each other. Seeing those big, soapy hands trailing all over each other's hard, muscular bodies fired her desire to a fever pitch. Picking up one of the sponges, she rinsed the suds from Rand's chest, fascinated by how the rivulets of champagne-colored water seemed to make his tattoos sparkle.

Unable to resist, she traced the design with her fingertip, earning his shiver. "They really are beautiful. Is there a meaning behind the symbols?"

"They're clan marks." Rand's fingers closed over hers. "This one is Braeden's." He drew their hands higher until they rested on the upper portion of the tattoo that covered his shoulder. "And this one is mine."

Braeden's palm skated over the tanned, velvety skin stretched over Rand's pectoral. "He made sure to leave plenty of room here for your mark, darlin'."

She blinked at him. "But I don't belong to any clan."

"Your family." Braeden chuckled. "Surely you've got one of those. We can always do a little research and find out if your people have an ancestral crest."

The pain she thought she'd buried so well caught her unawares, the dull ache of it seeping into her heart. She swallowed, her throat and chest unbearably heavy. Old insecurities rose to the forefront, whispering a jumbled, discordant chorus of hateful words that cut her to the bone.

Freak. That's all you'll ever be. A little, good-for-nothing freak.

Desperate to hide from the taunting specter inside her head, she stumbled back a step. Rand's fingers squeezed hers tight, refusing to grant her the escape she longed for.

"Nessie." The soft command in Rand's voice managed to edge past her panic and she stared up at him, instantly becoming ensnared in his dark, compelling gaze. "What are you afraid of, sweetest?"

"N-nothing."

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Rand's expression made it clear that she didn't have him fooled. "You were ready to bolt. This is the second time today any mention of your family has upset you."

She sent him a glare, this one completely genuine. "I told you that I have no family."

Frown lines pinched the center of Braeden's brow. "But that makes no sense. How could you not have one?"

The pain she'd kept locked away broke from its bonds and tumbled free in all its gut-wrenching, ugly glory. "Because some of us are too much of a freak show to deserve a family who won't abandon us the first chance they get. Some of us are destined to be alone our entire lives." Shaking, she met Rand and Braeden's compassionate gazes. Shit, she'd said too much.

Rand tugged her toward him. Left with little choice, she slumped into his arms. Though she made a valiant effort to regain a semblance of composure, Rand and Braeden's comforting hugs and kisses proved her undoing and she cried against Rand's chest.

"That's right, sweetest, let it all out."

Apparently his words were a carte blanche invitation to her psyche, because everything came spilling out in a rush. Every last sordid, pathetic memory. "I—I don't recall much about my real parents. They left me in a women's restroom at a state hospital in California when I was three." She read the disbelief and anger riding Braeden and Rand's features and tried for a dismissive shrug. "I guess there could have been worse places to drop me than a loony bin. Regardless, that should have been a warning of what my future had in store. I probably could have saved myself a shitload of trouble if I'd been smart enough to ignore the Otherworlders in the beginning. Because once they knew I could see them, interact with them, nothing would convince them to leave me be. The worst was a goblin named Fred. That dickhead would follow me from foster home to foster home, creating all kinds of hell for me and the families that took me in. For a while, everyone thought maybe I was haunted by an evil poltergeist. Eventually I became known as the cursed child, and it became near impossible for the state to place me with a family."

His eyes filled with a wealth of sadness, Rand brushed her hair back and kissed her forehead. The soothing gesture eased a fraction of the ache in her chest and she took a shuddering breath. "You'd think that'd be the hardest part of it, never having a place I belonged. But it wasn't. Miraculously, the state found a couple who were willing to take me in. For two months I lived this amazing fantasy, believing I'd finally found a family who could love me despite the insanity that followed me."

Braeden stroked her cheek. "What happened?"

"The Robertsons didn't love me at all. They'd heard the rumors of the poltergeist theory and decided it meant I possessed some latent psychic ability. I should have caught on to things sooner, but I wanted them to love me. More than anything. Two months in, they started asking me if I had special numbers for them."

Rand frowned. "Numbers?"

"The lottery. They thought I could help them win one of the jackpots. When it became clear that wasn't going to happen..." You really are nothing but a useless little freak. She struggled to shove the cruel, phantom voice from her mind. "They sent me back, too, just like all the others did."

"Aw, darlin'."

The suffocating weight of Braeden and Rand's sympathetic stares left her uncomfortably exposed. She dragged her fingers through the steaming water to hide her sudden need to fidget. "I stayed in the staterun system until I was sixteen. That's when the Veil Alliance League tracked me down and recruited me. I figured what the hell, might as well make my curse work for me, right? Pay might not be the greatest, but the techno gadgets make me look cool and badass."

Rand and Braeden continued watching her, their sober expressions adding to her overall sense of vulnerability. Desperate to return to the carefree fun of earlier, she scooped up a handful of the water and flicked it at Braeden. He blinked at her through the droplets running down his face, and she bit her lip to keep from giggling at his stunned look. Slowly, a grin crawled in place on his handsome mug and he took a stealthy step forward.

She slid a pleading glance in Rand's direction and Braeden gave an evil laugh. "He's not gonna save you, babe." He lunged at her and she yelped before leaping out of the way. Unfortunately, attempting to maneuver in the waist-deep water was like trying to square dance in Jell-O. Or so she assumed. Regardless, she lost footing and splashed backwards in an undignified sprawl.

So much for looking all badass. She came up for air, sputtering.

"That's what you get, darlin'." Hooting in laughter, Braeden reached for her.

"I'll have you know, I meant to do that." She wrung out her hair, watching the water plop and ripple on the surface of the pool. "I keep meaning to ask what the deal is with the water in this joint. Why it always looks like it's pumped from an underground spring of champagne."

"The explanation lies in the fountain. We could tell you, but it'd be easier to show you." Rand laced his fingers through hers and led her toward the steps.

She gaped at him. "Um, you mean like right now this minute?"

"Why not?"

Because I was hoping for some pool sex. Not about to admit that out loud and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt how much of a shameless hussy she was, she cleared her throat. "I'm not trekking downstairs buck naked." Her luck, it'd be the one time the damn staff happened to be moseying about.

Braeden met them at the lounge chair and whipped open one of the waiting towels with a dramatic flourish. "Your wrap, m' lady."

She let Braeden and Rand tuck her into the towel before following them to the elevator. "I still don't know why you can't just tell me."

Rand's arm wrapped around her waist. "Because this is better."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

"Are you always this cryptic and mysterious?" she grumbled.

"Only on Fridays."

Grunting, she remained silent for the short trip down to the lobby. The entrance was deserted, not that she supposed Rand and Braeden gave a donkey's ass if anyone spied them walking around naked. When it came to public nudity, they seemed happiest to let it all hang out. Literally.

"Come on, darlin'."

She started to follow Braeden across the tile, but pulled up short when he jumped into the fountain. The sexy blond pooka shot her and Rand an inviting grin over his shoulder. "What are you two slowpokes waiting for?"

"Uh, is he nuts?"

"Yes, but not about this." Rand cupped her elbow and coaxed her forward. "You'll be glad you saw this, Nessie. I promise."

The excitement dancing in Rand's eyes was infectious and she found herself consumed with an overwhelming curiosity to discover whatever waited within the fountain. Nodding, she allowed him to lead her across the lobby.

"Ready?" Giving her hand an encouraging squeeze, Rand helped her step over the fountain's ledge. They splashed toward Braeden, and the section of the pyramid closest to them shimmered before revealing a doorway bathed in brilliant, orange light. Despite the multitude of odd and wondrous things she'd encountered throughout her life, a sense of awe the likes of which she'd never experienced shivered over her. Almost as if an invisible force drew her, she passed through the doorway and entered a world of such stunning beauty, speech momentarily abandoned her. A wide beach stretched before her, its crystal-fine sands blending seamlessly with the champagne waves lapping in the distance.

Golden sparkles dusted Vanessa's arms like spilled glitter and she lifted her focus. Millions upon millions of the crystal-like flakes were drifting from an undulating, violet sky. "It's the veil, isn't it?" She turned toward Rand and Braeden and noticed how their skin gleamed from the richness of the sparkles, making them glow with an otherworldly light.

No, not otherworld. Their world.

Rand nodded. "It powers the entire hotel. Hence the color of the water."

It certainly wasn't the first time she'd seen the veil, but never in such spectacular, undiluted potency. "I've heard rumors of portals like this one, but always wondered if they were more myth than anything else."

"Now you know they're real. Are you glad we brought you here?"

Words didn't seem adequate for expressing the jubilant wonder blossoming within her. She offered Rand a fierce hug instead. He held her close. "Never consider yourself cursed, Nessie. This place, you, me and Brae, it's a gift."

Before Rand could say anything more, Braeden took off down the beach with an exuberant "*Whoop*", his feet kicking up sand and his gorgeous ass flexing. He dove into the gentle waves, only to reappear a second later as a dolphin flipping into the air.

Rand shook his head. "What a fucking showoff." Despite his sarcasm, wistfulness danced in his eyes.

"You want to join him, don't you?" When he didn't immediately answer, she stood on tiptoe and brushed a kiss across his bristly jaw. "Go."

"Come with me."

"I will. I just want to take all this in for a moment first."

After a reluctant hesitation, Rand raced toward the seaway. Like she had done with Braeden, she indulged in the splendid scenery Rand provided before he, too, transformed into a dolphin. She watched the two pookas frolicking in the waves, their playfulness firing up a multitude of old longings. That need to be loved, to belong, built to a strong ache within her soul.

A pair of whistles carried on the wind, followed by the sound of Rand and Braeden's voices beseeching her to join them.

Yes, go to them. Joyously obeying the calling in her heart, she ripped off the towel and ran down the beach. All her worries and insecurities lifted as she waded into the water and swam out to Rand and Braeden. They took turns jetting her through the waves, their smooth, dolphin bodies slick and graceful beneath her clasping arms and legs. Many minutes later, tired and exhilarated, the three of them collapsed at the water's edge in a tangle of limbs.

"That was...incredible." Her lungs bellowing, she rolled onto her elbows and grinned down at Rand and Braeden. They both stroked her face, their eyes shining with pure joy. Raw emotion kicked her square in the solar plexus, causing her breath to jam in her throat.

This was what she'd waited her entire life for. Them.

Hands trembling, she traced the curve of first Rand's jaw, then Braeden's. Leaning down, she kissed them both, the wet ends of her hair streaming around them. Neither seemed to mind. Braeden gathered her close, his caresses along her wet skin as cherishing as his expression. He deepened the kiss, his tongue gliding along hers, and she whimpered. A hand curved around her shoulder and she looked up into Rand's hot gaze. She hadn't even noticed that he'd risen onto his knees.

