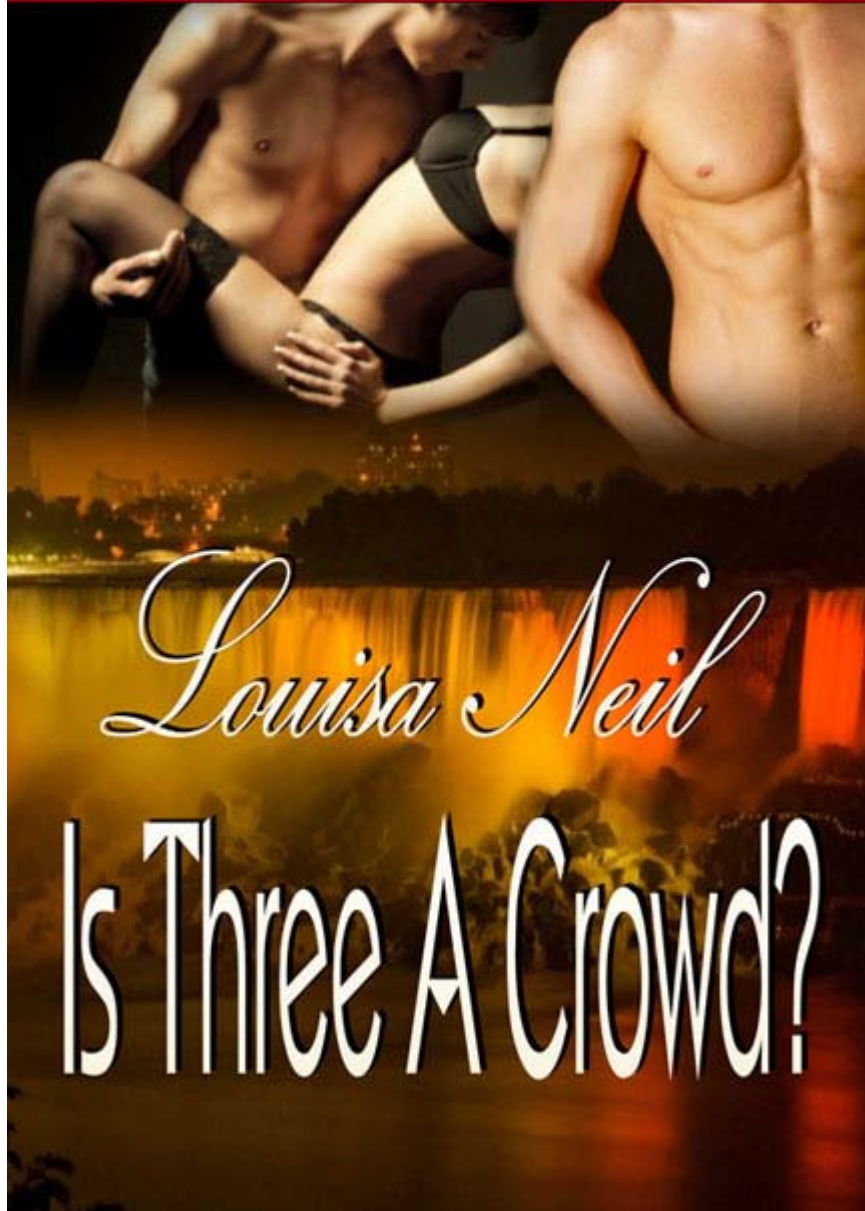


Siren Publishing

Ménage Amour



Louisa Neil

Is Three A Crowd?

Is Three A Crowd?

Five years ago, land appraiser Maris lost all personal memories after an accident.

Now, she is looking forward to a job in the mountains. Then, the sight of Nathan, the landowner, and his business partner, Blake, triggers a sexual response unlike any other.

Maris soon discovers both men were once her lovers, and she is shocked by their past ménage relationship.

Only finding out the details of her accident will unlock her suppressed memories and allow Maris to come to terms with the freethinking woman she once was. But getting her men to agree to continue their previous three-way relationship may be her most difficult quest.

Genre: Contemporary, Ménage a Trois/Quatre

Length: 67,439 words

IS THREE A CROWD?

Louisa Neil

MENAGE AMOUR



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com

ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **legal@sirenbookstrand.com**

A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Ménage Amour

IS THREE A CROWD?

Copyright © 2011 by Louisa Neil

E-book ISBN: 1-61034-224-0

First E-book Publication: March 2011

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

All cover art and logo copyright © 2011 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

PUBLISHER

Siren Publishing, Inc.

www.SirenPublishing.com

Letter to Readers

Dear Readers,

If you have purchased this copy of *Is Three A Crowd?* by Louisa Neil from BookStrand.com or its official distributors, thank you. Also, thank you for not sharing your copy of this book.

Regarding E-book Piracy

This book is copyrighted intellectual property. No other individual or group has resale rights, auction rights, membership rights, sharing rights, or any kind of rights to sell or to give away a copy of this book.

The author and the publisher work very hard to bring our paying readers high-quality reading entertainment.

This is Louisa Neil's livelihood. It's fair and simple. Please respect Ms. Neil's right to earn a living from her work.

Amanda Hilton, Publisher
www.SirenPublishing.com
www.BookStrand.com

DEDICATION

For my husband, my erotic muse.

IS THREE A CROWD?

LOUISA NEIL
Copyright © 2011

Prologue

They'd been tempted to bring her home earlier but resisted. Their perpetual state of preoccupation and arousal kept her present in their minds. Through the years, missed opportunities haunted them. This time they'd not make any mistakes, take any risk to lose her again.

After five years, they'd come to terms with the situation. Actually, become friends and respected business partners. Both had heeded her mother's wishes, not pushing Maris to remember them or the parts they played in her past until she remembered on her own. When her mother passed away, they saw no reason to delay further, especially since they knew she had no other family or love interest.

Their time had come. How they reintroduced themselves would be crucial. Their pact still stood. Whichever man Maris chose to be with, the other would back away to ensure her future happiness. While neither Nathan nor Blake liked the idea, it was the only way they could reason to keep Maris happy. And since that had become their ultimate goal, their plan was set.

Chapter One

Maris was always at ease on the job, but today, something was different. Even her dog, Shin, seemed on alert. Beyond company, she was a great companion and watchdog. If Shin was on guard, something wasn't right. The dog's hair stood on her back as she scanned the woods, on alert. Her low growling set the hairs on Maris's neck to prickle. Only leaves and branches fluttered in the light breeze. Pulling the collar of her denim jacket closed, she shook off the odd feelings, forcing herself back to work. Shin followed, her tail straight, her ears alert, her hackles ruffled.

Usually these jobs in the woods soothed her. She'd been looking forward to this appraisal even though she still wasn't sure how she got the job. Surely, there were qualified property appraisers closer to the site than her Manhattan office, but she wasn't going to argue when her boss, Ron Conleth, gave her the assignment. Surely, a week in the Adirondack Mountains could only improve her mood and hopefully her sleeping habits.

Shin let out a low growling sound beside her, the hairs standing on both their necks a second time. Maris scanned the area, still unable to spot anything near them. Her first thoughts tended towards an animal being surprised by the strange sounds she made in their serene forest. Today, something deep inside told her this wasn't a deer or even a bear protecting her cubs. Maris was being watched, but by who and why she didn't know, only this wasn't an owl peeking from a nest. This felt like a human presence. The skin on her arms prickled with goose bumps, making her rub her arms over the cloth covering them.

If there was such a thing as intuition, hers was telling her to get out, *now*.

Shin wasn't responding to her commands, a virtual first between them. From the day she adopted the three-month-old Jindo puppy of Korean breeding, they'd had an understanding of sorts. Other than general puppy hijinks, Shin was a centered, well-mannered dog. Maris accomplished this with consistent training even when it meant she had to get dressed at four in the morning to walk her. Through the last years they'd found a comfortable routine. Today the dog was distracted and non-responsive to both English and Korean word commands.

"Come, Shin." A snap of her fingers and the dog acknowledged her voice with a quick head turn but didn't move.

Glancing at her watch, Maris saw it was just past three. The sun would be setting soon, the fall days losing their light early. An innate feeling told Maris not to be in the woods at night. The hike out took twice as long with Shin circling around her as she walked.

Back at the hotel in Lake Placid, Shin was fed and walked. Maris took the time to enjoy the indoor pool for an hour before going back to her room to crunch numbers and plot the next day's plan over a room service supper. One last short walk with Shin, and they were bedded down for the night.

With the television on low to an all-night news channel, Maris prayed the dreams wouldn't come tonight. When Shin crept up on the foot of her bed, Maris didn't shoo her back to the floor as usual.

* * * *

Her wake-up call at six a.m. roused her from a sound sleep, something she'd not experienced in a long time. By the time she'd fed Shin and dressed, the dog was waiting by the door for her walk. Breakfast was coffee and a muffin in the truck from the hotel buffet as she drove to the site.

The early light gave her a different perspective on the land. After yesterday's intimidating episode, she'd been hesitant to come back. Now she felt silly, berating herself silently for fleeing early the day before. The morning went smoothly as she trekked around the huge acreage, checking surveyor's marks. Near late afternoon, Shin started to get antsy. With her work plan for the day completed, Maris decided to leave early.

As they neared her pick-up truck parked on an old logging road, the dog started to growl again. Safely locked inside, Maris would have sworn she was being watched. Her hands went clammy and her stomach soured, a cold ripple of fear running through her.

Something was there. Something or somebody was watching her. The engine didn't catch on the first try, and Maris broke into a cold sweat. Shin growled, baring her teeth toward the closed window. Forcing a deep breath, she turned the key a second time and the truck started. She was very careful to put her foot firmly on the brake as she shifted into drive. Maris slowly pulled away, Shin was scratching at the closed window. It took all her concentration to make it back to the main road. Just before the turn onto the highway she stopped, taking deep breaths and calming Shin.

Maris saw it, knew deep inside it wasn't a vision. Black beady eyes stared at her from the woods, watching every move from about three feet from the ground. This had to be an animal. What else could it be? She never feared animals in the wild. Rather, she tried to respect their habitat. These eyes had been different, hard and calculating—almost human.

With precise movements, she drove back to the hotel. "No swim tonight," she said to Shin who was eating her dry food as Maris washed up. "We'll take a long walk around the town, get to know the area better." Talking aloud to Shin was normal. She often held one-sided conversations since adopting the dog. At least she wasn't talking to herself.

Their long walk took a short turn when she felt uncomfortable on the main road, wandering the storefronts.

It was nothing she could identify, just the same innate feeling of unease. Locked in the hotel room with her fast food take-out meal pushed aside, Maris took her cell phone in hand and placed the call she'd been dreading.

While driving back she decided not to reflect her insecurities about the woods on the job. Maybe there was some confusion with the arrangements. Mr. Radulf's personal assistant, Aminta, had confirmed her e-mail with dates and schedule outlines. The phone number she'd been given for Chateau Munteanu was answered on the first ring, as if they'd been waiting for her call.

"Good evening, this is Maris Dusan. May I speak with Mr. Radulf or Mr. Aminta please?" Her voice sounded less stressed than she was prepared for.

"Just Aminta, Ms. Dusan. How can I help you?"

Suddenly she felt foolish telling a stranger somebody was watching her in the woods. Hedging, she cleared her throat. "I was just checking in. I wanted to let Mr. Radulf know I'm on site and schedule."

"Yes, Ms. Dusan, we're aware of your arrival and schedule."

"Oh," was all she managed.

"Is there something else?"

Maris wondered what the person on the other end of the phone was like. From his voice, she pictured someone mature, very formal, and probably European from his accent. She decided to try another direction. "Yes, actually, I was wondering if there were any other work crews on the site."

"Has there been a problem, Miss?"

Maris immediately decided she heard concern in his voice. "No, not really, I just like to know my surroundings. I'll get back to you when I finish the initial calculations." *Did that sound professional instead of paranoid?*

“Of course, Miss.”

“Thank you.” Maris shut the phone off, letting out a sigh. She made sure it was charging before settling into bed. Signals were hard to find on large plots of forestland, especially in the mountains. A weak battery wouldn’t help.

Double locked inside her room, she picked at her supper, losing her appetite when she remembered the two dark haired, dark eyed men who seemed to be everywhere she turned tonight in town, studying her closely—intently, she decided. Last night when walking with Shin, she’d seen another dark man across the main avenue who seemed to be watching her. She’d ended the walk because of his appearance. She’d dismissed it at the time, but she couldn’t put it aside tonight.

* * * *

What was happening to her? The question kept coming back to taunt her. The dreams had stopped the last few weeks, and she’d hoped somehow they’d miraculously disappeared forever. She had no memories of a time with the tall stranger with hazel eyes who ravished her in the dreams, his kiss and his touch so real even in her dream state. By the time she woke, the dreams faded, and only the remembrance of his touch on her skin remained.