"Take him inside you, Nessie. He needs you."

"What about you?"

Rand grazed his knuckles along her cheek. "I need you too. More than you could imagine. But I also want to see you ride Brae."

She glanced down at Braeden. His typical teasing charm appeared to have taken a hike. A ruddy flush darkened his golden complexion and heightened the intense desire in his eyes. She kissed him again and his groan vibrated inside her mouth. There was no way she could wait a second longer. She had to take him inside her body. Now. Straddling him, she impaled herself on his thick cock with one downward stroke. She cried out at the fierce pleasure of it, her pussy clenching when Braeden gripped her hips and pumped his cock deeper. Neither finesse nor technique a goal, she rode him hard and fast. Rand's palm slid to her breast and she moaned.

One of Braeden's hands traveled upward and covered Rand's. "Join us."

Her body rejoiced at the suggestion. Amazing how in such a short time she'd come to crave their mutual lovemaking. Would she ever be able to go back to anything else? Unwilling to dwell on that question, she reached for Rand, fisting his cock as her tongue swept inside his mouth. Like Braeden, Rand uttered a helpless moan. The sound affected her like nothing else. Making this powerful and sexy male tremble just from her touch was a heady thing. She reluctantly released his cock. "Please. Together."

"Yes, sweetest. The way it should be." Rand's lips met hers in a final, lingering kiss before he moved behind her. Planting his hand in the center of her back, he coaxed her downward until she was completely flattened on top of Braeden. Hooking her ankles with his feet, Braeden spread their legs wide to make room for Rand. It wasn't until she felt Rand's cock prodding against Braeden's that she realized he intended to join them in the most literal sense.

For a brief moment she doubted the physics of taking two giant cocks inside her pussy at the same time, but as Rand eased his way inside she stopped thinking about anything but the delicious fullness stretching her to the absolute limits. "Oh God."

"Feel good, sweetest?"

Holy mother, talk about an understatement. The tight fit meant minimal thrusting from either Rand or Braeden. Didn't matter. Stuffed as she was, the tiniest friction on her sensitive inner walls had her teetering on the edge of orgasm. As if sensing how close she was, Braeden gave a sexy roll of his hips, causing his pubic hair to rasp against her clit. She broke on a wrenching cry, her climax crashing into her with the force of a runaway semi. Gasping, she writhed between Rand and Braeden, half-convinced she would pass out from the sheer ecstasy washing over her. She opened her eyes and noticed Braeden watching her, his irises filled with heat and tenderness.

Love—so sharp and sweet it almost hurt—slammed her dead center in the chest. Like a withered rose recovering from a hard frost, her heart opened, radiating a warm glow that spread throughout her whole body. Beneath her, Braeden tensed suddenly, his face twisting in an odd grimace. Worried, she stared at him. "What is it? Are you hurt?" She started to lift up but he grasped her hips, keeping her in place.

"No. I think I'm going to—" He gave a wild buck suddenly, his fingers digging into her. "*Fuuuuck*." The oath morphed into a strangled roar and Braeden shuddered, his eyes rolling back.

She freaked out, convinced he was having some type of seizure, but then the pulsing of his cock gave him away. Just as she was becoming acclimated to the fact that Braeden was coming, not dying from a brain aneurism or something, Rand started shaking too, his tortured roar joining Braeden's. Good Lord, she'd never seen anyone come so hard before in her life. Not even in a really badly acted porno flick. It almost looked painful.

She attempted to gingerly ease up along Braeden's torso. Both he and Rand pulled her back, thwarting her efforts. His smile lazy and wicked, Braeden brushed his thumbs over her nipples. "Where do you think you're going?"

"I thought you were...uh..." Concentrating became difficult when Rand sucked her earlobe into his mouth and started moving inside her again. Miraculously, he didn't seem to have softened. Same went for Braeden.

"Done?"

It took a few seconds for her to realize Rand was attempting to fill in the missing blank at the end of her observation. "Well, clearly—" She gasped as Braeden countered Rand's stroke. "You're not done."

Braeden's mouth curled at one corner. "Clearly."

"We've got a lot of lost time to make up for, sweetest. I wouldn't count on going anywhere for a while."

They began thrusting in earnest, steadily driving her back to that dazzling, decadent peak where pleasure reigned. Her toes curled into the sand.

Nope. She definitely could think of no better place to be for the next lifetime or two.

Chapter Eight

"Put on your sexiest outfit, darlin'. We're taking you out tonight."

She gaped at Braeden while he sauntered into the bedroom. "As in out of the hotel?" For some strange reason, the thought of leaving their idyllic little world didn't set well on her. Ridiculous, since they obviously couldn't stay here forever.

"No, we'll still be in the hotel."

Despite knowing it was silly to be glad over the news, relief swept over her. Until she remembered all the hoochie-mama outfits resting in her suitcase. Well, on the bright side, selecting a sexy outfit wouldn't be difficult. Now if only she could find one that didn't overexpose her girly parts. She crossed to the ottoman and inspected her choices before settling on a slinky, emerald-green mini dress that left her shoulders bare. Platform wedges in a matching silk completed the ensemble. Once she was zipped and tucked into everything, she twirled in front of Braeden. "Well, what do you think?"

He rubbed his chin. "Hmm..." Dropping his hand, he tackled her to the bed.

Laughing, she put up a good pretense of a feigned struggle while he kissed and nibbled her neck.

"Sweet Titania, I can't leave you two alone for five seconds."

She and Braeden stopped their horsing around and glanced at Rand. Amusement rode the rugged planes of his face. Seeing him all decked out in a sleekly tailored dark navy suit, his crisp, white button-down shirt opened at the collar, made her pulse kick up a notch.

"You're just jealous because I was the wise one who decided to come in here first."

Rand snorted. "Whatever, smarty-pants. Here's an idea, how about actually putting on some pants?"

Braeden adopted a sourpuss expression. "You really know how to suck the joy out of life." He snapped his fingers and a leisure suit printed with a garish psychedelic pattern instantly materialized on his big frame.

"Bloody fuck, Brae."

Chuckling, Braeden snapped his fingers again, replacing the garment with a more subdued pair of jeans topped by a T-shirt and blazer. "I love getting his jockeys in a bunch." Standing, he offered her his arm. "Shall we, m' lady?"

She let Braeden and Rand escort her to the elevator. Rather than descend, the conveyance seemed to travel sideways.

Sideways? She shot a look up at Rand. "Whoever designed this place is severely whacked." The elevator slid to a halt and the doors opened to a festive, party atmosphere. Brightly attired Otherworlders jam-packed the cavernous space, some sipping on equally colorful cocktails, others dancing to the raucous music pounding through the sound system.

"Come on, sweetest. Let's get you a drink."

Bemused, she followed Rand through the insane throng, sidestepping a centaur that was shaking his groove thang with a troll. With Braeden bringing up the rear of their threesome, they arrived at the crowded bar. She wiggled her way through the clusters of Otherworlders until she came to an opening, and almost smacked into a familiar backside. Eyes narrowing, she stared at the delicate slope of the unicorn's neck, imagining her hands wringing it.

"Gus, you horny bastard, how'd you get in here?" Sidling around her, Braeden slapped a hand on the unicorn's rump. "I thought they refused to let you back in after last year's fiasco with the band."

A disgusted snort bulleted from Gus. "Those motherfuckers were murdering 'Margaritaville'. Anyone messing with Buffett like that deserves my horn rammed up their asses." A bartender approached and topped off Gus's trough of beer. The unicorn slurped down half of it before glancing over his shoulder. His eyes locked with Vanessa's and his mouth popped into a big surprised O before he whipped his head around and bleated in warning, "Every man on deck! We've been infiltrated by Big Brother!"

Somehow she managed not to roll her eyes. Rand slung his arm around Gus's neck. "Relax, she's with us."

His nostrils quivering in disbelief, Gus stared at Rand. "Have you been smoking pooka crack, Quinlan? That broad is a hunter."

"I know what she is."

"Hell, I never took you for the type that possessed shit for brains." Gus's focus returned to her and he did a slow sweep up and down her body. "Although, damn, mama is built like a brick house. Why didn't I notice that before?"

She stacked her arms over her chest, partly because she was pissed, but mostly to block the unicorn's lecherous ogle. "Probably because you were too busy biting my ankle or knocking me into walls."

"Can you blame me? A guy's gonna get ornery when he's continually cock blocked." Gus transferred his inquiring gaze between Rand and Braeden. "Feel free to back me up here."

Tuning out Rand and Braeden's enthusiastic agreement, she glared at Gus. "How exactly did I cock block you?"

"Back in Houston, I was *this* close to scoring with a pretty Arabian filly that was in town for the horse show, but you held me up in that alley, making me late." Gus once again glanced toward Rand. "Never date a racehorse. Trust me, there's a reason they're called nags. Shit, if I wanted that, I'd stay home and listen to my mother."

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Vanessa tapped her foot. "Did it occur to you that if you stayed home, you wouldn't have to deal with the likes of me?"

"How the hell else am I supposed to get laid? My only options back in my dimension are my mother, and Ralph with the gimp leg. Ain't no way, man."

"I don't know..." His lips twitching into a grin, Braeden leaned down close to Gus's ear to be better heard above the escalating noise in the bar. "Talk around town says Ralph is really hung. Maybe you're just being too picky."

"Kiss my big white ass, Whyndham." Gus made a face. "On second thought, scratch that. Fucking pervert, you'd probably enjoy it."

Braeden made a kissing sound that earned another grimace from the unicorn. Shaking off his shudder, Gus winked at Vanessa. "Now you, on the other hand, can kiss my ass anytime you want. Amongst other parts."

"Yeah, in your dreams. I don't date anything with more than two legs. Besides, you bit my ankle. That kind of makes me not like you."

"*What*?" Gus looked flabbergasted. "Everybody likes me. I'm a unicorn. I can fart rainbows from my ass. Okay, not really. But I'm still pretty fucking adorable. You know what, we should settle this with a random poll." He slammed his hoof down on the bar and made another trumpeting noise that quieted the room. "Everybody who likes me, raise their glasses."

No one moved. Vanessa started to open her mouth but Gus rattled the bar top again. "Anyone here who doesn't want my horn rammed up their ass, raise 'em high."

Nearly every hand and hoof in the joint went up, and Gus gave her a cocky grin. "There you go." "Please. You just—"

Rand rubbed her shoulder. "Sweetest, arguing with Gus only leads to severe migraines. Why don't you spend your time more productively, such as sharing a dance with me while Braeden waits for your drink?" Before she could agree or balk, he twined their fingers together and led her toward the farthest corner of the room—where she ran into her second familiar sight of the day.

She slammed to a halt, her mouth falling open. "My car."

Sure enough, the vehicle was parked near one of the grunge-painted walls. A tiny disco ball hung from the rearview mirror and half-a-dozen sprites and pixies were boogying down on the miniature dance floor that'd been erected on the hood. She jerked her gaze to Rand, who was valiantly trying to keep a straight face. "I should be threatening you with immense bodily harm right now."

He took her into his arms. "And why aren't you, Nessie?"

She snuggled her cheek against the warmth of his shoulder. "Because you smell good and I'm still all mellow from the hot sex. But just you wait till later."

His hands trailed down her spine and curved around her butt. "Mm, later I plan on even more hot sex."

"Then I might have to give you a rain check on the ass kicking."

"Deal."

They continued swaying to the music until Braeden arrived with Gus in tow. His smile sympathetic, Braeden handed her a martini glass filled with a pink concoction that had a trio of raspberries floating on top. "Gus started picking a fight with the fairies, so I brought him with me to keep him from being lynched."

Gus's expression turned innocent. "What? All I did was point out how that one dude had exceptionally small wings. Who knew they're so fucking touchy about size." He offered Vanessa a smile that made her feel kind of dirty. "Besides, this gives me and Red a chance to get to know each other better. What do you say? Fancy a trot around the dance floor with the Mr. Ed of disco?" Sticking his teeth out in an exaggerated overbite, Gus waggled his rear end in a shockingly good impression of The Hustle.

She found herself laughing despite herself. "Oh brother. I'm probably going to regret this, but okay."

Giving a triumphant bleat, Gus led her deeper into the sea of dancers. He seemed to take a particular thrill in bumping folks out of the way with his horn. For one tense moment, it looked like he and the centaur were going to get into a kickboxing match, but Vanessa managed to nudge Gus along, diffusing the standoff. The music picked up and she began really getting into it. Dancing had always been one of her favorite pastimes. Not that she was particularly good at it. Then again, she was doing the Electric Slide with a unicorn. Did grace really matter?

"That's it, Red. Shake what your mama gave ya." Gus shuffled closer and nuzzled her head before chewing on a lock of her hair.

She batted him away. "Yuck. What are you doing?"

Spitting out her curls, Gus gave her a sheepish look. "I can't help myself, Red. I—I think I love you and want you to bear my children."

"That's creepy and disturbing. Not to mention physically impossible."

"True. Can I at least lick your hair some more?"

"No."

Gus heaved a sigh. "Guess I didn't stand much chance with Quinlan and Whyndham warming your bed. A fucking Tijuanan donkey has less lasting power than those two."

Oh man, there were so many levels of *eew* in Gus's pronouncement she wasn't quite sure where to start. "Uh, do I even want to ask how you know about Rand and Braeden's stamina?" She wasn't going to touch the Tijuanan donkey reference with a ten-foot pole.

"Are you kidding? They're legendary. Wish I could keep the ladies satisfied like that. Still, it's got to be a bitch walking around with a killer case of blue balls all the time." "What do you mean?"

"The curse, Red." Gus's nostrils flared. "Wait, are you telling me you don't know about it? Damn, I thought just about everyone—" He shook his head. "Anyway, back shortly after those two hooked up, they made the mistake of seducing the wrong fairy. Fiona McCairin didn't ken to the idea of a brief affair with our boys, so when they decided to take their cocks elsewhere, she whammied them with an anorgasmia spell."

She blinked. "A what?"

"There's no cream filling for their Twinkies." Gus rolled his eyes when she continued to frown at him. "They can't climax. Ever."

That certainly wasn't true. She opened her mouth to set Gus straight, but he cut her short by pawing at the ground.

"Wait, I take that back. They might be able to regain the ability one day. Assuming that rumor about a human lover being able to break the curse pans out."

Human lover? A hollow pinging sounded inside her head and her skin turned cold and clammy.

Gus snickered. "Shit, I'd like to see those two smooth talkers try to weasel their way around *that* conversation. Hey, mind if we boink your brains out so we can finally..." He broke off, a glint of concern swirling in his brown irises. "Red, what's the matter? You look kinda—" His eyes widened, marking the exact moment he came to the same epiphany as her. "Oh shit."

Blood pounding in her eardrums, she turned and looked for Rand and Braeden. They were both leaning against the SUV, chatting with a group of sprites. Nausea crawled inside her belly. They'd played her like a total and utter fool. The worst part was she'd known better, and she'd willingly allowed them to trick her into falling for the one illusion she swore never to believe in.

Love.

Chapter Nine

"Tempted as we are by your offer, ladies, I'm afraid Brae and I are officially off the market."

A chorus of boos sounded from the sprites and Rand swiveled to check once more on Vanessa. He spotted her heading toward them. "Speaking of our lady love, here she comes now." His smile faltered as he took in the fierce anger darkening her face. Gus trotted close behind her, his expression nervous.

Rand growled beneath his breath. If that damn unicorn did something to upset Vanessa, he was going to personally geld him. He stepped forward, but Vanessa rushed right past him and stormed to the vehicle. She yanked open the door, eliciting a tide of complaints from the revelers inside. Braeden sidled up behind her and squeezed her around the waist. "We missed you, dar—" A surprised yelp replaced the remainder of Brae's sentence and he went flying backwards onto his ass.

Vanessa pivoted, her stun gun crackling in her grip. Shrieks twittered from the sprites and they all darted off.

"What the hell was that for?" Braeden shook his head, his eyes dazed.

"For being two sacks of shit." She slashed a hand toward Gus. "He told me everything. About how you needed me to break the curse."

Rand divided his attention between Vanessa and Gus. Finally he shrugged. "Okay."

If anything, her face tightened more. "*Okay*? That's all you have to say, you callous son of a bitch? Were the two of you laughing the entire time at how idiotic I was to fall for your bullshit?"

"Of course not." He stepped toward her, but she brandished the stun gun in warning, halting his advance. "Nessie..."

"Don't. Call. Me. That." Her loud bellow on the last word drew every eye in the place.

"Sweetest, none of it was bullshit. You're our bond mate."

"Who just so happened to conveniently break the curse for you," she snapped.

"Yes, but only when you gave us your heart." He grimaced when her entire body went rigid. Damn, obviously that hadn't been the right thing to say, regardless if it was true or not. "Vanessa, we would have chosen you even if you couldn't have broken the curse. Brae and I have lived with it for three hundred years. We would have lived with it for a thousand if it meant bringing you into our lives."

"Easy for you to say now." The fire in her gaze didn't bank. "If you weren't trying to dupe me, why didn't you come clean about the curse?"

Jodi Redford

"Brae and I decided long before we jumped the veil that we wouldn't mention it in order not to put any undue pressure on you."

The squinty-eyed look that'd been absent all day returned. "No pressure? What do you call all the mind sex and man-love nookie you've been throwing at me for the past twenty-four hours?"

Weariness riding like an anchor around his neck, Rand pinched the bridge of his nose. No matter what he said, odds were good his words would sound damning. "I admit all that was done to tempt you. But only into accepting our bond mate. Not as a means to break the curse."

She gave a humorless laugh. "You expect me to believe that? Sorry, but I'm not that big a fool."

"How can you not believe it? What the three of us shared on the beach went light years beyond breaking a curse. Our hearts united."

Her features hardened. "We had sex beneath a veil of illusion. I think that's pretty fucking telling, don't you?"

A sharp ache twisted in his heart. "Don't do this, sweetest." Past the point of caring about the stun gun she held, he crossed to her and caressed her cheek. Surprisingly, she didn't slap his hand away. He discovered the reason why a millisecond later when a pair of electro-cuffs banded his right wrist. A buzz sounded from the gadget while it blocked his ability to dimension jump. Not that he would have if he'd been able to. Short of death, no force on earth would convince him to leave either of his bond mates.

She shoved him toward the vehicle's rear passenger door. "Get inside."

"Vanessa, let's talk about this."

"I'm done talking or doing anything else with you." She clicked on the stun gun and an electrical snap sizzled from its prongs. "Get in the damn backseat."

Obviously she was in no frame of mind to be reasonable. Exhaling heavily, he ducked into the car. Sounds of shuffling came from outside and a moment later Braeden scooted in next to him. Vanessa leaned into the doorway and gestured for Brae to slap the remaining cuff onto his wrist. His face displaying the same helpless defeat growing in Rand's chest, Braeden slid the device into place. The driver's side door opened and Vanessa climbed inside. Their eyes met for the briefest second in the rearview mirror before she glanced down, her lips adopting a firm, resolute line. "Work whatever hocus-pocus you have to and get us the hell out of here."

He must have hesitated a fraction too long because Vanessa whipped her head around and glared at him. "*Now*, damn you."

Weaving the threads of his magic into the proper spell, he cast out the invisible web that would transport them from the hotel. In less time than it took to blink, they went from viewing a crowd of curious fairies and elves gathering around the vehicle, to a dark stretch of Michigan highway. They sat there idle for several minutes and relief began to fill Rand's heart. She couldn't do it. Her anger had finally started to clear, and she realized the monumental mistake she'd almost—

The engine turned over with a chuggish purr, and the hope instantly withered in his chest.

They drove nonstop for hours. At first he and Brae attempted to plead their case repeatedly to Vanessa, but after the hundredth time of being drowned out by the stereo she kept stubbornly turning up, they both acknowledged the fruitlessness of that endeavor. Shortly after midnight they arrived at a nondescript strip mall outside of Gaylord. Vanessa drove around back and honked her horn before breaking to a stop near the loading dock of the larger of the department stores.

Despite knowing he was likely wasting his breath, Rand leaned forward, seeking Vanessa's reflection in the mirror. "Look in your heart. What the three of us share is real and true. We love you. Please believe that."

Beneath the shadow of anger in her eyes he caught a flicker of the dark phantom that fed her fears. And he knew. "You don't think we can love you. That anyone can love you. Sweetest, *that* is the true illusion here. The one you've built in your head."

"You don't know what the hell you're talking about."

He wouldn't let her push them away. Not when he was so close to dragging that phantom kicking and screaming into the light. "Everyone who should have been there for you, loved you, has let you down. Abandoned you. Lied to you. Sweet Titania, no wonder you're afraid of love. In your mind, it's done nothing but lead to misery." He dragged his free hand through his hair, his heart aching for her. For them.