He never gave her his name, never spoke to her. Rather, he appeared in her sleep, taking her to a wonderful place of sprawling lawns and forests to make love to her. Well, almost. Even in her sleep, he never actually put his penis inside her. His lips and mouth, along with his hands, roamed her body freely, bringing her to the eclipse and holding her when she fell. Maris knew she’d felt him, larger than her hand could hold, but he’d never entered her, only stroked her with his fingers. Their foreplay would turn frenzied until he’d finally pull away, his look of anguish embedded on her mind.

Lifting from above her, his wide shoulders blocked the moonlight as he looked down at her. He would dissolve from her sight and touch. She'd wake in her bed in her apartment with Shin sleeping soundly across her doorway.

The last dream had been different. He'd used his lips and fingers to arouse her beyond the pinpoint lights on her closed eyelids. He'd held her, soothed her, and when she woke, she knew she'd climaxed. Her own fingers slipping between her lower lips confirmed it. She would have sworn her thighs were chafed from his slightly graying beard, a beard she used to pull him closer. She remembered how her fingers slipped amongst the soft strands holding his tongue to her center until she felt the free flight of orgasm, confident he would be there to catch her.

At the time, she figured the dreams were some latent memories or wants pushing forward, a want she couldn't have in real life and so dreamt up. Surely if he'd been a real person from her past, she'd have remembered him by now.

Her nipples stood to attention, heavy with a need she knew his mouth would soothe. Her insides heated, making her liquid without his touch, only the idea of him. She let her hand slip down and stroke herself, but it wasn't the same. After several minutes of futile attempt, she gave up with a sigh. The image she conjured when she closed her eyes this time became disconcerting, reminding her of her other dream lover. Even though she was technically wide-awake, the dark stranger invaded her mind—actually her imagination, she acknowledged.

The image of this second man was the complete opposite of his counterpart. This man was dark. His brown hair was soft to her touch. His brown eyes reminded her of chocolate with a hint of mischief. She read lust and uninhibited confidence. His olive complexion and heady smile made her smile reflectively. The forbidden feelings he created were new and exciting, different from her hazel-eyed dream lover.

This man touched her differently. He wasn't hurtful, but he was rather gruff. He didn't slowly lavish her body with his affection, he touched her with purpose and direction. When he grasped her upper arms and drew her body to his lips, she felt the restraint in his hold. His demeanor was relaxed yet intent, experiencing the moment. He made her come from his kisses and touch. Her dark man filled her pussy with his fingers and dropped her from the cliff of orgasm with his tongue to her clit. He never put his hard cock inside her body either. While she remembered reaching to him, he too maneuvered his body from her reach, just as her fair-haired lover did.

Maris decided she'd found the best of both world. One lover was tender and gentle, the other brash and demanding. One lover was sensual; the other taught her body to lust for his touch. She acknowledged he'd visited her dreams, too, that he wasn't a figment of her imagination. He didn't invade her dreams as frequently as her green-eyed man, but he'd made her feel alive in a primal way she hadn't known. With a sly smile, she decided the perfect solution would be to have parts of each man at the same time. Would she want two men touching her intimately? Would they touch each other sexually? Did she want to witness that or be a part of it? Only if it was her directing them. Such bold thoughts had never entered her mind before. Now the images of all three of them intertwined would not leave her dreams.

* * * *

Maris sat up abruptly, moving to the bathroom and splashing cold water on her face. Shin slept in front of the double-locked door, unfazed by her bathroom break. Staring at herself in the mirror, her brown eyes and hair seemed the same. Only she wasn't the same. Deep within her, she knew something was changing. Maybe her memory was finally coming back. Maybe soon she'd find the piece of her history that went missing five years ago after the accident.

Dissociative amnesia, she'd learned, could cause a person to block out certain information, usually associated with a stressful or traumatic event, which left her unable to remember important personal information. The doctors told her the memories still existed but were buried deeply within her mind. They assured her one day they would resurface, triggered by something in her personal surroundings.

She could remember everything about her life, childhood, and adolescence. She remembered all her time at university and all she'd learned to achieve her degree in horticulture and landscape engineering. What she couldn't remember were the details of her personal life. She had nothing to refer back to from about two years before the accident concerning her private life.

After the third dream, she'd started keeping a journal of the dates and situations, whatever she could remember when she woke. There was no rhyme or reason to the dreams. The nights before and during a full moon would always produce her hazel-eyed lover or her brown-eyed lover. The journal made her realize her menstrual cycle was in tune with the phases of the moon, so she accepted that her hormones drove the unspoken wants. Maris had stopped writing in the journal then, understanding it was a waste of time. Now she let the dreams wash over her and tried to accept them. She crawled back into the strange bed and literally pulled the covers over her head.

"No dreams tonight, please," she prayed aloud. Settling back under the covers, she let her hand drop between her legs, squeezing her thighs tight hoping to ease the new ache that now seemed ever-present.

Chapter Two

Maris woke refreshed from a sound sleep with a renewed attitude. She had two workdays left in the woods, and then she'd move to the smaller outer buildings and finally the main house. She took time to eat the breakfast offered by the hotel and found the secondary road she'd marked on the north side of the property. At noon, she stopped to eat her deli lunch, feeling tired and lazy on a full stomach. She sat on the tailgate of her truck absorbing the sunlight, Shin asleep beside her. Forcing herself back to work, she walked along the north boundary and heard a strange noise. Shin heard it, too, growling and baring her teeth.

Maris's heart started to pound, her stomach got queasy, and she started to sweat. Suddenly it seemed the woods around her were alive, the presence of the unknown overwhelming. The woods smelled sour to her instead of fresh. Turning in a circle, it seemed she was surrounded by sets of beady black eyes. Maris panicked, screaming aloud with a voice she didn't know was inside her. It was an anguished noise, almost wounded-sounding. The noise stunned Shin, who stopped to stare at her while the woods around her became still, too still to be natural.

They were alone again, the set of eyes gone, the feeling of panic released. It was as if they'd never been there, but they had been, nobody would talk her out of it. Not that she'd tell anyone ever, they'd think she was crazy.

Shin's tail started to wag. Behind her Maris felt a presence, not menacing this time, rather reassuring. His warmth and spicy scent filled the air around her. Maris turned slightly, his large hands stilled

her. She caught only a glimpse of the light haired, bearded man. He didn't speak, rather calmed her with his hands rubbing her upper arms. Maris closed her eyes and basked in the security of his presence. When she was calmed, his presence faded away, leaving her alone with Shin in the woods.

Maris forced one foot in front of the other, and with a snap of her fingers as a command, Shin scurried in front of her through the woods, coming out about a half mile from where she'd parked her truck. A black SUV was approaching on the dirt road, a small dust cloud announcing the arrival. She walked slowly towards the vehicles, Shin running ahead to the tall, light-haired stranger leaving his vehicle, standing to stretch to his full height. His short beard was visible, but his eyes were sheltered with dark sunglasses. He bent and petted Shin until Maris reached their position.

He was extremely tall with broad shoulders and long legs, and muscled thighs covered in tight denim. He wore work boots and only a light turtleneck sweater in the cool fall weather. He seemed impervious to the cold, while she pulled her collar tighter around her throat. Her stomach knotted in a different way. Her nipples hardened, she felt slick and ready, horny. Studying his lips as he approached, she almost reached to him without thought. Instinct had her dropping her already extended hand as if to shake his.

"Ms. Dusan, is everything all right?"

"Who are you?" It was blunt, but what she needed to know.

"Nathan Radulf, Ms. Dusan, is there a problem?"

"What?" Maris was stunned into confusion. Before her stood the man she'd conjured up in her dreams. There was no doubt in her mind, although she knew they'd never met. Not at the office or by chance on the street, only in her sleep. He didn't try to disguise the overall look he was taking of her, but somehow it didn't disgust her as it did when strangers sized her up. She let herself take the same long look at him. His hand clasped hers, the feeling of relief and security

overwhelming. If Shin hadn't nosed between them, she might never have let go of his hand.

This was definitely off for her. Since the accident she'd become leery of strangers. Men mostly intimidated her, but she didn't know why. Right after the accident, her mother continually reinforced that her memories would return on their own, and that forcing the process wouldn't help. Nevertheless, they hadn't returned. She remembered all of her past schooling. Only people seemed blocked. The first months she'd held onto hope that one day she'd wake up and remember everything. It hadn't happened. Seeing her daughter frustrated, her mother, Margo, moved them from their Canadian home to the outskirts of Manhattan. There she finished school and turned her engineering degree toward surveying land. With the land, she didn't have to have personal feelings or give her personal history. She still remembered the name of every flower and leaf, but they held no interest. At least being a surveyor, some of her time was spent outdoors, not locked in a small cubicle in some nondescript office. Being afraid in the woods simply wouldn't do. Now, meeting the property owner in person shook her to an inner level of sexuality she'd never experienced. Instantly her body betrayed her. Her breasts were heavy with need, her lower lips moist and wanting. She had to get her act together and finish this job. Just because this man resembled a figure from her murky sexual dreams, she'd not assume he had any alternative motive except having his land surveyed. She was hired to do a job and she'd complete it. Maybe her dreams could center around a real person for a change. Yes, she'd use this man as the object of desire for her fantasies for a while.

Maris realized he was staring at her and felt her neck and cheeks heat up from embarrassment, as if he could read her erotic thoughts. Either way, he was quite a specimen. He was tall and broad, solid with a flat belly, large hands that dropped to ruffle the dog's ears.

"Aminta said you called last night."

“Oh,” she managed, silently berating herself for staring at him. *Get your act together, girl*, she admonished, pulling a deep breath. She may have dreamed about a similar man, but this man was a stranger to her. He was skin and bone and a reality in person.

Shin sat beside him, accepting his touch. Even her dog deserted her for this stranger. Instantly, she wanted to hate him and knew it was impossible, yet she couldn't get past the slightly smug smile on his lips.

“Don't laugh at me!” she said, with a bit too much attitude in her voice, forcing away the introspective thoughts, remembering this was business.

“I'm not laughing, Ms. Dusan, just admiring.”

She did hate him a bit for being honest. “What?”

He laughed openly this time, standing to his full height. “Mr. Conleth assured me of your degrees, but is he aware you can't form a sentence?”

“Why you smug son of a...” Maris pulled back the rest of her words, glaring at him.

“That's better, now you have a bit of color back in your cheeks. Come, we'll go back to the house and you can tell me about what's been haunting you in my forest.”

“I never said I felt haunted, Mr. Radulf.” *How did he know she felt haunted unless he was the one watching her?*

“I think you should start calling me Nathan, and Maris suits you, all right?”

“Yes. No.” She shook her head. “Yes, you can call me Maris. No, I don't need to go to your house.” She paused, shaking her head. “I have my truck.”

“It will be brought up to the house.” His tone sounded so final she bristled against it, couldn't allow him to direct her actions.

Maris watched as her well-trained Jindo trotted beside this stranger. Silently she fell in step beside him. Only when they reached his vehicle did she hesitate. This wasn't a fear of him, more a fear of

her feelings and emotions. Overwhelmed by the situation, she stopped walking. Nathan Radulf halted with his back to her, Shin beside him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Shin, come.” She snapped her fingers and the dog hesitated. This was a first. While sometimes distracted, the dog always went with her. Both people watched the dog look from one to the other. Slowly, as if with regret, Shin moved from Radulf’s side, coming to sit beside Maris.

“Thank you for taking the time to check on me, Mr. Radulf. I’d rather keep to my original schedule. I’ll finish with the acreage tomorrow and move on to the outer buildings.” Thankfully, she found her keys in the zippered pocket of her jacket and opened her truck door. With one last look of longing at Radulf, Shin jumped into the cab and moved to the passenger seat, settling in as she usually did.

“Don’t be foolish, Maris, come back to the house with me.”

“No, thank you. And just to clarify, I never told Aminta I felt haunted. I only asked if there were any other workmen on the property.”

He seemed to be debating his options before answering, choosing to laugh aloud but she caught the look of angst on his face just before he pulled it back. “All right, Maris, have it your way. Call Aminta if you need anything.” She saw he was still laughing as he took to the wheel of his SUV, expertly turning the vehicle around on the narrow road. He didn’t speed away instead Maris felt he was still laughing at her expense.

In her truck, safely locked inside, she let her weight slump against the steering wheel. “You’re a big help,” she said to Shin, ruffling her ears. “What is it about him that you left me for?” The dog turned her head to one side, then laid it down on her paws, dismissing the subject. It took Maris three tries to turn her smaller truck on the same road before heading offsite. Once on the main road, she glanced at Shin, who let out a deep huff.

“Great, now my dog would rather be with him,” she said. “You should hang your head. Just because he’s good-looking doesn’t mean we can trust him.” Maris wondered if she was telling the dog or reinforcing the concept to herself. She didn’t even know what color his eyes were, as he never took off his sunglasses. Just because he resembled the man she’d been dreaming about didn’t make it reality. His image soothing her in the woods at her moment of panic just before he drove up riled her. Did she conjure her sleep lover to comfort her or was he actually there? That would be impossible, should be impossible.