A fierce rumble shook through the night. At first he thought it was thunder, but his misassumption was corrected when the large steel door directly across from them swung upward. A burly fellow dressed in overalls and a red flannel shirt wobbled outside, his arm raised against the glare of the headlights.

Vanessa clicked her low beams on. "Thanks for the pep talk, Dr. Phil, but your escort is here." She pushed open the door and went out to speak to the imitation lumberjack. Less than three minutes later, she returned with the guy. "This is Frank. He'll be checking you both in and taking care of your needs until you're sent back home in the morning." Her lips curved in a humorless smile. "Well, not *all* your needs. I doubt Frank here swings that way, so I don't suggest wasting your mind magic on him."

A terrible pain erupting in his sternum, Rand stared at Vanessa as she stepped out of the way, allowing Frank to lean into the car.

"Okay, boys, we can do this nice and easy, or the Frank way." The burly attendant cracked his knuckles, his grin menacing. "Makes no difference to me."

Rand reluctantly climbed from the seat, dragging Braeden with him. He sent Vanessa one last pleading look. "We wouldn't leave you, Nessie. Not ever."

The phantom fear in her eyes slithering deeper into the shadows, she turned and jumped behind the wheel, slamming the door with a rattling bang. Gunning the engine, she squealed from the parking lot.

Chapter Ten

"What do you mean I'm on probation? I brought my damn jumpers in on time." By sheer will—or more likely a guardian angel who frowned on bloody violence—Vanessa managed not to go apeshit on Cooper McKenzie's ass. Okay, she should probably be a little grateful to the guardian angel because Cooper *was* her boss. It'd be kind of hard convincing him to take her off probation if she decked him.

"You also slept with them."

Damn, she knew coming clean about that would bite her in the keister. This was what she got for being an honest employee.

Cooper leaned back in his leather chair, causing the casters to creak. "That's a violation of code. We could come down much harder on you than temporary suspension. It's only because you're a damn good agent that we decided to go easy on you."

Easy? They were taking her job away from her for three weeks. What the hell was she supposed to do in the meantime? Renewed panic clawed at her as she visualized sitting around watching Jerry Springer reruns, her butt increasing proportionately with her intake of pizza and deep fried pork rinds. Worst of all, she'd have excess time to dwell on thoughts of Rand and Braeden. She shook her head, refusing to let the doubts that'd haunted her all weekend take root. "Look, I admit that I made a huge lapse in judgment. It'll never happen again."

"I'm sorry, Vanessa, but our decision's final. Tabby has already been given all your assignments. Now if you don't mind, I have a mountain of paperwork to catch up on."

Helpless frustration weighing at her, she trudged from her superior's office. Luckily, it was too early for the rest of the staff to be working. Having to do the walk of shame in front of her colleagues would have been the turd topping what looked to be a shit-pile of a day. She stepped outside, cringing at the cruel brightness of the sunshine. Usually she loved mornings like this, when the air held a slight crispness that conflicted with the intenseness of the rising sun. But lack of sleep and daylight the past two days left her feeling like an anemic vampire who'd been evicted from her coffin.

Sliding her sunglasses in place, she trudged to her Jeep. Less than five minutes later, she was cruising the Pacific Coast Highway, her only other company on the road the various surfers out to catch the early waves. She passed the Huntington Beach pier, and the spectacular sight of the sun's rays gilding the ocean's rolling surface acted like a sucker punch to her stomach. Almost unconscious of her actions, she eased up on the gas and the Jeep coasted to a slow crawl. The normally vivid blue waters had turned almost entirely golden. Instantly she was reminded of another ocean.

Another beach.

Three hearts uniting.

She blinked and the illusion shattered. "No, it wasn't real. It was—" A sob caught in her throat, destroying her defiance. Stepping on the brake, she rested her head on the steering wheel, her heart so heavy she felt ill. A blaring horn sounded behind her and she lifted her arm and weakly flipped the bird out the window. Once the irritated driver sped off, Vanessa returned her foot to the gas pedal and continued her journey home.

Her small bungalow felt cramped and stifling. Despite that, she didn't bother opening the drapes and stumbled directly into her bedroom, where she promptly crawled into bed fully clothed and cocooned herself beneath the covers. She managed to snooze fitfully for an hour, but constant dreams of cavorting in the surf with Rand and Braeden left her with a hollowness in her belly and a dull ache behind her eyelids, thanks to the tears now soaked into her pillow.

"Bleh." Furious with herself for crying over a damn illusion, she punched the offensive pillow out of the way.

You don't think we can love you. Sweetest, that is the true illusion here.

As it'd done the night Rand uttered those words, her heart gave a traitorous little leap. God, she'd be a fool to believe him. To believe a single damn thing he and Braeden had professed.

So why did the idea of chucking it all and running to Rand and Braeden sound so damn appealing?

Idiot, idiot, idiot. She punched the pillow again before drop kicking it into the corner of the bedroom. She should probably be more concerned that taking her frustration out on innocent bedding felt pretty damn good. Scrubbing her palms over her face, she abandoned the bedroom for the kitchen.

She was halfway to the fridge when the doorbell chimed. Backtracking to the front entrance, she peeked through the peephole and noticed Tabby Fowler parked on the other side, her huge, '80's rock band hairstyle practically filling the entire doorway. The last thing she wanted was company, but knowing Mama Tabs, there'd be no getting rid of her until she'd seen for herself that Vanessa hadn't slit her wrists over the probation. Sighing, Vanessa popped the deadbolt free and swung open the door.

"Girl, you look like shit."

Tabby might have been lovingly nicknamed Mama Tabs because of her nurturing nature, but it didn't stop the woman from taking the brutally honest approach.

"I haven't slept much the past three days." Actually, she hadn't slept much from the moment she'd chased Braeden down that Michigan hillside.

Jodi Redford

"It shows." Clucking her tongue in disapproval, Tabby bossed her way inside the small front vestibule and beelined for the kitchen. "You got the makings for French toast?" Without waiting for an answer, she began scrounging through the cupboards. "Where's your maple syrup?"

Vanessa pointed to the bottle resting right before Tabby's eyes and the older woman gave her a disgusted look. "Girl, do you not see the word imitation on there? I mean the real stuff."

"Sorry, don't have any."

"You are a discredit to the female race. Fine, we'll just have to settle for some fresh fruit and powdered sugar."

Vanessa waited for the inevitable complaint as Tabby opened the produce drawer inside the fridge.

"There are raisins in here. Raisins. Is that your idea of fruit?"

"They're golden seedless."

Tabby's heavily mascaraed eyes narrowed. "Disgraceful." Grumbling, she went about collecting the remaining ingredients for breakfast. While the slices of bread were grilling, she turned and gave Vanessa an assessing look. "You wanna talk about what happened?"

"No."

"Too bad. You're gonna anyway." Tabby lifted one corner of the French toast, checking for doneness. "You're one of the best agents in the field."

"Gee, if everyone keeps telling me that, I'll start to get a swelled head." Too bad being the best didn't equate with keeping her on the job, apparently.

"It's true. Which is why I was knocked head over ass when I heard you up and slept with your jumpers. Them boys must have really laid the charm on thick to get past your brick wall."

Vanessa frowned. "Brick wall?"

"Well, hon, it's certainly no secret you're a bit of a hard-ass when it comes to the male gender. In fact, that's what all the guys from work call you behind your back. Hard-ass."

"What?" Those motherfuckers. She was so going to wring their balls the next time she...

Okay, they might have a teensy point.

"So what'd your jumpers do to worm their way past your infamously impenetrable wall?"

"Nothing." Everything.

Tabby's gaze remained shrewd. "Nothing doesn't jive with you locking yourself in this rathole for two days."

"I told you I was tired."

"You also told me you haven't slept."

Damn, busted.

"So what's the story, Nessie?"

She started to open her mouth, intending to refute there being anything more to it than exhaustion, but stared at Tabby instead. "What did you just call me?"

"Oh damn." Tabby began flipping the finished French toast onto two mismatched china plates, obviously flustered. "I can't believe I said that out loud. I'm usually good at stopping it before it slips."

Vanessa blinked. "Wait, are you saying you've been secretly calling me Nessie behind my back all this time?"

"Well, it's better than hard-ass," Tabby groused. "The only reason I never told you is because I've always gotten the distinct impression you're not much of one for nicknames. But personally, I think Nessie is cute. Plus it suits you."

"No, it doesn't. It's the name of a—" She swallowed hard as an unexpected sob tunneled its way up her esophagus. Despite her efforts to rope it into submission, the embarrassing sound blubbered free.

Tabby gaped at her. "Oh, hon. I had no idea you hated nicknames *that* much. I promise I'll never say it again."

"I-it's not..." Sniffling, Vanessa knuckled her nose. "He called me Nessie too."

"Who?"

"Rand. My pooka."

Tabby's pencil-thin eyebrows arched. "Hon, you just called him your pooka. Are you sure there isn't more of a story there than you're letting on?"

Vanessa lasted exactly five seconds before spilling all the sordid details. By the time the tale ended, Tabby looked suitably shocked. And a bit envious. "Well, damn. No wonder you let them talk you out of hauling them in immediately. I'm just amazed you only opted for forty-eight hours." Tabby gave a wicked chuckle. "I would have renegotiated them to at least a week."

A fresh crop of tears sprang to Vanessa's eyes, and Tabby dropped her spatula before dragging Vanessa against her ample bosom. "Ssh, it's okay now."

"N-no, it isn't. Because I...I..." The word clogged in Vanessa's throat like a bitter pill that refused to go down without a fight.

"You love them, hon. Why don't you just say it?"

"I can't. Because if I do. If I admit it out loud..." She looked into Tabby's compassion-filled eyes and finally found the courage to acknowledge her darkest fear. "They'll leave me. Just like everyone else has. They may not realize it now, but they will eventually. Now that the curse is broken, they don't really have any use for me."

"Do you honestly believe that, or is it just your stubborn fear talking?"

"I-I don't know."

Tabby leaned against the counter and stroked her double chins. "What is your heart telling you?"

Vanessa sucked in a deep breath. "That I love them and want to be with them."

"So go be with them."

Could she do it? Drop everything, including the scared voice in her head that kept whispering about her past heartbreaks, and simply embrace every precious second she might share with Rand and Braeden, no matter how long or short it might last?

The joyful "Yes" bursting in her soul was all the answer she needed. Until reality once again set in. "I'm on probation. They'll never let me past the veils."

A crafty grin slid across Tabby's face. "They will if you have a jumper."

Chapter Eleven

She might have known she'd track him to a damn rodeo. Still, she should probably be grateful for the pervert's predictability. Otherwise she might have been hoofing it all over San Antonio looking for Gus.

Keeping to the shadows, Vanessa crept down the corridor of stalls ringing the perimeter of the arena, her senses on high alert for the telltale tingling at the base of her spine. Finally she felt it. Not that she needed the warning once that familiar and grating voice made itself known several stalls down.

"So what do you say, mama? You, me, a trough of Margaritas and perhaps some bow-chicka-wowwow afterwards. You feelin' me?"

She planted her boot against the stall door and kicked it open. "Trust me, no one wants to feel you, Gus."

The unicorn bleated an incredibly colorful swear word as she lassoed his right ankle with the electrocuff. He tried to headbutt her. Fortunately she was faster and slapped the restraining muzzle she'd wisely brought along over his mouth. She looped the rein around his left leg, making it impossible for him to do anything more dangerous than glare at the ceiling. He mumbled something around the bit that sounded suspiciously like *cock blocker*.

Grabbing hold of Gus's mane, she sent the quarter horse he'd been seducing an apologetic smile. "I know he looks adorable, but one day you'll look back on this night and thank me for saving you from the horny little bastard." With that said, she led Gus outside. When he wouldn't let up with the incessant snorting and throat clearing, she reluctantly loosened the bit. "What is it?"

"My neck is getting a fucking crick."

"If I take the muzzle off, will you promise to behave?"

"When do I never beha—" He yelped when she tweaked his ear. "Damn, you're a feisty mama. Have I mentioned lately that I love you?" He sighed when she gave him the stink eye. "Fine, I'll behave. But it's gonna damn near kill me."

Holding up her end of the bargain, she removed the muzzle and walked Gus five blocks to the local detainment center. The building was hopping tonight, overrun with Otherworlders who'd obviously decided to skip the necessary red tape involved with getting their papers legalized. Fortunately that worked in her favor. An overstressed staff meant less scrutinizing of her doctored forms. She waved one of the workers over. A young kid. Even better. "I'm really late getting my jumper home. Think you can swing me through right away?"

The frazzled kid scrubbed a hand over his jaw. "I'm not supposed to let anyone cut in line."

She rubbed his arm. "Please? You'd be saving my job."

Gus gave a mocking ninny and she elbowed him in the ribs.

A pink stain crawled over the kid's pimply face before he shot a covert look over his shoulder. "Okay. But we've got to be quick. Give me his home dimension and I'll go dial up the coordinates."

"Pitticairn." She elbowed Gus again when he opened his mouth to correct her.

The young attendant nodded toward the adjacent hallway. "Go on into the back and I'll start the portal process."

"Thank you." She bussed the kid on his cheek, earning another of his blushes. Hah, and the guys from her office called her a hard-ass. Take that, motherfuckers. Grabbing hold of Gus once more, she trekked into the rear deporting dock.

Once all the doors locked securely behind them, Gus glanced at her. "Why are you taking me to pooka-ville?" His grin turned lecherous. "Ah, I get it. Once you get poked by a pooka, ain't no going back."

"You really are a disgrace to unicorns everywhere." Before she could say anything more, the portal shield activated in front of them. She waited for the shimmering violet membrane to fully open on the wall before tugging Gus forward. They both jumped into the eye of the portal, following the spinning tunnel until it opened up onto another portal—this one to Pitticairn.

They stepped into a deportment room that was an exact duplicate of the one they'd just left behind back in the human dimension. The attendant waiting for them frowned at Gus. "Since when have we had unicorns?"

"Gus is a...uh...pooka stuck in form." Hey, not a bad improvisation. "His cousin Rand Quinlan is the only one who can help him shift back. It's vital that you take me to the detainment cell where Quinlan and Whyndham are being held."

"They're not here."

She stared at the attendant. "What do you mean? They should have arrived last Saturday."

"I mean they're not here at the center. Charges were dropped and they were sent home. No point making two dying pookas stand trial."

A fierce, stabbing pain erupted in her heart, followed by swift denial. "What the hell are you talking about? They can't be dying. They were absolutely fine three days ago." The attendant's expression turned suspicious and she waved a hand in Gus's direction. "That's what he told me, anyway. Gus was with them before he got stuck in this unicorn shape." Half of that was truthful, at least.

The attendant shrugged. "Quinlan and Whyndham came down with the bond bends."

"The what?"

"Some chick revoked their bond and now it's killing them."

All the blood drained to her toes. "Oh my God."

Chapter Twelve

She would never forgive herself if Rand and Braeden died because of her. "There's a cure for the bond bends, right? If the one who revoked it decided she's made a huge, stupid mistake and begs them to take her back, they'll get better, right?"

The attendant started to get that distrusting look again. "Yeah, probably. Why are you so interested—?"

Not waiting around to hear the rest of his sentence, she raced from the room, Gus hot on her heels. Outside, she realized she faced another dilemma. She had a map to Rand and Braeden's home tucked in her pants pocket, thanks to Tabby's awesome research skills, but the seaside village where her mates lived was at least ten miles from the detainment center. Talk about one hell of a walk, particularly when every minute lost could be one minute closer to...

Refusing to contemplate the possibility of arriving too late, she scanned her immediate surroundings. Unlike San Antonio, the main city center of Pitticairn was quiet and uneventful. As she stared at the handful of pedestrians strolling through the park across from the detainment center, she realized she had yet another problem. Pitticairn didn't have any streets—which meant they likely didn't have any vehicles. And why would they? It's not like the residents needed to rely on cars.

She inwardly groaned. Great. Now what? Not like she could march over to that park and demand one of the pookas shift into a horse and take her to Rand and Braeden.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Gus's rein dragging near her foot. She blinked before staring at the unicorn. "Okay, I guess you're the next best thing to a horse."

Gus's nostrils flared. "Excuse me?"

Ignoring his hissy fit, she grabbed the rein and started to climb onto his back, but he skittered sideways, causing her to slide off. "Damn it, Gus. Believe me, this is a last resort. And probably the only time in your life my butt will be touching any part of your body. So take it or leave it."

Gus dropped onto his forelegs. "All aboard." She hopped on and soon she and Gus were thundering through the countryside at a breakneck speed. They galloped across rolling meadows and thick forests carpeted with dense, slippery moss that almost tripped poor Gus several times. Somehow he kept his footing, but by the time they arrived at Rand and Braeden's white clapboard-sided cottage nestled at the sea cliff's edge, Gus was sweating profusely and Vanessa's heart threatened to beat straight out of her chest. Jumping off of Gus, she barreled up the cottage's steps and tried the front door, nearly sobbing in relief when she discovered it unlocked. She hurried inside, letting her energy signals lead the way.

The cottage was deathly quiet. She stumbled into a large bedroom at the rear of the house, her heart seizing so hard her chest ached. Rand and Braeden were lying on the bed, their arms wrapped around each other. Their usually vibrant, golden complexions had been drained to a lifeless gray.

Tears spilling uncontrollably down her cheeks, she crossed to the bed and crawled between them. "Please don't leave me. I love you. God, I lo—" A choked sob backlogging in her throat, she twined her fingers around Rand's and Braeden's.

Their skin was colder than ice. She rubbed her hands over every inch of them, her motions desperate and practically chafing her palms raw. If she could just warm them up, they'd be fine. Right? She scrambled for the heavy quilt bunched at the foot of the mattress and tucked it around the three of them. The chill encompassing Rand and Braeden's bodies slowly leached into her bones and she shivered. She nestled her wet cheek against Rand's chest, the misery inside her growing to an unbearable pain when she realized she couldn't feel his heartbeat.

For the first time in her life, she prayed. For a miracle. For a second chance. And in those dark hours when hope seemed the biggest illusion of all, she prayed for forgiveness.

She held them throughout the night, until the pink rays of the sun peeked through the window and spread across the tangled sheets. Her throat was sore from crying and pleading for them to come back to her, but she didn't have the energy to leave the bed for a drink of water. She shifted her arm and someone's fingers fluttered beneath hers. At first she thought it was her imagination. When it happened again, she lifted her head, almost afraid to believe in the impossible. Her heart did a cartwheel of joy when her gaze locked with Rand's. Then he said the one thing she'd begged them for all night. "Sweetness, you came back to us."

"Told you so." Braeden's hand pulled hers more firmly into their clasped embrace. "I was going to bake some more cinnamon rolls to welcome you home, darlin'."

She gave him a watery smile. "It's okay. Having you both alive and healthy is the best homecoming I could wish for."

"You've got us, Nessie. For always."

Rand's words made her cry all over again. He lifted his hand and brushed away her tears before pulling her forward for a tender kiss. Soon enough, the kiss went from gentle to a full-on ravishment. When Rand finally came up for air, Braeden took his place, his tongue gliding coaxingly over hers. In between their hungry kisses, she noticed how their skin was regaining color. In fact, it seemed to darken every time she touched them. Putting her theory to the test, she slid her palms along their torsos. They both groaned, their eyes sparkling with need. She traced her fingertip over Rand's pectoral. "I think you should get a heart tattooed here with Nessie in the center of it. What do you think?"

Rand lifted her hand and kissed the center of her palm. "I think it sounds perfect. Now come make love to us. It'll give Gus a thrill."

She met Rand and Braeden's hot, amused gazes before turning toward the window. Sure enough, Gus had his eye pressed to the pane. "That little perv—" Her lips curving into a grin, she shook her head. "Oh, what the hell." Stripping from her clothes, she rejoined her mates, wiggling between them with a giggle. "Let's show that unicorn how to really get your dimension rocked."

Epilogue

Three months later...

Trills of laughter and the muted buzz of excited chatter floated into the cottage as Vanessa made her way into the kitchen. From the sounds of it, nearly the entire population of Pitticairn was camped in the backyard. Not too surprising. The first ever triad marriage—between two pookas and a human bounty hunter, no less—was bound to bring all the looky-loos out of the woodwork. Unable to contain her smile, she stepped outside onto the porch, the hem of her white lace dress fluttering in the honey-scented breeze that seemed to always perfume Pitticairn's countryside. The lush, hydrangea-like blooms of the keandra vines overtaking the latticework shielded her from view of the wedding guests but allowed her a glimpse of her two grooms waiting beneath the arbor with Pastor Tom Fowler, Mama Tab's brother.