* * * *

Maris was thankful to be finished with the forest acreage the next afternoon. Nathan arrived just as she finished. He wore similar clothing: well fitting jeans, broken in work boots, and a thin turtleneck sweater. No coat, but sunglasses again covered his eyes.

“Any problems today, Maris?”

“None, Mr. Radulf. I’ve just finished the acreage, so I’ll be keeping my schedule.” She hoped to sound professional using his complete name.

“I’ve no doubt, Ms. Dusan.” He used her full name with an exaggerated tone. “Anything annoy you in the woods today?”

She wanted to say he was, but didn’t. She noticed Shin was torn between going to Radulf and staying by her side. As if reading her mind, Radulf said, “Go with Maris, Shin. Guard.” He left with little fuss, Shin sitting beside Maris wagging her tail. Maris swore if a dog could smile, Shin was.

In her truck on the way back to the hotel, Maris looked at the dog when she stopped for a traffic light in town. “You know, ‘Shin’ means ‘trust’ in Korean. How can you trust Radulf without knowing him?” She got no response from the almost sleeping dog, rather wondered again what was the matter with her. Technically, the man

had done nothing wrong, but he seemed to get on her last nerve every time they met. Still, instinct told her to trust him, too.

Maris forced herself to finish her reports before taking a swim and walking Shin. Tonight they strolled the main street, alive with activity. However, she got the same feeling she had the last two nights. Scanning the street around her, her eye repeatedly landed on a dark-haired, dark-eyed man who would look away. Shin was back on alert, staying close to her side.

Tonight the dog lay down in front of her hotel room door without being pushed from the bed. Laying in the semi darkened room, the television on but muted, she had a long debate with herself.

She continued to refer to Nathan as Radulf, trying to keep an impersonal distance between them. He was obviously well-bred, handsome, and rich. He knew she was attracted to him, and he knew she felt haunted by the woods. Why didn't she feel the presence today? She'd read the file Roland Conleth had provided, and he never gave her a physical description of Radulf. She knew they'd never met in real life. So how had she managed to conjure him into her sleep? Her room phone rang at the stroke of ten, slightly startling her as she hesitantly answered.

"Yes."

"Ms. Dusan, just making sure you're settled for the night?"

"Yes," she answered, unsettled by the call. "You don't need to feel responsible for me."

"But I am. You're working for me. While you're here, you're under my protection."

A long pause spread between them before she answered.

"What do I need protecting from?"

"You'd be surprised, Maris. Sleep well, nothing will bother you tonight." He disconnected while she looked at the receiver for several seconds.

"What is he protecting me from or is it who?"

Shin was antsy again the next morning, so Maris hurried to dress. She kept talking to the dog, telling her she'd be ready any minute as her fingers crossed the long strands of her curly hair into a braid. With an elastic band securing the bottom, she grabbed her keys, phone and laptop before putting Shin's leash on her. She stopped at her truck to deposit her computer and phone and strolled the back of the parking lot with the dog. Shin was more alert than usual, doing her business quickly without wandering and sniffing.

With the windows half rolled down, Shin sat in the passenger seat and waited while Maris ran back inside the hotel to grab a cup of coffee for the road. Shin was well-ventilated and would wait patiently for her. She always had in the past, accompanying Maris on many errands and trips.

If the aroma of coffee wafting through the lobby air hadn't smelled so appealing, she probably wouldn't have gone back. She'd slept well, almost too well, not stirring until her wake-up call. She'd decided to skip breakfast and just take a cup with her.

At the breakfast buffet she headed to the take away cups, waiting none too patiently while the man in front of her slowly mixed sugar into his cup. The length she waited in reality was only seconds, but a strong feeling of unease overcame her. Behind her, a large man approached. In her peripheral vision, she saw tall, dark skin, and dark hair. A chill of anticipation ran through her. She had no idea why, but her pussy had gone wet at the first sight of this stranger. Her nipples hardened, and she was thankful her jacket would cover the protrusions. An embarrassed heat chased through her body, to her neck and cheeks. Her fingers tingled with a strange need to touch this man, this total stranger, in intimate ways she'd not considered before. She had a flash of a vision. He was lying on top of her, his hands holding hers high over her head, his cock penetrating her body. Her body arched up to accept each thrust. She saw the smile on his lips, leaned up to kiss them, and then the vision was gone. Her hand holding the cup started to shake, and Maris moved from the line with

purpose, tossing the empty cup into the garbage. Outside she was clipping her seat belt when Shin started to growl. Maris turned automatically to see why and came face to face with the dark haired man who stood beside her door, a white Styrofoam cup in one hand. Maris tried to hush Shin and was thankful she locked the truck after entering. She had no choice but to lower the window, but only a bit.

Up close, she took a long look at the dark man. He was of European descent, his skin a dark olive tone, his eyes brown as his hair. He was attractive, probably in his late thirties, dressed in jeans and boots with only a flannel shirt covering his upper body. In her mind, she wondered if any of the men up here in the mountains ever wore a coat. Only when he smiled did her concerns ease. Shin growled in a deeper tone, but he whistled once to get her attention, and the dog stopped. Now her tail was wagging against the seat. Maris wanted to be annoyed, but couldn't muster the emotions. Too much was going on around her, and it was time she found out how she fit into the puzzle. It was becoming an inherent feeling. It was obvious that these men would have a part in her future, but just how they fit remained to be seen.

"I noticed you didn't wait to get your coffee. I brought you one." His smile would generally have seemed sincere, but her intuition reminded her to be cautious even if Shin had settled down.

"Oh," was all she managed.

"I brought you cream, sugar, and the fake sweetener. I didn't know what you'd like." He stood beside her truck door with his offering in his hands, almost daring her to take it.

"Thank you, I'm in a hurry." She hesitated, then finally rolled down the window only a bit more, watching while he put two small plastic cups of creamer and several paper packs of sugar on the cover, lifting it towards her. Shin began snarling and growling again, Maris's whispered command to calm unheeded.

"Your dog is protective," he said, eyeing the animal. As soon as he spoke, Shin laid down on the seat.

“Yes, that’s how she earns her keep.”

This time his smile wasn’t quite so sinister looking. “I’m Blake, and you are?”

“Thankful for the caffeine fix,” she said, avoiding giving him her name. She took the cup, careful not to touch his fingers. “Thanks again,” she added, putting the cup in the console holder, pressing the button to raise the window. “Consider this your random act of kindness for the day.”

“Never random, Maris.”

They paused, watching each other intently. “I never told you my name.”

Looking quite caught, Blake quickly added, “I overheard it when you were checking in.”

“I see, well, thanks for the coffee, I must be going.”

Maris shifted into reverse. Blake stood where he was, watching her intently. Goose bumps crawled across her skin as she checked the driveway before pulling out onto the main road. Several blocks away, she drove into a fast food restaurant, making a loop around the lot to find a garbage pail, depositing the cup, creamers, and sugars into it. Then she made a second circle and ordered a cup of coffee to go.

By the time she arrived at the Radulf property, she was still shaken, but back in control. In all likelihood, there was probably nothing wrong with the coffee Blake brought her, but she felt his trust needed to be earned, as did Nathan’s.

Chapter Three

Her day went easily, finishing early. Back at the hotel, she swam because she loved to and rarely got the chance. Why give up the perk because of a strange feeling? On her fifth lap, coffee man Blake came into the pool area. He dropped into the pool at the far end and started swimming laps as she did. The same inherent feeling of forbidden excitement overcame her, and she used the side of the pool to hoist herself up and out of the water. Pulling a towel around her waist and using a second to blot water from her hair, she kept her back to the pool. She knew he was watching her, knew there was nothing wrong with the one-piece suit she wore, except she felt naked, compromised by this man's presence. It should have annoyed her, instead of making her pussy creamy. Suddenly she was sex-starved at the mere thought of him. Seeing him made her body react.

In her thoughts, she wondered when she started using the terms *clit* and *creamy pussy*. Of course, she'd known the words, but they weren't a part of her normal speech. Yet it was descriptive of her symptoms. She decided her speech patterns were the least of her worries. She gathered her cover up and dropped both towels in the basket by the locker room door. She'd avoided eye contact with him so far, and all she had to do was make it to the door. But there was no mistaking his voice.

"Maris, how was your day?"

She stopped mid-step, having no choice but to turn around and acknowledge his presence. "Fine. Enjoy the water," she added, knowing her tone was terse.

"Have you eaten yet? Why not join me for supper?"

“Thanks, but no. I have work to catch up on.” She again started to leave only to hear his taunt.

“All work and no play, Maris, what harm could happen?”

If his laugh hadn't sounded so inherently sexy, she might have answered, but his tone rocked her, making her nipples bud. He reminded her of the stereotype image of the bad boy, his touch forbidden because he'd lead her down a stray path.

Too many things ran through her mind to answer. She bypassed the ladies' locker room, where she'd showered off the chlorine in previous nights and changed into sweats. Tonight she just wanted to be away from him.

“Sure you won't change your mind? Once you get to know me, you'll find I'm a nice guy.”

“I'm sure you are, but I'm not interested. Thank you for the coffee this morning.” Maris turned to leave but his words made her pause. She couldn't help staring at him.

“We'll meet again, Maris.” This time there was a definite message in his words and tone. A gauntlet was laid. There was no other way to take his comment.

A few years ago, she might have felt threatened. Now she felt exhilarated. He made her think of hot sex and mind-blowing orgasms. She remembered glimpses of the first dreams when his image visited so long ago. She was standing naked with her back to him. He pressed his body against the length of hers, taking her hands in his and raising her arms over her head, holding them against the wall. When he drew away, his whispered words weren't coherent, but she understood he wanted her to stay that way. She did, using her palms on the flat surface to steady her. He traced her form and pinched her buttocks. His sturdy hands grasped her hips and pulled her a step further away from the wall, leaving her balanced in a wide stance. Lowering his body to his knees behind her, he laved her pussy lips and anus, his fingers ultimately filling her pussy, pumping in and out while he thrust his tongue into her anus. She came with her whole body

shuddering, covered in a layer of sweat. He caught her in his arms, held her tight to his body before laying her on the soft carpet. He had a strange, satisfied grin on his lips as his image faded. The next day she assumed she'd have bruises on her hips where he'd held her in place for her oral assault on her senses, but none appeared. How could they, the images were all in her dreams, not reality.

She left reluctantly, suddenly wanting to stay and swim beside him, to watch his form sluice through the water. Instead, she returned to her room.

She showered and dressed quickly, still uncomfortable from the meeting with Blake. She took Shin through the lobby instead of out a side door and stopped to speak with the concierge about a take-out restaurant choice. She chose one across the street, sitting outside on a bench directly across from the front door of the hotel until her packaged meal was brought out to her. She tipped the waitress and was glad to be back inside the building, double locked inside her room.

She made a point of finishing her paperwork and paused, wondering if her phone would ring, realizing she'd be disappointed if Nathan Radulf didn't call. At exactly ten, her cell phone rang.

"Hello," she managed, in more of a squeak than normal voice.

"Good evening, Maris. How did your day go?"

"Fine, thanks." Her hands became sweaty and she almost dropped the small phone.

"No problems in the woods?"

"None. I was working on outer buildings today, but you knew that already, didn't you?"

"Not to worry, Maris. Have you had supper?"

"Yes," she answered a bit too quickly, hoping to cut off any invitation, glancing to the counter where her meal sat untouched. Suddenly her stomach rumbled and she bit back a laugh. She *was* hungry.

“You’re safe for the night, Maris. Sleep well, and I’ll see you tomorrow.” He disconnected and left Maris wondering what their meeting would be like. Above all, she had to remember he was a client.

Using the small microwave provided, she reheated the meal and shared it with Shin, a strict rule she hardly ever broke. Tonight it didn’t seem a big deal to give the dog a taste of people food. Maris watched reruns of comedies from the fifties and sixties as her meal was devoured in no time.

She settled under the covers and fell asleep quickly, her mind not hassled with dreams of good or bad men.

* * * *

Maris felt rested the next morning, more like her old self than she had in a long time, until she reached the lobby with Shin. Just outside the main entrance, Blake was waiting for her. Shin seemed confused, and Maris’s stomach went jittery. Had this man actually touched her the way she was remembering? An embarrassed heat chased up her throat onto her cheeks. Had she known him in her past? Was he a friend or lover the accident took from her?

“Good morning,” he said, his tone light. “I figured you might have skipped the buffet again.” His hands were each holding cups of what she assumed were coffee.

“Thanks, but I don’t have time.”

Shin suddenly stopped grousing and sat by her side, her tail wagging. The expression on Blake’s face changed. From behind her, she felt warmth surround her.

“Maris, is there a problem?”