Her heart swelled to overflowing at the sight of Rand and Braeden, both so breathtakingly gorgeous in their matching tuxedoes. Miraculously, it hadn't taken much arm twisting to convince Braeden to wear clothes for the ceremony. More than likely though, there were plenty of females—and a few males—in attendance who were disappointed at being deprived of getting an eyeful of Braeden and Rand in the buff.

The clip-clop of hooves announced Gus's approach. "You ready to do this, hot mama?"

She straightened the unicorn's bowtie before nodding.

"Are you sure? 'Cause we still have plenty of time to elope, you know. Or at least have a quickie in the woods."

"That's mighty tempting, but no."

His wounded sigh impressively dramatic, Gus preceded her down the steps. A trio of fairies lifted their flutes and filled the air with their sweet music, hushing the assemblage. Every head turned in Vanessa's direction, but the only ones that truly mattered were Rand's and Braeden's. Even from several yards away, there was no mistaking the love reflecting in their eyes—a mirror to the emotion welling within her soul. Overwhelming happiness and a deep sense of rightness settled over her. For once in her life, no fearful voice held her back.

Quickening her pace, she followed Gus down the flower-strewn runner, her focus locked on Rand and Braeden. As if picking up on the joyful calling in her heart, her two mates reached for her, pulling her into the circle of their arms. The three of them indulged in a passionate kiss that resulted in ribald catcalls from the wedding guests and an inappropriate comment from Gus that earned him an ear tweak from Vanessa.

His cheeks blazing red, Pastor Fowler cleared his throat. "If everyone's ready, we'll begin. Do we have the unity rings?"

Tabby joined them and after gifting Vanessa, Rand and Braeden with fierce hugs, she passed over the rings. Each gold band was inscribed with a manitope clover leaf—the symbol of eternity within the pooka community. Vanessa's eyes welled up all over again as Rand and Braeden each kissed her fingertips before sliding her ring in place. When it came time for her to repeat the gesture for her mates, the tears she valiantly tried to blink away broke loose. Not so long ago, she would have felt ridiculous, exposing her emotions in front of a crowd of strangers. But almost losing Rand and Braeden had changed everything. She'd never again take love for granted, and she didn't care if the entire universe knew it.

After they each spoke the vows that would forever seal their mated bond, and Pastor Fowler pronounced them husband, husband and wife, Rand and Braeden shared the honor of tipping her into their arms and beelining for the cottage. More wicked hooting and hollering erupted from the assembled guests, and Vanessa gave a mock sigh. "You do realize we'll be the talk of Pitticairn for at least the next century, right?"

Their grins completely unrepentant, Rand and Braeden hustled toward the porch steps, but drew to a halt when Cooper McKenzie blocked their path. Her ex-boss looked a little embarrassed about thwarting a mid-wedding nookie session. As he should be.

"Uh, Vanessa, do you have a moment?"

"Nope." Hooking her arms tighter around her mates when they started to set her on her feet, she glared at Cooper. "You're *not* ruining my wedding day by begging me for the millionth time to come back to the agency."

"Sweetest, maybe you should at least hear the man out."

"Rand's right, darlin'. You don't want to make a decision like this without getting all the details first." Braeden gave Cooper a shrewd look. "I'm sure your former employer would be more than willing to double your salary and give you an extra two weeks of vacation."

Cooper's cheeks paled as he obviously mulled over the huge hissy management would throw regarding those demands. After an awkward hesitation where he avoided Rand's and Braeden's threatening looks, he cleared his throat and nodded. "Of course."

"Thanks but no thanks." She transferred her narrow-eyed stare to Braeden and Rand. "As for you both. I see one of two choices here. Either I yell at you guys for not believing me when I said I was done with bounty hunting. Or you can take me inside and eat wedding cake—off my breasts."

Sliding Cooper an apologetic glance, her mates rushed her up the steps. Once inside the cottage, they didn't immediately pounce on her. At least not in the way she was hoping for. But she could see from the look in Rand's eyes that he wasn't yet ready to let the issue with her now-defunct career drop.

His gaze worried, Rand cupped her cheek. "Nessie, Brae and I don't want you to give up what you love to do because of us. As much as we hate the idea of you being away from us for even a day, we want you to be happy."

Her irritation instantly evaporated and she could feel her eyes going misty again. "How the hell am I supposed to stay mad at you after you say something sweet like that?"

Braeden leaned down and kissed her before brushing away one of the tears stubbornly clinging to her lashes. "You're everything to us, baby. Haven't you figured that out yet?"

After a lifetime of being used by others for her abilities, their unconditional love was like a balm to her battered soul. "I don't need a damn job to make me happy, or give me a false sense of identity anymore. I know who I am." She laced her fingers with theirs. "I'm a woman who is truly loved."

"Yes, sweetest. You are."

Braeden echoed the sentiment with a soft kiss on her brow. She ran her fingertips along his smoothly shaved jaw before smiling impishly. "Besides, chasing veil jumpers down hillsides can't be good for a pregnant woman."

It took exactly twenty seconds for her statement to register with Rand and Braeden. Once it did, they both gaped at her, speechless.

"I was going to wait and tell you after I had my doc back home verify the home pregnancy test, but I—"

"You're going to have a baby?" Rand broke in, his expression suitably stunned. "Our baby?"

Braeden shook his head, equally shocked. "But...how? Our DNA..."

"Apparently isn't so incompatible after all." Her chuckle petered off when she realized Rand and Braeden weren't exactly whooping with joy. "Y-you guys are okay with it, right? I mean, I know the last thing you expected was a—"

Rand tugged her forward, his mouth stopping her flow of words. His hands cradling her head, he inched away enough to make room for Braeden to take his turn kissing away her doubts. By the time they were finished, she was breathless and dizzy. "So I take it you're okay with becoming dads?"

"We're going to be dads. Holy shit. Speaking of which..." His mouth stretching into a wide grin, Braeden clamped a hand on Rand's shoulder. "I can't wait to see you change dirty diapers."

"Same goes for me, smartass. Plus we'll see how long it takes you to toss your cookies the first time the baby spits up on you."

Braeden snorted. "You know better than anyone that I have zero gag reflex."

Smiling like a fool, Vanessa leaned against the kitchen counter. Three months ago, the idea of poopy diapers, baby spit up and pookas with amazing gag reflexes making her insanely happy would have been crazy. Now she couldn't imagine her life any other way. Rand and Braeden stopped teasing each other and pulled her toward the bedroom.

Jodi Redford

She cocked her eyebrows. "Uh, guys? I think you're forgetting something." They both looked at her expectantly and she nodded toward the cake resting on the granite countertop.

Rand chuckled devilishly. "Ah yes. Lovemaking is so much better with buttercream frosting."

"Truer words have never been spoken."

She batted her eyelashes. "Sex and dessert. You guys really are my perfect soul mates."

Giving a sexy growl, Braeden nibbled her neck before carrying her into the bedroom and tossing her onto the bed. She landed with a bounce, her laugh trailing off as Rand settled the cake on the dresser and stripped out of his tux. Her gaze fell on the newest addition to his collection of tattoos—a unique combination of his and Braeden's clan symbols interwoven with her name. The first time she saw the beautiful design, tangible proof of the family she'd never dared to believe in, she'd cried. As it was, she could feel her eyes getting suspiciously prickly again.

Apparently intuiting that she was five seconds away from bawling and ruining the mood, Braeden distracted her with his own naughty little strip tease. His grin impish, he scooped up a glob of frosting and painted a smiley face on his cock.

She couldn't resist giggling. "He almost looks as blissfully happy as I am." And with that declaration made, she tugged Rand and Braeden down next to her and proceeded to indulge in two servings of pooka. With a side dish of wedding cake.

About the Author

At the ripe age of seven, Jodi Redford penned her first epic, complete with stick figure illustrations. Sadly, her drawing skills haven't improved much, but her love of fantasy worlds never went away. These days she writes about fairies, ghosts and other supernatural creatures, only with considerably more heat.

She has won numerous contests, including The Golden Pen and Launching a Star.

When not writing or working the day job, she enjoys gardening and way too many reality television shows.

Currently residing in Michigan with her husband and overgrown lapdog, she is a member of RWA national and Greater Detroit Romance Writers of America.

She loves to hear from readers. You can email her at jodiredford@jodiredford.com and visit her online at www.jodiredford.com.

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Thieves of Aurion Lover Enslaved

That Old Black Magic That Voodoo You Do

Coming Soon:

That Old Black Magic The Seven Year Witch Something dead this way comes...

That Voodoo You Do © 2010 Jodi Redford

That Old Black Magic, Book 1

For ten long years Griffin Trudeau has managed to keep his paws off Jemma Finnegan, best friend and leading star of his kinkiest fantasies. As her appointed cat familiar, indulging those fantasies with the delectable witch is strictly forbidden. But when Jemma shows up at his door with seduction in mind, control goes right out the window.

Too late he realizes making love to Jemma is the trigger that launches a zombie apocalypse.

Jemma's been dealt a double whammy: she's just discovered she's a witch. And Griff has been hiding whiskers and a tail. Oh, and if her life wasn't crazy enough, a dead voodoo queen needs her blood to raise a legion of zombies.

There's one plan that might work to increase Jemma's powers so she can put an end to the looming holocaust. A sexy threesome with Griff and Logan Scott, a werewolf familiar with a history of rubbing Griff's fur the wrong way. A cat and a wolf playing nice, much less sharing? It'll take a miracle.

Warning: A witch, tiger and wolf doing naughty things. A dead voodoo queen doing evil things. And zombies doing zombie things. Get your shovels ready.

Enjoy the following excerpt for That Voodoo You Do:

"So what's going on in there?"

Logan propped his elbow against the frame, giving her a close-up view of his barbed-wire tat. Now that she thought about it, the symbolism seemed appropriate. Tangling with the lusty werewolf was bound to leave a few scratches. "Just Clarissa taking care of some coven business. Nothing for you to worry your pretty little head over, darlin'."

She narrowed her eyes. "That managed to be both evasive and sexist."

"Damn, and here I wasn't even tryin'." He chuckled. Taking advantage of his momentary distraction, she reached around him for the doorknob. He scooted sideways, forcing her hand to smack into his abdomen instead. His bare, firm-as-marble abdomen. Her fingertips brushed the warm hollow of skin resting just above the low rise of his button fly. Sucking in a sharp breath, she yanked her arm away and shuffled back several steps.

Logan's irises shimmered with amusement and heat. "Don't stop now. Things were just getting interesting."