Without turning, she knew from his voice it would be Nathan. She was never so relieved and thankful to see him, but it came with a hint of disappointment, too. Maris realized Nathan’s presence changed the dynamics of the situation.

“No, the dog...” she managed only to be cut off by Nathan’s words.

“Has good instincts. Blake, what brings you to the hotel this morning?”

“You know each other?” she asked.

“I’m staying for a few days.”

“When you have a perfectly good home not far from here?” Both men sized each other up. Maris held back a smile, never being caught in the middle of a male confrontation about her.

“Renovating, you know how the sanding and fumes can be. It’s easier to leave it to the workmen until it’s finished.”

“Yes, I do, although the timing is convenient. I see you’ve already infiltrated Maris’s life.” A look of impatience passed between the men. She realized they knew each other, but how?

“Just a friendly offer of coffee,” Blake said, his tone cold and harsh when he spoke directly to Nathan.

Nathan reached down to ruffle Shin’s ears. “The dog has good instincts. Say goodbye to Maris, Blake. There’ll be no more surprise meetings, do we understand each other?”

“You don’t own her.” It was a flat statement. “Why not let her choose for herself?” Blake’s brown eyes bore into Nathan’s green ones. Today was the first time she saw him without sunglasses. She’d been right, he had hazel green eyes. He stared at Blake, but she wasn’t able to read his expression.

“You don’t have the right to breathe the same air as her. I’ve given you some rope these past days, and you’ve managed to hang yourself.” There was a static silence between them. With Nathan’s hand on her lower back, she turned with him automatically, not looking back. Shin trotted before them, her tail up and her ears perked.

By the time they reached her truck, she was pissed. Just who did he think she was? The longer they had walked, the more agitated she’d become.

“You don’t own me, Mr. Radulf, and I don’t need your protection.” *Maybe I don’t want it. Maybe I want to be reckless just once.*

His hands moved to her upper arms, soothing her while he slowly reached down to press his lips to hers. Maris didn’t want to be kissed. She was annoyed and wanted to left alone. Only once his lips skimmed along hers, the anger subsided, and she found herself leaning into his body. Her hands slid up along his chest, feeling the muscles under her fingers. It was an invitation to his lips to extend the kiss. He took full advantage, his left hand reaching to her cheek, turning her slightly until she fit against him fully. When he finally moved to pull back, she held fast.

“You’re safe, Maris. Go about your plans for the day.”

“Why wouldn’t I be safe?”

“You are now. Keep to your schedule. I’ll pick you up at six for supper.”

“We didn’t have plans.”

“We did, you just haven’t checked your e-mail this morning.”

“Not yet,” she managed.

“Six o’clock, and bring Shin.”

“But—” was all she managed to utter as he left her beside her vehicle, confused and horny. The moment his lips touched hers, she’d gone liquid inside, felt her body betray all the wants she never would allow. Needs she’d steeled herself away from.

If she couldn’t tell a man who she was in her entirety, how would they ever come to trust each other? Living with amnesia forced her to examine people’s ulterior motives. She’d come to demand absolute truth from people she met. Yet through the years, she’d learned most people weren’t honest at all. Lies were her enemy.

Chapter Four

Maris was ready and waiting at six o'clock in the lobby, Shin fed and walked. She wore an ankle length black skirt, black leather boots with a slim heel, and a white silk cowl neck sweater under a black blazer with silk piping. Her hair was brushed down her back, the top and sides pulled away with a silver barrette. Her makeup was minimal as always, just a hint of color to her lashes and a bit of gloss on her lips.

Nathan was prompt, arriving under the canopy at precisely six. He was dressed in black slacks and black shoes with a white starched shirt, no coat again. The doorman opened her door while Radulf let Shin in the back seat. Once they were away from the main entrance, Maris found her voice.

"Where are we going?" She glanced over her shoulder and saw Shin napping across the leather seat already.

"Someplace special."

He said no more, seeming to enjoy the silence.

Maris watched the road, looking for landmarks, and she found several. She realized he was taking her to Chateau Munteanu by the main entrance.

"This is the road to the Chateau, to your home."

"Yes, I wanted you to see it at night. The lighting against the night sky is interesting."

"I was due to inspect the Chateau outer buildings the day after tomorrow." She tried to sound terse and managed confused.

"And you will, but the overall effect is different from night to day."

She sat quietly, taking in the scenery as Nathan drove them into the sprawling property. He'd been right, of course. It was a breathtaking sight. The castle was set on a mountaintop, the road winding through the forest. She observed quick snatches of the outer buildings, several small home sites sprinkled along the grounds, a well-lit gazebo as well as a glass atrium covering the swimming pool. She'd seen the surveys, knew the buildings existed, but hadn't ventured to think what they might look like. She rubbed her fingertips together with anticipation of seeing the greenhouses. From the plans, she knew that there was one large building with several small additions to it. The only odd thing about the assignment was that she wasn't to appraise the Chateau itself. She figured a different appraiser would do the main structure.

Maris couldn't remember an earlier time when the idea of getting her hands in soil intrigued her, even though it had been her chosen profession.

Maris felt as if she'd come home. Without thinking, she whispered, "Up around the next curve is a small Tudor-style home, two stories, with red tulips in the front garden in spring."

"Yes," he answered, not taking his eyes off the road.

"How did I know that?"

"Maybe you saw it on the plans, or in a dream."

Maris's head snapped as she turned to look at him. "What?" *How could he know?*

"Never mind, just relax, Maris, tonight you're off duty, just supper with a new friend."

"I thought you brought me here to see the house at night?"

"A bit, mostly just for a good meal."

She found she was irritated, and couldn't define the absolute reason, only that he always seemed one step ahead of her.

When Chateau Munteanu came into view, Maris released her long-held sigh. It was spectacular as promised. The stone exterior gave the large structure an elegant feel, yet the free form landscaping

and lighting softened the surroundings. Overall, she'd felt an odd shift in her mood, as if the house had been waiting for her, and she for it.

Maris sat speechless in Nathan's parked truck before the double arched front door. He sat quietly beside her. She could feel his presence, his heat, his intent. She became very aware of her companion. His silent presence reinforced her internal desires, like none she'd ever felt before. Lust became palpable in the vehicle, as their breath fogged the windows.

Too many things ran through her mind at once, like snapshots of times long gone. Some were in vibrant color and others mere shadows, some serene and pleasant and others dark and cold. Some of the memories took place here in this very house. Maris wasn't sure whether to be afraid or relieved. Glancing to Nathan, she found he stared ahead into the darkness.

There was no thought behind her move. She wanted to see his eyes, had to know for herself. With slow deliberate movements, she turned to face him, her right hand slowly going to his face, feeling the soft texture of his beard against her fingers. She gently turned his chin to face her. There was only the sound of their breathing as she took off his dark glasses and acknowledged the hazel green eyes watching her closely.

"Maris," he started, but became silenced by her movements. She used both hands to slip along his jaw, her fingers sliding among the short hairs covering his face. Her lips met his without hesitation and found him familiar, a mouth she'd kissed. She was accustomed to his taste, his tongue.

Nathan's large hand slipped under her blazer along her waist to the small of her back, tugging her a bit closer to his chest. When he drew back, his smile said more than words.

Maris decided his smile held sexual intent and a bit of arrogance, just short of smugness. Nevertheless, she couldn't resist leaning back for a second taste of him. There was no thought process, only the

want to kiss him. She pulled back when her seat belt halted her movements.

Nathan dropped his mouth over hers for just a moment longer, then moved his lips to her temple, whispering, “Welcome home, Maris.” He released her gently back to her seat, pausing only to take off his seat belt before leaving the truck. He was around to her door before she could comprehend his words.

He opened her door, extending his hand. She started to reach to him, her seat belt restricting her. Nathan leaned across her to unsnap the buckle.

“Come inside, Maris,” he said, his tone making her wonder if she’d heard him right when he said, welcome home.

Pausing before the main door, she turned in a circle several times, trying to take in her surroundings. Nathan opened the back door, unsnapped the dog’s leash, and let the tail-wagging Shin out. The dog jumped down and took off, investigating her surroundings. Maris started to call her back, but Nathan took her hand.

“She’ll be fine, just checking out the yard. You’ll see, she’ll find you later, let her run a bit. Come, we’ll have a drink before supper.”

* * * *

Maris would have sworn in her lifetime she’d never been in this castle-like home, but some part of her had been. Squeezing his hand, Nathan paused beside her as she stared at the main entrance.

“The floor is travertine marble, black and white squares. The staircase splits along the front wall running up both sides and meets in a center balcony above a long hallway. The railings are stone and there is a blood red carpet runner along the center of the stair treads.”

“Yes,” he said, confusing her further. The doors were opened from the inside, a tall, slim man standing to Nathan’s side.

“Good evening, Ms. Dusan.”

“Hello,” was all she managed. The entrance was exactly as she’d described. Nathan reached to take her jacket, and she absently let him, wandering the large space, her fingers running along the carved stone stair railing.

“Would you like a drink or a tour?”

“I think I’d like a drink first, explanation second, and tour third.” Deep inside, she felt she had to assert herself or forever be doomed to subservience in his presence.

Nathan laughed aloud, a genuine laugh for the first time in her presence, not like the snickering in the woods. It was a hearty and familiar sound. Aminta’s smile was reassuring. He was another enigma. Probably pushing sixty if he was a day, he was very poised. He wore a dark grey wool suit with Italian leather shoes, his starched white shirt a foil for the charcoal tie knotted at his throat. His smile was a memory, as was his voice. Maris looked to Nathan for reassurance.

“Please tell Cook we’ll have supper in an hour.” Aminta nodded and slipped away. Maris turned to him without hesitation.

“Drinks in the solar?” She smiled at her own words but wasn’t sure why.

“Of course.”

He motioned to the right, but she already knew the direction, where it was, and what it looked like. It was called a solar in its early days, eventually turning into a formal parlor with a large bar and several seating areas. There were magnificent ceiling to floor windows overlooking the rear grounds.

As they entered the room, Shin appeared, lying across the outside threshold.

“You were right, she’s back.”

“She senses your angst.”

“Is that what I’m feeling?” She laughed, relaxing into her surroundings. Maris accepted this was no longer *déjà vu*. She’d been here before. Which also explained why she was so drawn to Nathan.

At this moment she couldn't recall why she was drawn to Blake. She swallowed hard at the thought that she might have known him, too, in her past life. Why was she here, when, and how long ago? More questions formed in her mind, but she didn't ask them. The right time would present itself.

"Something similar, I suppose. Wine, or something stronger?"

"Just wine for now. I'll save the hard stuff for your explanations."

"Explanations?" he questioned, with a smile she'd seen before.

"Of all the things that have haunted me over the last months."

His smile told her she was right. He handed her a glass of dark burgundy, the bouquet heavy with fruit and wood.

"To the truth, Mr. Radulf." Maris lifted her glass to his, the crystal making a slight clinking noise as they touched.

At that moment, something clicked in the back of her mind. It was blurry, but it was definitely something, and then she realized she *had* been here before. She had met and spent time here with Nathan, and she had met and spent time with Blake. *Quality time*. She held back a smile of realization that at some point before her accident she and Nathan had been lovers. Her mind conjured an image of them lying on a plaid blanket deep in the back reaches of the forest, making love—no, she decided—fucking their brains out. She remembered being aggressive and telling him to go harder and faster. He'd brought her to a climax that had her collapsing under him, his strong arm holding her to him as he thrust several times more before letting himself find his own release. Both of them were out of breath and covered in a fine layer of sweat. Then the memory was gone, just as quickly as it appeared. The chill that ran through her body remained, as did her lower lips pulsing for attention, wanting to feel him inside her body.

"To the truth, Maris." His smile would be her undoing, and apparently already had been.

At least I know I'm not crazy, she thought, and decided to just let Nathan unveil his plan. It became obvious she was there at his

request. Business aside, she knew her job was now secondary to finding her history.

Chapter Five

Nathan realized Maris was too calm for the situation. She was wandering around the large room, touching a tapestry, then a piece of glassware. She sipped her wine before coming to rest on the window seat near the garden door. He closed his eyes against the sight. How many times had she sat in the same place when they spent time here? She had no idea, of course, only that it was a comfortable spot with a view of the exterior and interior of the room.

“Where would you like to start?” he offered.

“I suppose my jumping off point would be the dreams. Up until a few months ago, I was just an average woman trying to make her way in the world. I realize now it’s a year since my mother passed. Somehow, my dreams set this reunion in motion. That’s when I started losing nights to my dreams, when I’d awake expecting to find marks on my throat or breasts that I couldn’t reconcile. Was her death the trigger, or was it you hiring me to do this appraisal? Were you in New York, did I see you there at some point?”

“Both were probably the catalyst, but I never...stalked you in Manhattan.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Maris, all of this is going to sound a bit...curious, but with time you’ll understand and remember.”