"I, uh, just have to go and...um...yeah." She spun and stumbled in the direction of the kitchen before she did something really stupid, like follow the silky trail of hair disappearing beneath the waistband of Logan's jeans. With her tongue. That thought sent her tripping through the entry of the kitchen. She jerked to a halt when she spotted Griff in front of the stove, stirring the contents of a large stockpot. He was notably shirtless too, which put the mouthwatering expanse of his back on dazzling display. She stared at the muscles shifting beneath all that golden, velvety skin, her suspicions bubbling. It was too damn weird and convenient that both Logan and Griff were standing around half naked all of a sudden. Unless some devious shirt monster was making its rounds in the neighborhood, there was definitely something afoot.

And where was everyone else, anyway? She craned her neck, scoping the dining alcove for signs of Ms. Peach or Gloria.

"Hey, baby. You're just in time for a taste test."

She whipped her head around at Griff's zippy tone. Now she *knew* something was up. Griff didn't do chipper, particularly not thirty minutes after snarling at her like a pissed-off Tony the Tiger. "What the hell is going on?"

Griff tried for a guileless look. Oh yeah, he didn't do innocent well either. "I'm getting lunch ready."

"Without your shirt on?"

"It's hot in here."

Well...that was certainly true. Even without Griff's muscle-icious torso making her girl parts all warm and tingly, there was no denying the temperature in the kitchen hovered between muggy and meltyour-panties-off miserable.

Griff dug a spoon out of the drawer and ladled some of the sauce he'd been stirring. "Tell me if this needs anything."

Her intuition warning her to be on the lookout for any sneakiness, she hesitantly crossed to the industrial-sized, stainless-steel stove. She tried to wrestle the spoon from Griff, but he insisted on feeding her the concoction himself. Almost from the instant the tapestry of flavors met her tongue, a seductive ripple of heat unfurled inside her, tightening her nipples beneath the sundress's snug, smocked bodice. Griff's thumb traced the outline of her lower lip. Holding her gaze, he lifted his finger and slowly licked it clean. If the humidity didn't melt the crotch of her panties, Griff demonstrating his perfect oral skills sure as hell would.

"What do you think? A pinch more salt and pepper?"

She stared into Griff's dark-as-sin pupils. Clearly he was waiting for her to answer, but damn if she could concentrate on anything beyond the flush of arousal making her dizzy with hunger. Only it wasn't food she was lusting for at the moment. Knees wobbling, she clutched the counter. "W—what's in that sauce?"

"Butter, egg, milk. The usual Béchamel ingredients."

Sure, and a liberal dash of horny goat weed and Viagra thrown in for good measure. She had no idea why Griff was trying to get her juiced up for sex. He knew damn well that all he had to do was breathe and

she'd gladly tackle him to the floor and ride him until they were both properly yippee-ki-yayed out. Which left only one possibility.

He was about to spring some hellaciously scary sexual request on her. If a midget and a monkey strolled in right now, she was so out of th—

"Looks like the party is revving into high gear." Logan ambled into the kitchen, his expression wicked and wolfish.

Her focus shifted between the two gorgeous specimens of male flesh on decadent display, and the puzzle pieces began locking together. *Oh, sweet Jesus*. Her heart frantically tap dancing, she snatched the embroidered dishtowel resting on the counter and blotted her perspiring forehead. Either the heat and the sauce were getting to her, or Griff and Logan. More than likely, all four.

She shot Griff an accusing glare. "Now I get it. You think the three of us having sex will fix everything, and I won't have to worry about Nettie luring me to the dark side. Did it even occur to you to give *me* a say in this decision?"

Griff thunked the spoon on the stovetop before giving her his full attention. "Christ, do you honestly think you wouldn't get a say? Damn it, you know I'd never force you into doing anything you don't want."

She plunked one hand on her hip and waved the other hand at the stockpot. "But you weren't averse to a little cheating, courtesy of your pasta à la sex sauce."

"I just wanted you to feel more comfortable. Relaxed."

"Turned on," she added, arching a brow.

A guilty flush spread from Griff's jaw to his cheeks. Chuffing a laugh, Logan joined them at the stove. "Catman had good intentions, sugar. The potion in the sauce is designed to loosen inhibitions and supersensitize erogenous zones you didn't even know you had." He flicked a glance in Griff's direction. "Maybe you better give her a demonstration."

She snorted. "Trust me, he already did."

Logan's mouth curled in wicked devilment. "You only got a small taste of the potion's capabilities. To truly appreciate its gift to the fullest, you need to ingest it in a more...intimate manner." Before she knew what he was up to, Logan unlaced the ties securing the sundress to her shoulders and pushed the bodice down, exposing her breasts. Gasping, she shot him a startled look. He awarded her a crooked smile. "Don't worry, you're gonna enjoy this."

Something warm and sticky stroked her nipples. She jumped at the unexpected sensation, her gaze shooting to Griff's sauce-coated fingers as they painted her areolas with the creamy substance. He lowered his head and followed the path of his fingers with his tongue, sparking a new conflagration of fire inside her. She shivered and Griff peered up at her, his eyes blazing. Curving an arm around her waist, he stood and claimed her mouth in a hot, devouring kiss. He tasted of Béchamel and exotic spice. Of magic and sex.

She wrapped her fingers in his hair, tugging him closer, ravenous for more. Their tongues rasped in a mating dance and she wiggled against him, her nipples aching for the sumptuous devotion of Griff's mouth.

Logan's knuckles skated the length of her spine. "Noticing the effects yet?" She mewled a response and he chuckled. "Excellent." He worked the dress over her hips and the garment floated to her feet. His feather-light touch skimmed above the elastic of her bikini, teasing the dimples near her tailbone. She arched against Logan's hand, her knees turning to jelly when he palmed her ass and gave it a good squeeze. He snuggled close behind her, so close she easily detected the hard ridge of his erection suggestively rubbing into her. "I've got something for ya, darlin'."

Oh yeah. No mistaking that.

Griff's mouth trailed to the crook of her neck, and something soft and silky caressed her cheek. She reached for the fabric, but Logan swept it behind her head.

"Not yet. First I want something in return."

She licked her lips, a hot liquid rush of excitement pulsing low in her belly. "What?"

"A taste." Logan's teeth scraped her earlobe, making her breath stutter. He moved lower and tongued the pulse point beneath her ear. "Same as you gave Catman."

A whimper escaped her and Logan tilted her head, his fingers tunneling in her hair as his lips glided along hers. Sucking her tongue into his mouth, he gave her a sneak peek at the devastation he could wreak on her body. If she let him. The question was, would she?

Never Have I Ever © 2010 Alisha Rai

Reynolds Pack, Book 1

Ana Hudson enjoys her picture-perfect marriage to the love of her life. Everything is pleasant, easy and satisfying. Then an anonymous e-mail arrives filled with lurid pictures of Taylor's youthful exploits, leaving her wondering if she really knows him at all. More importantly...does she know herself?

Driven to uncover the truth and push the limits of their sexual boundaries, she convinces Taylor to arrange a weekend getaway to a friend's luxury cottage in the mountains. It's the perfect place to get her husband to spill his secrets—and show him there's a wealth of kinky fantasies hiding inside his good girl.

Taylor's spent years suppressing his animalistic side, hiding the not-completely-human DNA that once drove him wild. Except now his once quiet, reserved Ana has launched a campaign to destroy every inch of his hard-won control.

With the snowy wilderness containing his darkest memories surrounding them, and his old pack-mate dropping in to give them a few pointers, the sexual battle of wills gets fierce.

Let the games begin.

Warning: Contains a brooding, dirty-minded, not-quite-human hero, a sweet not-quite-good-girl heroine, a howling-hawt car ride up a mountain, a chase through the snow followed by an erotic adventure with sports equipment, oral sex, anal sex, and a M/F/M ménage scene that will leave you panting.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Never Have I Ever:

Taylor studied the shape of Ana's ass in the bright pink snowsuit she wore. It was a sad, sad day when the sight of the woman in a shapeless outfit drove him a little mad.

For the umpteenth time he cursed Eli's presence. His best friend had the absolute worst timing. Forget the fact that he'd been put outside like a naughty pup, when he could be snuggling with his wife on a wide leather sofa. With the other man here, he couldn't even try to communicate with her about their recent escapades...not that he had the slightest inkling of how to broach that subject.

You know that mind-blowing sex we had last night? Please don't let me fuck you like an animal anymore. We need to leave here, because I think this place is making me want to do things to you that aren't even entirely legal in some states. Oh, yeah, and I never told you, but I'm a—

Abort, abort. Don't think it. If you don't think it, it's not real.

That's right. The test wasn't over yet. He still had all day tomorrow to get his body and rioting hormones under control. Perhaps by then he'd also be able to figure out what was going on in his newly enabling wife's tricky brain.

"This fresh air is so bracing, isn't it?"

Ana had to shout, and even then her voice was muffled by the ski mask on her face. His outfit wasn't nearly so confining, but then, his body temperature was higher than hers. The wind had stopped howling, and there was a lull in the snow. A good foot or two of the stuff had built up on the ground from the night before. It was soft, perfect for—

A snowball hit him square in the face. He recoiled in instinct and then shook his head. Ana's brown eyes behind her mask were alight with mischief and delight. "Whoops."

"I can't believe you just did that."

"Hmmm." She leaned over, picked up a handful of snow and packed it deliberately between her palms. He watched her, hands loose at his sides. She let it fly, and this time the powder hit him square in the chest and dissipated. "Do you believe it now?"

"You little..."

When he bent over to grab some snow, she squealed and began running away, but soon discovered snowshoes didn't allow for much speed. She wasted precious seconds trying to get her feet out from them. He, who had far more practice with the shoes, took them off in record time. Still, he waited patiently in his boots.

She yelped again when she glanced over her shoulder and took in his ready stance, a snowball in each hand, and started to run back to the house.

"I'll give you a ten-second lead," he announced. He was feeling generous, after all, and she was slow and tiny compared to him. Still, he let the snowballs fly, watching as she ducked and they smacked into the ground near her.

"Sucker..." came her faint reply as she disappeared around a tree.

Taylor didn't even bother to run, his strides eating up the ground, one step to every three of hers. The snow was so soft it was an easy matter to simply follow her footprints.

About ten feet into the woods, though, her footsteps stopped in front of a tree.

His eyes narrowed. He looked left, and then right. He even glanced up, but there was no Ana sitting up a tree. Not like she would have that much maneuverability with the bulky outfit on her. "Ana," he shouted.

Nothing.

He listened, but unlike Eli and the rest of his family, his hearing wasn't quite so superior.

His smell, though...

Taylor smiled grimly and inhaled, sorting through the scent of pine and smoke to find Ana's uniquely feminine scent, overlaid by vanilla lotion.