“I need to remember now. I’ve lost years of memories for an accident I know no details of. I want them back. I want to know who I was back then, what I was like as a person. I feel as though the woman I am today is a carefully constructed façade my mother put in place. Is that right? Was I different when we knew each other?”

“Yes, definitely. You were always beautiful in mind and spirit, but now you seem afraid to just be you.”

“I don’t remember how?”

Her tone was even, almost calm, he decided, but there was an inner struggle going on. Her knitted brow and erect posture gave away her angst. Not knowing her well in this post-accident reincarnation yet, he could only imagine she wanted to scream with frustration but knew it wouldn’t help.

“We were lovers?”

“Yes.”

“When?” She held his gaze, wanting the truth. “If you knew me five years ago you know not to lie to me, especially under the strange circumstances.”

“It’s not like I can read your mind.” He paused and stared at her.

“I’m just accustomed to your moods.”

“Is that why you’re so calm, you know the answers and get to dole out the information as you feel fit?”

“Maris, I understand this is all a lot to take in, but believe me, I’ve no reason to harm you, instead let me guide you on this...journey to your history.”

“What if I said I don’t want to know? That I want to walk away.”

“You’re a free soul, you’ll make up your mind as you remember, hopefully in the direction I propose.”

“Will my history scare me?”

“Your perceptions will be different.”

“Since I don’t have any just yet, I suppose we’ll have to start with yours.”

“History lessons, I think not. I’d rather you relax and let yourself remember in your own time.” His tone was dismissive, and he saw Maris prickle outwardly.

“That’s fine for you, you’re not the one who gets flashes of a memory, only glimpses of a blank history. You have all the answers.”

“I didn’t abandon you after the accident. Your mother moved you from Montréal to the outskirts of Manhattan. She threatened to press charges of stalking if we tried to contact you.”

“We?”

“Yes, Blake and myself.”

“Blake and you! Oh, my God, did I have sex with both of you?” His cheeks flushed, and she held her ground. “Oh, my God,” she said a second time. “What kind of woman was I, two lovers at the same time? Didn’t you want me full time?”

“Of course I did, and I was as jealous of the time you spent with Blake as he was of our time together. That was your decision. You told Blake and me that you weren’t a one-man woman, and you’d decide between us eventually. Either we accepted your ways of part-time or we’d get nothing at all.”

“Didn’t you think you deserved more?”

“Yes, but you were very convincing and extraordinarily sensual. At that time I’d rather have had half of you than none at all.”

“And Blake made the third.”

“Yes.”

“He accepted my demands, too?”

“He’s younger than me, more open, he didn’t want to lose half of you either. He called you his erotic muse for his painting.”

“Paintings, he’s an artist!” It was a statement of recollections, not a question.

* * * *

She knew he watched her wander around the room, was taking in each movement, but her nerves were on edge and she couldn’t sit still. Eventually she forced herself to calm, choosing a sofa near the garden door. Maris knew this was significant in some way, and she gravitated to the position.

“What will help you remember, Maris? I know this is overwhelming, but in reality, you decided the timing. By letting your mother take control she kept us away.” He sighed, adding, “We wanted to bring you home sooner, but Blake and I accepted her warnings. She was a very intimidating woman, and we both wanted what was ultimately best for you. We wanted our Maris back, with memories of all the times we’d shared.”

“Did my mother know I was having an affair with both of you?”

“We never worded it that way, just that we were both close to you and wanted to renew that closeness.”

“She wouldn’t allow it?”

“She made it clear she had other plans for your future,” he said, laughing only a bit at the irony.

She waited while he refilled their glasses, obviously waiting for her to question him rather than proceed on his own.

“Have we met since the accident?”

“Not since before the incident.” Her hands fisted at her sides, anger welling at another instance she couldn’t change.

“Don’t get angry,” he added, seeing the glare in her eyes. “This is important, and I’m sure you’re confused. This is our future together, it’s important to both of us. It’s just that I’ve waited so long to see you again.”

“But you didn’t own the Chateau then, did you? I get the impression I worked here and brought you and Blake here on occasion.”

“That’s right. You were reworking the gardens for the old owner. He wasn’t around much, gave you a free hand as long as the gardens were upgraded. I moved to Lake Placid that summer to be close to you. You installed Blake in town, too, seeing us both at your whim.”

“Quite frankly, Nathan, I don’t believe you stood for that kind of treatment.”

“You have an amazing spirit, Maris. One that made men long to spend time with you, in bed and out.”

“I don’t know that woman.”

“Yes, you do, you’re her, and your mother just repressed all of your kindness and spirit, taking away your individuality. She made you meek and afraid.”

She glared at him but gave no verbal answer. Her lack of agreement was her answer.

“Yes, but I can see this is too much too soon. What do you remember of your mother?”

“Margo? She was kind sometimes, but often moody, not a genius with money or men. I think I thought she had PMS all the time and she should have gotten hormone therapy to improve her moods.”

He laughed outright. “I’m sure that didn’t go over well.”

“We were similar in coloring and height. I do have memories of two distinct personalities. Before the accident, she was almost lackadaisical, and after she was always on edge, on guard somehow. In addition, she had me very late in life. I always wondered why she didn’t have children earlier. She’d be seventy now. I’m thirty, so she was forty when I came along.”

“Maris, she tried very hard to have a child, you.” Nathan hesitated before continuing, choosing his words carefully. “Blake and I learned a lot about your childhood after the accident. It wasn’t her choice really, fate has its ways. What else do you remember from your younger days?”

Maris accepted that he was asking for a reason, to jog her memory, so she went along. “My father left when I was an infant. I have no memory of him, didn’t even before the accident. I don’t think they ever married, I don’t remember any talk of divorce, instead he just slipped away and she let him go. He never contacted us or me again. I’ve never looked for him. I don’t remember him, only that mother refused to discuss him with me. My childhood seemed normal to me. However, as soon as I left for university, she remarried with no warning. I didn’t know Walter Garnett existed, or that she was dating him. I came home for my first vacation, and they were married.”

“What else?” he prompted.

“I had just turned twenty, and yes, I’d lost two semesters of schooling to a skiing accident in high school, so I was a few years behind. My stepfather wasn’t thrilled with my existence. I was just baggage for him to care for. His children were well into their thirties when he married Margo. We never met until after they eloped. I always got the impression he’d thought I’d be different, but I’m not sure how or why.”

“Did she marry for love?”

“I don’t think so, I always assumed it was for financial security.”

“And your stepfather?”

“Walter, he always looked at me with a wary eye. I learned early to stay in the shadows and when called forward to smile and be polite. We found our own level of existence. I only came home for the holidays.”

“Your stepbrother and stepsister, how did they treat you?”

“Me and mom like a plague their father brought home. She apparently was nothing like their mother, and they never let her forget it. I suppose they understood he wanted a sexual outlet and companion after their mother’s death, but they couldn’t figure out why he chose Margo. But, with her, I came into their circle. They didn’t want anything to do with a stepsister reminding them of the situation.”

Before he could prompt her she went on. “You know all about it, don’t you? You wanted my perspective, that’s how I see it.”

“This isn’t therapy, Maris, just relax and tell me about yourself.”

Maris sipped at her wine, choosing her words. “We managed to get along for the first year. They’d see their father away from the house. On holidays, we all smiled and played nice until our cheeks hurt, and then I went back to school.” She didn’t add the details of nerve-wracking shared meals and holidays. She learned to dread Sunday suppers and tried to make excuses. “They started to turn him against Margo and then me. We were a costly intrusion into their

family, and they felt he should rectify his mistake and find another companion. I overheard them in the living room one Sunday afternoon. Later, I decided I was meant to hear their discussion. Then they didn't have to say the words to my face."

"You keep referring to her as Margo instead of Mom?"

"That was their idea, my stepbrother, Nelson and stepsister, Robin. When Margo and Walter married, they thought it would be a smoother transition into their social circle if I wasn't calling for my mother all the time. Their words, not mine or hers."

"What did she think?"

"I realize now she was resigned to being a peacekeeper between us. Anything not to ruffle certain people's feathers, namely my stepfather or his children, or any of his friends. She tried hard to keep up with what they thought appropriate behavior and style, but ultimately it didn't matter. They'd never accept her no matter who she became."

"Then what?"

"You know already. Why make me say it aloud? Do you think talking about her will make me remember?"

"I'm only trying to learn more about who you've become since our last meeting."

"I'm more curious why you would wait five years for any woman. Why put your life on hold for what? Only half my affections? And what made Blake do the same thing?"

"We both have our reasons."

"You've obviously struck some kind of bargain with him. What draws two completely different men to stand and wait, what don't I know?"

"We know less than you. One day we were lovers with passion and conviction. The next you were forbidden, completely unreachable. When your mother's lawyers intervened, we backed off."

"Does Blake know I'm here tonight?"

“Yes, we agreed to give each other some private time for you to get to know us, so you’d make an informed decision.”

“To decide between you two. You make it sound like deciding which coat to wear in the morning or what to make for supper. Don’t you both deserve more than that?”

“Yes, but ultimately me rushing in and taking you away before you have your memories wouldn’t be fair.”

“Nothing is going to get accomplished until I remember about us and I get Blake’s version.”

“Don’t forget about your mother. She took you away so you wouldn’t remember us, wouldn’t choose one of us over her in her old age.”

“What, you think she kept me away from you so she’d have a nurse as she got older?” Maris sipped the wine in her glass and put it aside.

“Let’s get back to your history. Continue on about Walter and his children.”

She drew a breath and turned to look out the glass window before starting. “Things turned when he started calling her a bitch, then a witch. His kids decided she was truly a witch, like a Salem-born witch with powers they were afraid of.” She gave a slight laugh. “I always wondered if she was a witch, why she didn’t provide better for us. Why not use her powers to make our lives better without having to rely on a man to provide for us?”

“Not all witches have the same powers.”

“I don’t know anything about that.” She laughed and watched Nathan finally relax. Maris figured he was waiting for her to explode in anger or throw a fit of some kind. She wasn’t in the mood. Anger took too much energy and she wanted to remember more about herself.

She laughed aloud at the absurdity of the whole thing, taking another sip of the wine. With definite care, she put her wine glass on

the table beside her, sitting forward, wringing her hands in response to the memories.

“I wouldn’t worry about that for now. What else do you remember?”

“They were separating when the accident happened. Of course, his kids said she was the cause, even though they were both passengers in a friend’s vehicle on a rainy night. The three others died instantly, but Margo walked away without injury. Since there weren’t formal separation or divorce papers, they had to give Margo a share of the estate, another strike against us.”

Maris watched Nathan, how his quiet presence calmed her, how he knew instinctively to let her take her time to recall the history she tried so long to forget.

“By then I was finishing school. I took my cut of the estate and left. Don’t think that didn’t piss off the stepfamily. The wills were never changed before his death, so his old one stood. At times, I thought to give back the money I’d used for university but decided not to. I kept it because of the way they ostracized Margo. I decided what I wanted to do and set about it.” Maris laughed. “You know all about those degrees, Roland Conleth told you all about them. No, I must have told you at some point.”

She became pensive and tried to think back. “Did you know me during or after grad school?”

“Do you wish to ever see either of them again?” He purposefully changed the subject, not answering her question. She decided to go on hoping he was pushing her to remember a certain point of information.

“The stepfamily, no. They weren’t family, just forced acquaintances.” She sighed. “I don’t know, I felt...ambivalence towards them. Neither would want contact with me now. They didn’t want anything to do with us when Margo was still alive.” She sighed again and realized her mood was somber. She didn’t want that feeling

mixed with thoughts of Nathan. Instead, she wondered if he'd make love to her tonight.

Maris heard her own tone, relaxed with a sensual teasing edge. She realized for the first time in her new life she felt female. With that came a strange feeling of power. "Tell me about our relationship."

"No. Finish telling me about your family."

"The last call between us went horribly wrong. I called to tell them about Margo passing. They assumed I was looking for more money and threatened legal action if I ever contacted them again. My stepbrother was quite rude."

"You called Nelson when Margo died?"

"Yes, why do you have such a strained look on your face?"

"Nothing, go on."

"I assured them I wouldn't. Nevertheless, the conversation pissed me off. He made me feel inferior for taking his time on the phone over such a trivial thing like my mother dying."

"Did you keep any of her things as mementos?"

"A few grainy photos. She wasn't one to have her picture taken." Maris could still picture her image. Absently, she wandered the room again, taking in new details, settling before the glass wall, ensconced in the garden lights.

Nathan encircled her from behind as she stood before the garden door. It felt right to be held against his chest, her hands clasped over his.

"We managed to spend an hour dissecting my childhood and apparently my misguided twenties, and I still don't have any answers or insight."

"You will. Let it come naturally, Maris. Let's get some hot food into you. Cook will have supper ready."

"Intuition tell you that?"

"No, the clock." He smiled and she joined him, feeling lighter than she had an hour earlier.

Over their meal, expertly prepared prime rib with all the usual trimmings, Nathan tried to deflect her questions.

“I still know nothing of your life, before me, with me, and after the accident. I’d really like to know more about you.”

Chapter Six

“We have time now, Maris, relax. We have eternity to talk over old times.”

“Eternity. That’s an interesting choice of words. Was it deliberate?”

“Both or neither, now that we’re together. Nothing else matters. You and Shin complete me, the Château, everything I am.”

“Hold on, buddy. I’m not completing anybody or anything. I’m finally settled in my life, and I like it. My apartment and my dog are what I wanted. I worked hard to get where I am, and just because you showed up in a few of my memories or dreams doesn’t mean I’m going to swoon and blindly follow your lead.” She hadn’t meant to say the words aloud. She was still confused about Nathan, and now Blake, and how she fit into this situation. It was obvious she was the catalyst of their threesome. She just didn’t know what her role was.

He seemed truly shocked by her words. His face couldn’t fight a scowl of confusion. Maris suddenly felt better than she had in months. Nathan sipped from his water glass to buy time, composing himself. Had he truly expected her to just go along with his theories and not question him?

“You’re tired, and this is a lot to accept. Over the next days and weeks you’ll settle in.”

“Settle in? What am I, a pet or something?”

“I just mean...”

“That I’m supposed to fall in line with your plans without questioning you or your motives?”

“I presumed...”

“You certainly did. You presumed I’d let you lock me away in some castle of horrors and listen to your stories for the rest of my life or until you get bored with me. What about my plans, work, friends, career?”

The second she said the words she knew she had no plans that couldn’t be rearranged. Her dentist wasn’t social. Nor had she any real friends—plenty of acquaintances, but not any close friends. Her job gave her purpose.

None of it mattered. He did. But she was loath to tell him. She wouldn’t, not until she had some time to think about all this and check out his history and wild stories. He was intimidating only if she let him be.

She sensed she was beginning to grate on his nerves. He assumed she’d accept his word and his plans without thought or input. Instinct told her this side of his personality had kept her from committing to him, hence keeping Blake to fill in Nathan’s shortfalls and Nathan to fill in Blake’s. She was about to ask about Blake, but read the erectness of his posture and decided there’d be a better time to find out. Their situation seemed to be unfolding around her. She’d wait for a better time to ask her questions. Besides, being with Nathan made her feel safe.

One side of her wanted to just let him take charge. That was the sexual side that was longing for his touch, his lips against hers, the need to feel him touch her in intimate ways and places. The other side of her knew she couldn’t. Not now, not until she could think clearly and make her choices with a clear head, not an overheated libido thinking for her.

She understood that being with him would be permanent, as would accepting Blake. Maris realized these two men were intertwined because of her. Until she knew how, she wouldn’t make any definite decisions. There would be no short affair, no walking away gracefully if they didn’t get along. For the rest of her days she would be with him. A heat ran through her, straight to her lower lips,

making her slick and hot, needy. She remembered how careful he was in her dreams. He never penetrated her with his penis. Was he waiting for her commitment? Or did he not have any other choice? Did her mind always stop the memories at that point, and why? *Because*, she rationalized to herself, *to let them literally fuck her, even in her dreams, would mean they'd possess a part of her.* Even in her memories, she censored their relationships.

“This room is getting cold. May we have our coffee in the solar? I know we referred to the parlor like that, but why?” She paused, adding, “Oh, yes, the dates of the original castle. Back then they would have called it a solar.”

She glanced around the room one more time. “Nathan, I have feelings of being here before, of spending time here and on the grounds, but no memory of people. You and Blake... and Aminta, he was always in the background, always anticipating any need.”

“Yes.”

“Blake was with us here?”

“Yes.”

“Did the three of us...”

Nathan fisted his hands at his sides. “I wouldn’t put it past Blake to tempt you into such behavior somewhere on the land just for spite.”

Maris flashed to the memory of sucking Blake’s cock in the stables and then to having Nathan fuck her ever so slowly in a missionary position before the embers in the solar fireplace. Both felt so real they had to be memories, not fantasies.

“I’d like to change the subject, please.” Her emotions were on full tilt and she wanted to love him and hate him at the same time.

“Of course, I figured you’d go running and screaming out the door by now.” He didn’t quite manage to hold back the smile forming on his lips, and she despised him for it.

“Wipe the stupid grin off your lips, Nathan. I’m not above slapping it away just now.” Maris’s words surprised even herself. Never was she so bold and outspoken, at least that she remembered.

He seemed surprised by her attitude. While she never accepted physical violence as a means to an end, she had taken basic self-defense classes back in school. She could get a good shot if she had to, but hoped it would never come to that. Tonight, she wanted to hurt Nathan because he held the answers she desperately wanted. He had her confused and emotional. She didn't think clearly under the circumstances. As they wandered back towards the living room, she caught a glimpse of his hand about to reach to the small of her back and saw him pull back. Shin was still in her place at the back door, her tail wagging as they entered. She decided logic would work better than emotion.

"First, Mr. Radulf, you brought me here, so I can't go running into the night. That would be stupid. I also don't think you plan to keep me here against my will. You will drive me back to the hotel when we finish our coffee."

Maris couldn't resist running her fingertips along the marble mantel before coming to rest at the chaise lounge near the door. "I'm going to finish the appraisal and go back to Manhattan where I belong."

"You seriously can't mean to leave this house or the town. We've lost so much time already, Maris, don't make us lose anymore because of your inability to deal with your past." *He's pissed*, she realized, somewhat taken aback. He always seemed so in control.

"I haven't lost any time, Nathan, except for some sleep. So, until I can wrap my mind around all this, I'm going to continue with my schedule and think this through. While you may consider that irrational insecurity, I consider it practical."

"*Women*. You are all alike. Through all these years you'd think I would know better."

Maris stopped him before he could continue with his rant. "Your 17th-century chauvinistic ways are treading in the 21st century. And, since this is my frame of reference, I expect to be treated with respect, honesty, and compassion. I expect to have my opinions considered,

whether you like it or not. Whatever you surmised I might have done with you reentering my life again is not how I will react. Wrap your mind around that for a while.”

Aminta, entering with the coffee tray, interrupted them. He placed it on a table near Nathan, retreating quickly as if sensing the thickness in the air around them.

“I’ll pour,” Nathan said.

“Please thank Cook for a wonderful meal.”

“Of course, Miss Dusan.” He shut the door quietly behind him.

“You are most infuriating, Maris.”

She watched him work through his anger and objections, holding back a small smile of satisfaction. She understood that if she didn’t set ground rules now, she would never have a say in her future, and she felt he was her future. In some unspoken, strange, crazy world, she would end up with Nathan only if she could bring him into the 21st century. He made her feel as if she were a piece of property which annoyed her beyond reason. Taunting him felt right and natural. His references made her feel inept, as if she need a keeper and he’d taken on the job. His next words frustrated her further.

“I suppose a few days longer won’t kill us.”

“More like months or years.”

“Months? You try my patience.”

“The Maris you refer to is dead, Nathan. She doesn’t exist in my mind any longer, just like you don’t have a place there, either. The sooner you recognize that fact, the better off we’ll both be.” She stood close enough to feel his breath being expelled, reaching to take the cup and saucer he offered. It was hard to turn away from his penetrating hazel stare. They held secrets he would unlock and share in the darkness.

“All right, we’ll start at the beginning. How do you like your coffee in this lifetime?”

She decided not to pick at him, as they were both on edge. “Black, no sugar.”

Without consulting him, she took her coffee out on the terrace, pausing to pet Shin while she studied the sky, hoping the stars might give her the answers she longed for. Maris had known for years that she was out of sync with her history. If what Nathan was telling her was true and he didn't turn out to be a raving lunatic, it might explain some of the awkwardness she always felt. He didn't follow immediately, standing in the doorway, watching her, waiting her out. Maris didn't bother to get annoyed with Shin when she abandoned her for Nathan.

"I suppose you had this whole reunion planned, and I've put a crimp in it?" Her voice held humor that she didn't feel.

"I'll make you a deal. From now on, no preconceived notions on either side. I have faith that in the end we will be together."

"Maybe. If we are it will be because I chose to be with you, not that I was ordered to. Do you understand difference?"

"I'm beginning to. You don't take orders." A small smile slipped across his lips with acceptance.

* * * *

Maris decided she'd had enough. The last few days had been intense and trying. "Since you've learned your lesson, it's time you drove me back to the hotel. On the way you can tell me what part Blake has in my past and clarify why his head is all but up my butt since I came to this town."

There was no question of the change in his body language. Nathan became tense at the mention of Blake's name. He was beside her instantly, taking the cup from her hands and setting it aside. His large hands dropped to her shoulders, turning her to see him in the light. He drew her to him, and she could feel the restraint in his hold.

"Don't trust him, Maris. If you believe nothing else, please believe that."

“Right now, I’m not about to trust anybody. And, for general information, Blake hasn’t tried to sabotage your reputation. What is between you two, and how do I fit into it?” She reluctantly pulled from his grasp. “That’s the only explanation for both your attitudes. Keep one-upping each other and I’ll leave, never to see either of you again.” She felt emboldened by verbalizing her thoughts, but the scowl on Nathan’s brow told her he didn’t. “I’d like to leave now. Please take me back to the hotel.”

She watched several expressions cross his face before he accepted her request. The vehicle was waiting outside the front door, the engine running, the heater turned on, when she pushed past Nathan and all but ran to the vehicle.

Chapter Seven

They were silent most of the way back to the hotel. As they neared town, Maris decided she wanted answers to her questions. “So what’s the story with Blake, and why don’t you trust him? More important, why don’t you trust him around me?”

Maris watched Nathan’s fingers grip the steering wheel tighter. “Long story short, we were once weary competitors for your affections, now we’re weary...partners, destined to have to deal with each other until you make a choice.” His tone was flat, and she wondered why he chose to relay the facts so simply.

“You seem to loathe the sight of each other. Why doesn’t one of you just move away?”

Nathan laughing aloud wasn’t the reaction she expected. She resettled in her seat, tugging the seat belt away from her throat. “Enlighten me. What did I say that you find so humorous?”

“I should let you twist and find out on your own...especially with your attitude tonight.”

Nathan’s words were low, but she heard them. Anger welled deep inside her, and she wanted to reach across the vehicle and slug the smile off his face. The instant the anger filled her, she realized it was not the first time she had had that inclination. Maris was never physical in the past she could remember. In fact, she refrained from most interactions with humans that required touching. The image her mind conjured was of her slapping him, but not his face, his buttocks. She blinked a few times, trying to rid her mind of the vision, but it only cleared, showing her she spanked two men’s butts. In a breath, she realized one man was Nathan, and the other was Blake. They

were both naked, on their hands and knees, and she was spanking them. Maris felt an odd chill of recognition rush inside her. Her pussy was instantly moist, her breasts heavy, and her nipples hard. The image floated to mist and disappeared, but she could almost feel the sting on her palms, along with the rest of her physical symptoms that stayed to remind her she was once a sensual creature. She let out the breath she had been holding in increments, not glancing to see if Nathan realized her instant arousal and panic.

“Maris, no more questions?”

“Too many to decide where to start. I think I’ll wait until I’ve had time to speak with Blake and get his version of this situation.” She said it on purpose to witness Nathan’s reactions. She wasn’t prepared for him to stomp on the brakes and slow them so quickly in the middle of the roadway.

“Why can’t you just trust me and leave him alone?” His exasperation was evident in his voice. He gently started them towards town again, driving slower.

“I might have if you hadn’t shut him out before I could make my own decisions about him. That was your mistake, Nathan. You should have let me make up my mind about him on my own.” She watched the grimace on his lips get deeper. “Or were you afraid I’d choose him over you? Is that why this is all such a rush? Are you afraid he’d be the one I sided with?”

“He’s a very dangerous man for a woman like you, Maris, with unscrupulous thoughts. He’ll take you without your consent and never have a moment’s pause about it. He just wants to win you and become superior.”

“It seems to me you’re trying to do the same thing, win me without letting me hear his side of this absurd history we seem to share.”

Nathan answered through gritted teeth. “He’ll call you slave instead of beloved.”

“I doubt that. I’m beginning to realize if your history lessons are true, I hold a power over both of you. Until I figure out what it is specifically I hold and you two want, I sense I’ll be safe.” They fell quiet until he pulled up before the hotel.

“Maris, please be careful. Think through everything before you make any major decisions.” He cleared his throat before continuing. “Maybe you were right about me keeping you away from Blake, but I do have your best interests at heart.”

“Nathan, I feel like leaving the hotel now would disadvantage my independence. And besides, I’m not about to go off with strangers. You and Shin seem to have a sixth sense going. Tell her to keep me safe.”

“You’d still be safer at our home.”

“I’ll decide where my home is.” She unbuckled her belt and reached for her purse. “Thank you for a lovely dinner and some interesting history lessons. I’ll be on the site tomorrow, appraising outer buildings. And tomorrow night I’ll be having supper with Blake, getting his side of this nonsense.”