Aaaaand, there she was. Hello, Ana.

He stepped around the tree, only then noticing the almost too-careful brushing of the snow. A smile spread across his face, both proud and amazed. Smart girl, dragging something behind her to keep her path hidden.

For someone who'd grown up in a crowded city, she'd just mightily impressed him.

He didn't bother walking anymore, but started running, his legs eating up the ground, following both her scent and the brushed path in the snow. He'd catch her soon.

She'd zigged and zagged well though, moving fast for a tiny human who was weighed down by winter clothes, boots and what appeared to be a tree branch. His admiration shot up another notch.

So did his lust.

When I find her...

He couldn't even formulate the words as he ran faster, as her scent became stronger. Images passed through his mind of her wearing a fragile peasant blouse and flimsy skirt. When he found her, he would rip her top off...

His strides lengthened. She'd gasp, but her body would conform to his, her mouth eating his as surely as he ate at hers. Sinking sweetly to her knees, she would open his rough trousers, take his cock out and suck it into her mouth. He'd control her motions with his hand on her head, making sure that she fucked him exactly as he wanted and needed it, and then he'd hoist her up against the side of a tree, rip her panties off and fuck her as she screamed and squirmed under his body. The rough bark would bite into his hands where he braced them, but he wouldn't care, would be unable to stop...

The sound of panting filled his ears, and it took him a second to realize it was him, his breathing coming mostly from arousal and not exertion.

Find your woman.

Fuck your woman.

The sentences became a never-ending loop in his head, reverberating through every cell in his body, commanding him, working him into a frenzy. He didn't even need to look at the disturbed snow—he could smell her, so close, so close, so closesoclosesocloses...

He broke free from the stand of trees. Her ski suit made her into a target of puffy pink, small and defenseless in the huge backyard of the cottage. Like any good predator, he made sure she heard him too late. By the time she started to turn, he was in mid-leap. She could only get out a tiny squeak before he tackled her to the ground.

Somehow, though he was in his frenzied state, he managed to keep her landing soft, cradling a hand under her head so she wouldn't smack it against the snow, shifting his weight so he didn't land on her.

He kissed her, his desperation and need a living thing, uncaring that she still wore a ski mask, uncaring that she was bundled in layers of slick outerwear.

She kissed him back eagerly, but it was the cold lips under his that made him draw back, reason entering his mind for the first time since he'd caught her scent.

"Inside," he said roughly.

it.

With the ski mask on, all he could see was her wild eyes and her lax, wet mouth. She grabbed him by the sides of his face and brought him down to kiss her again.

He complied, surprised and hard. Was she as excited by this chase as he was? It was the slight touch of wetness on his wrist where his glove had separated from his jacket sleeve that brought him back to the world.

"Too cold," he rumbled, and moved off her despite her grasping arms.

He hoisted her to her feet and glanced at the house. Eli was inside there.

Good. Make him watch you take her. Maybe he doesn't know yet that she's yours. Force him to admit

Taylor shook his head, trying to shove the vicious thoughts out. Images bombarded him again, even more dark and dirty, of Eli holding Ana still for his penetration. Fucking his wife's mouth while the other man ate out her cunt, both of them driving her wild with pleasure.

No! No. He'd never treat her like that.

"Taylor, please, fuck me here. I need you so bad."

The dirty word coming from his wife's sweet lips drove him even further into his dangerously borderline feral state. If she had had his higher body temperature, she probably could have easily been fucked into a snowbank, but she didn't. And he feared what would happen if he did take her to the house to find Eli there.

So he hoisted her into a fireman's carry, ignoring her yelp of surprise, and made way for the huge storage shed. Despite its humble name, the space was large and neat, and most importantly, it kept the cold out.

After he entered, he set her on her feet on the concrete floor and gave her a terse order. "Strip."

Whirlpool © 2010 Vivian Arend

Forces of Nature, Book 2

Braden can't deny he's always wanted Chelsea, but getting involved wouldn't be fair. She has college and big dreams ahead of her—he has no desire to leave Jaffrey's Cove. Plus, there's the fact merfolk women often take more than one lover. Share her? Not in this lifetime.

When Chelsea's plans for the future fall apart, the only bright spot remaining is Sheriff Braden Marley. She's been angling for a shot at the gentle giant's heart—and the rest of him—for a long time. Except he not only holds her at a maddening arm's length, he somehow manages to keep other men away, too.

Enter Jamie Powell, a human marine archeologist who's in town for a cataloging project. His instant chemistry with Chelsea inspires her to try a sexy new tactic: make Braden jealous enough to stop dragging his feet and start leaving his shoes under her bed.

The ensuing storm generates a boatload of complications none of them saw coming. A forbidden attraction no amount of merfolk magic can erase. And the danger that their secrets could be exposed to the outside world...

Warning: Seductive shimmering lights, a sexy interlude on the strip club floor, mysterious Spanish lovers, and a trio caught in an eddy of intense sexual attraction. Swim at your own risk.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Whirlpool:

Chelsea licked her lips and let her head fall to the side. Braden kissed his way down her neck, nuzzling behind her ear. Her nipples tightened, one breast held cupped in Braden's hand, framed like an exotic work of art.

Desire threaded through Jamie, then one seam at a time yanked apart his inhibitions.

"Hmm, yes. Feels so good, Braden. Touch me, love me. I need it, need Jamie too." Her husky voice beckoned him, the sound swirling through the room, and Jamie grew lightheaded. The desire to join them, to touch and caress every part of the beautiful woman before him grew irresistible.

He wanted her. It was the plain and simple truth. Jamie lifted his gaze to take in Braden's towering frame, watching the two of them move in a beautiful symmetry together. Smooth, sensual.

So be it. In spite of not completely understanding all the whys, he was willing to accept it for now and figure the details out later.

They met in the middle of the bed and all his saved-up passion broke free. Jamie kissed Chelsea like his life depended on it. Her sweet tongue tangled with his, their naked torsos touching, the tight tips of her nipples hard against his chest. She caressed his shoulders, dragged her fingers through his hair, tugging harder as the intensity of the kiss increased.

Braden joined them. He'd stripped off his shirt and the bare skin of his arm brushed Jamie's side as they trapped Chelsea between them.

She moaned with delight. "Oh yes, this is what I needed."

The breathless confession did something to Jamie's heart. He'd desired her before all the chaos of the day, and for whatever reason he was receiving this gift, he was going to treasure it.

He glanced over her shoulder to see Braden smiling at him. "It really is what we want. She needs us both right now."

Jamie nodded, staring with fascination at the centers of Braden's eyes. Blue flecks of light reflected back at him. *I know what you are, man of mythology*. The temptation to reach over and kiss Braden no longer frightened him. Passion erased his habit of analyzing.

Chelsea wiggled impatiently between them, and Jamie willingly turned back. He sat on the bed to worship her breasts, laving her nipples, nibbling along the soft under curve. Braden slipped a hand over her belly and between her legs, parting the pale curls of her mound to play with her clitoris. He slid his fingers in and out of her passage. Jamie watched everything as he worked his way down her body, needing to taste her as the scent in the room increased.

"Braden, give me room."

Two men making love to one woman—he'd never done this before. There were points of juggling limbs he'd never realized. Braden switched his hold, bringing his hand between Chelsea's legs from behind. As Braden eased his fingers back into her sheath, Jamie covered her with his mouth, teasing her clit with his tongue. Her flavor filled him, made his head spin. He reached down and circled his cock with a fist, holding off to make sure Chelsea was satisfied before he grew too tempted.

They worked in tandem, Jamie matching the pace of Braden's thrusts. Slow now, then quicker, until she cried out, her body quivering between them. Heated liquid rushed his tongue as he lapped, dragging his tongue against her folds. Braden pressed in, again and again, prolonging her climax. Jamie's tongue brushed Braden's fingers as the other man slowly circled her clitoris, teasing the still-quivering flesh under his fingers. Chelsea sighed heavily as she leaned back, supported by Braden's torso, her skin flushed.

Jamie held on to his control by a thread, his aching cock reminding him he wanted much, much more.

"You're amazing, Chelsea, so beautiful." Braden kissed her neck.

"Please ... "

The tormented need in her voice made Jamie put aside his caution. No longer waiting to see what Braden would do, he rolled her to the mattress and covered her with his body. Skin to skin, her warmth felt so right under him. He closed his eyes for just a second to appreciate it fully. He kissed her again, this time a slow and thorough exploration. Tongues and lips and open mouths. He breathed her in and the darkness and fears he'd experienced all faded away. She was right. It was a celebration—of life and love and a passion that had been far too long unanswered.

The stroke of a hand down his back reminded him Braden was still with them, and yet...he couldn't stop. All his focus was on Chelsea, on the pleasure he found in her, the pleasure he wanted to bring her.

"You should see what I see." Braden's deep voice rustled through the air. He touched them both, his hands skimming Jamie's side. Hovering where Jamie cupped Chelsea's breast. The contrast of their fair skin and Braden's darker coloring—his rougher, beefier hands—showed clearly. "You two look like erotic Greek statues, porcelain fine and breathtakingly beautiful."

Chelsea laughed softly as she snaked out an arm to catch Braden around the neck. "And you're Poseidon, rising from the sea to love us both?"

"Hmm, it's not difficult to love you, baby." He kissed her, lowering himself to lie skin to skin against Jamie's side. Jamie watched in fascination until Chelsea squirmed under him, pressing her breast up into his hand, and he shifted to be able to reach her easier. He nibbled and licked, listening to the soft noises of pleasure she made, hearing Braden's whispered words of love.

Then a hand cupped his own neck, threading through his hair. Braden took control of him and turned their faces toward each other.

"I want to taste you." Braden paused, and Jamie's heart leapt to his throat. Slowly, inch by inch, Braden approached. He gave ample time to retreat, but Jamie wanted this. Wanted it as much as he wanted the woman lying under him.

With a satisfied hum, Braden brought their mouths in contact. Rougher, more forceful than touching Chelsea, but just as right. Jamie ignored everything else and simply felt—the caress of Chelsea's hands as she explored his back, the harsher touch of Braden callused hand trailing over Jamie's lower back and buttocks. The softness of her body under him as she opened her legs and he nestled tighter between her thighs. The curls on her mound were wet from his mouth and her juices, and they coated his cock as he rocked his hips slowly. He was enveloped by both of them. Surrounded and satisfied.

He'd never had such a rich and full experience before in his life and he reveled in it.

"I want you. Want you now." Chelsea pressed upward, her rigid nipples hard against his chest.