Maris watched Nathan’s body stiffen with anger, and she understood she didn’t need to physically slap him. All she had to do was be herself and she’d annoy him in a different way, one she controlled without physical contact or much effort. She hid her smile at the idea, but suddenly felt much better, lighter in mind and spirit.

The doorman appeared and open the back door first, taking Shin’s lead and then opening hers, pausing to hand her the leash. She thanked him with a smile and turned back toward Nathan, waiting none too patiently behind the wheel. “I’ll be in touch.” She didn’t turn back, just walked directly into the hotel and to her room.

Safely locked in with Shin bedded down for the night, she realized it was the first time in a long time she held no fear. Whatever was unfolding around her or because of her, her vision of the two men kneeling before her gave her confidence on a new level. She instantly knew to wield it carefully, and she felt if used properly, her future

would be very different from the staid years she'd experienced. This was her time of coming into her own.

Maris picked up the hotel phone and asked to be put through to Blake's room. She wasn't sure if his name was Blakely or Blake Leigh, but the operator didn't ask. She was connected, and he answered immediately, his tone just short of mocking as he asked, "Is it my turn to tell tales now, Maris?"

"I'm calling to invite you to supper tomorrow night, here at the hotel. A quiet hour where you can give me your perspective on our current situation."

"That's a very generous invitation, Maris. Did you tell Nathan this is what you planned? I'm sure it made him angry to think you'd actually sidestep his instructions and make a decision on your own."

"I'm offering you a chance to tell me your side of things. If you plan on being snide, I'll rescind my invitation."

"*No.*" She smiled while she waited for him to continue. "I didn't mean to raise my voice. I'd be pleased to have supper with you and give you my side of the situation."

"Fine, seven tomorrow night at the hotel dining room. Moreover, Blake, I get the feeling there's trouble brewing, and I don't like it in any way or form. Whatever you and Nathan have between you will be put on hold until I have facts. That means no antagonizing each other. Do I make myself clear? Any trouble, and I'll walk away. I get the impression that's the last thing you or Nathan wants. So keep your act together and we'll talk tomorrow."

"We could meet at the bar for a nightcap?"

"We could, but I won't. Tomorrow will be soon enough. Good night."

"Till tomorrow, my sweet."

Maris hung up, slightly off-kilter from their talk. The way he said "Till tomorrow, my sweet" was too familiar. She sat on the bedside and closed her eyes. The image was clear. It was Blake making love to her, his cock filling her body while his hands squeezed her breasts.

For a second time tonight, her pussy went wet. She could almost feel each thrust of his body inside hers. Maris felt the same small shiver of climax she had when Nathan kissed her earlier.

“Oh, God, what did I get into here?”

Maris felt calmer after she showered and stretched out on her bed. Shin slept against the locked door. With the television on but the sound muted, she let her hand drop to her crotch. At first, she was embarrassed, but the sexual longing she felt outweighed her antiquated thoughts on the subject. Lifting the hem of her sleep shirt, her fingers lightly stroked her lower lips. They became full when she let her thumb lay against her clit, the light weight making her pussy moisten further. Sliding her middle finger back and forth between her puffy lips, she let it slip inside, feeling the moist heat her body created. She repeated the process, and soon her other hand was palming her breast and pinching her nipple. This was not the usual bedtime routine for her, and she wanted to be ashamed. Instead, she nudged her index finger beside her middle one, stretching herself wider. Maris came with her body shuddering. Releasing her grip on her nipple, she sighed. Then she brought her fingers to her lips and licked them, tasting her essence. Never before would she have considered doing such a thing. Tonight she wondered why she hadn't before.

Sleep came quickly, and she woke refreshed. The only reminder of her private moments was the slight aroma of her climax in the air around her.

Chapter Eight

Her workday went quickly, her mind clear and unencumbered. Wandering the property of the Chateau, she began to feel at ease, as if she belonged there, had lived there. Shin didn't stray far from her side and gave her no inclination she was being watched.

She passed a log-style home that wasn't on her appraisal listings as part of the estate. Yet Maris felt she'd been inside it at some point in her past. The smell of turpentine and paint assaulted her senses with the memory.

Maris envisioned her image on a large canvas, her naked back to the world, glancing seductively over her shoulder with a sensual smile. She'd sat for a portrait in that home. Somewhere there was a painting of her, but where she had no idea. Neither did she know when she'd sat for it. From her memory, she was much younger.

Blinking several times, she remembered the painting studio at the far end of the home, encased in glass, letting in natural light and the outside surroundings. She saw herself standing, hands braced atop a wood trestle table. Blake fucked her pussy from behind, her braced hands absorbing each penetration. His hands were wrapped around her body, fondling her breasts, leaving smudges of paint on her skin. She knew he'd come inside her and had pulled out, turning her body until she sat on the ridge of the table. Blake dropped to his knees before her and licked his cum from her pussy. Her body shook as if she could feel his tongue against her lower lips right now. She didn't force the feeling away. Instead, she enjoyed the shiver that raced through her body.

* * * *

She'd showered and dressed, and waited at the darkened doorway of the hotel restaurant until her eyes adjusted. Blake appeared at her side, guiding her with his hand on her waist to a quiet, candlelit table in a back corner. His touch felt light and natural. Maris should have felt nervous, but she didn't. All day she assumed the fear and anxiety would kick in, yet it hadn't. Instead, she felt relaxed and in control. They ordered white wine, and while waiting for it, she settled into her seat.

"What would you like me to know, Blake?" She studied his face, and saw a bit of humor cross his lips in a small smile. She was familiar with the smile, but not from this visit. It was a memory forcing its way forward in her mind.

"What questions do you have, Maris?" He paused when the wine arrived, approved it, and waited while it was poured. "We'll order later," he told the waiter. When they were alone and had each sipped from their glass, they sat across from each other, in a standoff of looks and questions.

"I'm here now, you have my full attention. What is going on between you and Nathan, and how do I fit into the situation?"

"In ways you'd never imagine, my sweet." He sipped from his glass and relaxed back into his seat. "What has Nathan told you?"

"Only that I should be leery of you and your ulterior motives. What does he mean by that?"

"Nathan always was a control freak, always wants everything to be just as he directs. I'm a little less...anal when it comes to the details. As long as work gets accomplished, I don't see why we can't have fun doing it."

"What is your business?"

"Same as Nathan." He gave her a shrewd look. "He didn't tell you. We are both half owners in the Chateau and land and all the businesses that are run there."

“Then why wasn’t your name mentioned when he hired me to do the new surveys?”

“I’m sure he went out of his way not to mention me. Under the circumstances...”

“Circumstances?”

“We’re co-owners. Both our signatures are needed for major decisions about the business. I was aware you were coming, and chose not to butt heads with him from the start. Both of us had the same goal to get you here.”

“And now I’m here, what did you expect?”

“Now you’ll have to make some decisions of your own. But I don’t want to force you. I’d rather you chose me because I’m the better man.”

She laughed, even though she didn’t want to. “Who am I? How did I meet you?” Even in the low light, she saw he became uncomfortable with her questions. “Squirming in your seat won’t help avoid answering me.”

“I’m squirming, darlin’, because my cock got hard when I remembered you sucking me down your throat.” He paused and watched her carefully. “What, no witty comeback? And please excuse the pun.”

“So I knew you in the biblical sense?” Maris knew at some time she had, but she wanted his perspective on the situation just as she’d wanted Nathan’s.

“We were lovers. We used to fuck with abandon.” He leaned forward. “We had a good time together, Maris. We understood each other’s needs and wants.”

“This was going on while I was sleeping with Nathan, too? Why would you stand for that? Help me to understand.”

He sat back, looking at her with a pensive stare. “Years ago we were all in different places in our lives. You met Nathan when he was lecturing at your university. We met on campus a few months later and we clicked on a personal and sexual level. But you didn’t want

commitments. You'd just graduated from university and had your Master's degree. We had fun together, Maris. Sometimes it's hard for me to believe you don't remember any of it, or me."

"When did you find out about Nathan and me?"

"From the start you were very upfront. You said it was casual with him and planned to keep it casual with me. I accepted the situation to spend time with you. I chose to take what you were willing to give, just to have you with me, even if it was temporarily." He paused and sipped his wine. "Besides, at the time I was still a struggling artist, not financially set as I am now. That put Nathan and me on an even keel. I'd hoped you'd eventually decide he was too old for you and would let him slip away."

Maris sat back in her seat, trying to take in all he told her. "I can't believe I carried on affairs with two men at the same time." She took several deep breaths. "What about the partnership, the Chateau, and the lands?"

"Just after your...accident, the owner you were redesigning the gardens for decided to sell the whole thing—house, gardens and forest lands, everything in one package. Nathan wanted to buy the Chateau and I wanted to punish him for taking your affections from me. So, I blocked his sale with my own bids. In the end, we decided you loved the land so much we couldn't let it go to a third party. We formed a wary partnership and bought the place, lock stock and outer buildings, each owning half. He manages the day-to-day work of the property, and I paint when I'm inspired."

"How long ago was that?"

"Longer than you could imagine right now." He paused and sipped his wine. "It all wound up about two years after your accident. We decided we'd punished each other enough for any two men, figured one day you'd come back, regain your memories of us and choose. That was when we struck the bargain that the other would leave gracefully, for your happiness, not Nathan's or mine. But be

warned, I will fight to be the one you decide to spend the rest of your life with.”

“Where did you get your money for the partnership? Were you independently wealthy when we met?”

His laughing aloud wasn’t what she expected. “No, I was just a broke guy looking for someone to discover my paintings. You brought some of my works to a gallery in Montreal. They loved them and held a show. Since then, anything I paint sells quickly. It was as if you were my magical muse. I never would have had the courage to just walk in and say, ‘Hey, these are good, and they’ll sell.’ You did just about that and set my career. I thank you for that every day.”

“I’m sure your art had a lot to do with your sales. And Nathan’s money, where does his come from?”

“Some of his was family money, and he earned a lot when he was still designing office buildings and museums.”

“This is all so much to take in. It’s like we’re talking about a third person I’ve never met. Do you live at the Chateau also?”

“Yes, it’s my permanent residence. But Nathan and I have different lifestyles. I bought the smaller log cabin up the road with the proceeds from my first sales. I knew you loved the land, and I figured I’d stay close to it for inspiration. Now I use it for private times and painting. I find it much more cathartic for me to paint there. It’s far more inspiring to be in the forest than a bustling house.”

“I really don’t understand why two intelligent men wouldn’t get on with their lives, especially once my mother cut off all communication. I never knew about you or Nathan until recently. After Nathan hired me to appraise the Chateau, I started having dreams or memories about both of you, but they were just snippets of time. I wasn’t sure if they’d been real or imagined.”

“We were bound by you, Maris. Not by blood, but coincidence and true love, with a lot of lust.” He gave her a smug smile, one she remembered.

Maris picked up her menu and scanned the pages, not hungry, just exasperated.

“Maris, some things are better left to time. Jolting you with information won’t help make your decisions, only overwhelm you.”

“I’m sick of being treated like a sickly woman who needs to be protected.”

“There are things in this life you know nothing about. One day you’ll remember, and then we’ll start over.”

“Why didn’t you come to supper last night?”

“I gave Nathan the courtesy of some private time. Tonight he gave me the same courtesy. It wouldn’t be right to overstep the limits we’ve set.”

“What if I wanted to overstep them?”

“But you don’t, you’re not ready. We both understand that. Neither of us will push you further.”

“I felt as if I’d spent time in the Chateau, but I didn’t have memories of being with you there. Why?”

“When I’m in the Chateau with you, you’ll remember our times together.”

“Why do you and Nathan both have ‘crews’ of men? What do yours do?” His smile would be her undoing. While she’d only sipped her wine, her body was already heating at the idea of his touch. He was similar in size and height to Nathan, but their colorings and attitudes were different.

“I have a crew that works for me, as does Nathan. Call them our private assistants.”

“When I think of assistants, I think of secretarial work and lawyers, I don’t know what your crew does.”

“They make sure things run smoothly.”

“So your crew watches Nathan’s crew, who watches yours.” It was all so absurd she laughed aloud. “Seems to me there’s a lot of distrust between you. Why?”

“Ages of animosity, I suppose, and a partnership he hates, which makes me happy. It’s a hard cycle to break. We’ve come to terms with the business end of things. It would be stupid to let that side of things go when we are both heavily invested in it. But we’ve both been in a sort of limbo waiting and wondering if you’d come back to us.”

“Am I here to break the cycle?”

The waiter approached apprehensively and she nodded for him to interrupt. She ordered the crab cakes, and Blake ordered the steak. When he left, she decided to be blunt.

“Have you ordered your crew to watch me when I was in the woods doing the surveys and appraisals?”

“To watch you, no. I’ve had them around town to make sure nobody bothered you, but I haven’t sent them to follow you. Has something happened?”

“No, I just got an odd feeling one day, as if I was being watched. It was probably just an animal I stirred up with my presence.” Suddenly she didn’t like the look of alarm on his features. “Blake, it was probably just a spooked animal.”

“Was that when you first got here, the night you called Aminta to see if there were workman on site?”

“Yes, but I’m sure I was just overreacting.”

“No buts, Maris. From now on if you have any feelings like that again, you call Nathan or me at once. Do you understand?”

“Yes, but animals I can deal with.”

“I’m sure you can. Let’s just make sure it was an animal.”

“What else would it have been?” Maris didn’t like his unease, and the tension between them became palpable. Watching his face, she realized he did truly have feelings for her, even if they were just for protection. “I always have Shin with me in the woods. She’ll drive away any animal I stumble upon.”

“Maybe I should send some of my crew or Nathan’s with you when you resume your work.”

“Don’t be silly, I’m fine alone. I work better alone, and I don’t need babysitters.” He was watching her with true alarm in his eyes, his body stiff in the seat, his eyes squinted. “Blake, promise me you won’t send out sitters. If I come across them in the woods, I’ll get cranky. According to Nathan, I used to be very cantankerous. My word, not his.”

“It fits,” he said with a laugh, settling back in his seat. “I won’t send men to follow you if you promise to be careful.”

“I’m always careful.”

“Sometimes things get beyond our grasp. Just remember that when you’re in the woods.”

“Are you trying to scare me?”

“No, I’m trying to protect you. However, you’re probably right. You must have stirred up a deer or something. Would you consider keeping a shotgun in your truck or a small handgun with you? I can train you how to use either in a few hours. I would make me feel better.”

“No guns, I have enough stuff to lug around with me. If I’m uncomfortable, I’ll leave.”

“Promise me you’ll do just that. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable or spooked, just walk away, leave the woods, and come up to the house.”

“Fine, if I feel spooked, I’ll call the Chateau. It doesn’t matter now, anyway. I’m through with the wood land tracts and about to start on the outer buildings.”

“That’s not what I asked, but I suppose it is the best I’ll get as a compromise.”

“Ah, a man who knows when to back off. You don’t seriously think someone was in the woods with me, do you?”

She watched as he shook off the conversation and gave her a smile. “No, I think you’re safe. But I’ll make a few calls just to make sure.”

She leaned across the table, all but whispering, “Who would you call?”

He sat back in his seat, putting distance between them. “It’s just a knee jerk reaction, Maris, wanting to make sure you’re safe and happy.”

“Speaking of happy, when we were together, did I make you happy, was I content with our relationship?”

“You, my dear, defined our relationship before it ever started. I accepted your terms to be with you. So did Nathan.”

Maris let out an exasperated breath. She felt he was giving her the same non-answers Nathan had. They both knew something she didn’t but weren’t willing to tell her. Maybe changing the tactic would help. “You say we’ve been lovers, but I can’t remember us together. I only get images.”

“Oh yes, we were lovers and confidantes and so much more to each other. I can see you’re aching to ask, so go ahead.” He winked at her, a familiar gesture she remembered. From where, she had no idea, but she’d seen it before.

“I’m working on the assumption that I’m not crazy. That you and Nathan aren’t. So where does that leave me? What kind of crazy history do we share? I’m finding this all very frustrating on many levels.”

“History can’t be changed. What we can do is influence the future, and I’d much rather talk about our future together.”

“Nathan had a similar view. What happens once I make a decision? What does the other man do or go?”

“You’ll be the one to open that door. Whoever you choose, the other will have to accept your decision and leave.”

“Wait, so if I decide to have a relationship with you, then Nathan has to leave the Chateau? And vice versa? Where would you go?”

“I’ve made no plans,” he said. “I wholly believe you’ll choose me, and Nathan will have to leave.”

“What if I choose to leave both of you?” For the first time, she saw the light in his dark eyes go blank. His brow furrowed with worry. “What?” she asked. “That is an option. I had a life before I was hired for this job. What if I want to go back to it?”

“It would never be the same, and you’d always wonder. Once you know the truth, you’d be willing us both to an eternity in limbo. No other man would pleasure you the way I can.” He paused as if deciding what to tell her. “Neither of us has had any real relationships with women since you. We’ve both dated, but neither seriously. You’re a hard act to follow, my dear.” He said it with humor, but she understood the truth to his words.

“Oh, please, get a grip. I may be the object of your desire but I’m not life-altering.”

“Your decisions are, to me and Nathan.” His tone left no doubt in her mind that he believed she’d control his destiny. Maris was thankful when the waiter interrupted them with food.

Their meals were served, and she found she had a ravenous appetite. Blake ate, but reluctantly, she felt. He refilled her wine glass and his, neither sipping the amber liquid.

“I have to walk Shin later. Would you like to join me?” She felt it was a peace offering. She wasn’t sure why she felt the need to offer it, but she didn’t want to walk outside alone, even if all their “crews” were supposed to be on their best behavior.

“Blake, you and Nathan and your men, will they all answer to either of you?”

“I suppose so, but with time we’ve both found men we trust and are confident will follow our orders.”

“So both crews technically work for both of you.”

“Yes.”

“You’re uncomfortable with these questions. Why?”

“Because I’m holding back, and I don’t like lying to you. But it’s clear Nathan has chosen to be careful with you. I won’t supersede his judgment.”

“Interesting. So you do have some respect for each other.”

“We both excel in different areas. Over time we’ve come to accept our strengths.”

“That’s it.” Maris folded her napkin and placed it beside her plate. “I’m done for the night. I’m not getting any more information from you than I did Nathan. Why won’t one of you just tell me about our relationship, show me photos of us together, notes we wrote, something tangible beyond just memories. Blake, please tell me what happened. I still don’t know the details of the accident. Mother refused, said the doctors told her it would come back naturally, not to push. She’s dead, and details still haven’t come back.” She let out an exasperated breath. “I’m in charge of my future, and I will find out the details one way or another. I suppose it will be another because you and Nathan seem loathe to tell me the truth.”

She reached for her purse. “Until I came here, it didn’t seem important. I’d built a life, nothing was missing. Since I’ve come here, everything seems like a sham, like I’ve been going through somebody else’s motions and life.”

“Come, I’ll walk with you while you take Shin out one last time.” She nodded to the waiter, who was beside her instantly.

“Coffee and dessert?”

“No, thank you, just the check.”

“It’s taken care of, Miss. I hope you enjoyed your meal.” He left them alone with a glance from Blake.

“I asked you to supper, I planned on paying.”

“I’m old-fashioned, Maris, the man pays. Don’t argue on this, it will just be wasted breath.”

“Fine, thank you for supper. I’m going to get Shin.”

Maris left him in the restaurant. In her room, she freshened up and snapped Shin’s leash on. Blake was waiting in the lobby for her, taking her arm as they left the building.

“I’d like to walk the lake path, but I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“You’re safe with me, Maris. I won’t cross any lines Nathan hasn’t yet.”

“What does that mean?” They followed the dog’s lead, taking a path behind the hotel and around the lake path.

“It means Nathan has only kissed you, and that’s all I’ll do, too.”

She paused to look at him, and he brought her swiftly against his chest, his arms to her shoulders, gently directing her. His kiss started lightly. When she relaxed and leaned against the wall of his chest, he deepened it. Maris knew the kiss, had felt it before. She’d kissed this man at one time, had let him make love to her, had made love to him. Pulling back, she shook off the strange feelings. In the semi-darkness, she saw his eyes gleam. He was happy.

“I should get back. I have work tomorrow.”

“Of course.”

One side of her wanted him to push her further, but the other side was thankful he hadn’t. He walked her back to her room, kissed her forehead and said, “Sleep well, my sweet. You’re safe for the night.”

“Safe from what?”

“Just safe. Rest easy, you’ll have no disturbing dreams tonight.”

He left her with the distinct feeling that she’d gotten no further with him tonight than she did with Nathan last night.

“Damn them both,” she said to Shin, who settled before the hall door.

* * * *

Tonight she’d made her decision. She would go back to New York and drag herself into the imposing bank, which held the keys to her past in their safe. She would open the ominous folders with all the papers relating to the accident. She’d read them for herself and make her decisions accordingly.

What didn't sit right within her was why her mother had kept both men away. *Was she afraid I'd remember them and my past, or did they have a part in the accident?* Maris wondered.

Chapter Nine

The next few days went smoothly—too smoothly. She didn't see Nathan or Blake. She occasionally would pass a workman on the site. They were polite, usually smiled, and continued on their way. Not one of them tried to engage her in conversation. Each day at twelve thirty, Aminta would find her, no matter where she was on the property. He carried a picnic basket and blanket, choosing a nearby shaded area for her to eat.

"Thank you," she said, taking his hand as she lowered her body to the blanketed ground. "Why not join me?"

"Thank you, but no. You should enjoy your lunch and relax. Just use your cell phone if you need anything."

"I will. I'll drop the basket up at the house on my way out tonight." He nodded and walked away. "Damn, I wish he would have stayed," she said to the dog, who anxiously awaited her treat from the basket. Each day, a bone had been included for Shin. Today was no exception.

With her belly full, she stretched out, using the tree to brace her back. In the shaded afternoon sunshine, she let her mind go free. Maris decided that it wouldn't hurt if she dozed for a few minutes.

She opened her eyes when she felt a featherlite touch to her hand. Glancing up, she saw Nathan and Blake standing side by side, both nude. Their erections were impressive, each man using his left hand to stroke his own cock. Where Nathan was fair, Blake was dark. They both wore the same smile, one that told her of their anticipation.

She knelt forward, running a hand along each of their bellies, watching their cocks jump at her attention. When she licked her lips,

both men groaned. Maris continued to fondle each man, learning the texture of his skin and what made each man surge. She took Blake's cock to her lips first, licking only the head. Then she took Nathan's and did the same. All the while she went back and forth between them, she kept her hand on them. As she relaxed into the action, her movements became emboldened. Soon she was licking and sucking each man, taking their cocks deep down her throat. She could feel their bodies tense as she swallowed them to the base, her teeth lightly teasing them on each outward motion.

"I'm going to come," Nathan said.

"So am I," Blake added.

"Then come, isn't that what this is about?" She focused on Nathan first, still pumping Blake with her hand. She lavished his cock with her tongue and teeth. Nathan came when she lightly grasped his balls. She swallowed his release and licked him clean. His groan was her reward, relaxing his stance, watching her intently as she sucked the other man. Focusing on Blake, she used the same method, and he, too, came with little prompting.

Maris sat back on her heels, licking her lips, a satisfied smile on them. She stretched and reached forward but she found only air. Opening her eyes, she saw she was alone. Completely alone. There was no one in view. "What the hell?" she said to Shin, who was watching her movements. "We need to get out of here, girl. I'm going crazy." She stood abruptly and started to fold the blanket, trying to dismiss the situation to a dream. She could almost taste their essences on her lips. Grabbing a bottle of water from the basket, she drank it down, hoping to clear her palate. It didn't matter. In some unknown way, she knew deep inside in her lost past, she'd sucked both men to orgasm while they stood side by side, outdoors.

"That's enough for today, Shin, let's go." She gathered the blanket, basket, and her computer and headed to her parked truck, a short distance away. Stopping at the side door to the Chateau, she dropped off her lunch supplies and left quickly. Today was not the

day to see either man, not after the dream she'd just had. It had to be a dream, except her pussy was hot and needy, wanting exploration. Her breasts were full and heavy, her nipples erect and aching.

Back at the hotel, she skipped her swim and wandered around the town, no feelings of unease following her. It was a beautiful town with all the shopping she could want. While she didn't buy anything, at every place she went, she was met with smiles and good wishes.

There's nothing wrong with that, she decided. They were all friendly, trying to sell her their wares. But deep down, she felt something else was going on. Back in her room, she lay on the bed, thinking about the dream. It had been so real. She could feel the texture of each man's skin against her fingers. Could feel the coarseness of the hairs covering their chests and bases of their cocks. Even their tastes were embedded in her mind. The fact that she'd even considered the act of sucking their cocks surprised her. In the past she could recall, she'd never considered touching any man the way she had in her dream. Even stranger, she enjoyed the process. Knowing she held the power to release them or stall their climaxes was emboldening. Never before would she have considered sucking any man's cock. Today she decided she needed two.

She slept for an hour and awoke to the phone ringing. "Yes, hello."

"Hello, Maris. This is Blake. Nathan and I would like you to join us for supper tomorrow night."

"Both of you?"

"Yes, we've decided on a truce. We understand we're only confusing you, trying to make you choose between us."

"So you're both going to be cordial now?"

"Tolerant," he answered, and laughed.

"It's a step in the right direction. What time?"

"I'll pick you up at seven."

"I'll be ready."

“Until then, my sweet.” He disconnected before she could ask him about the pet name. She allowed herself to doze longer, waking with an intense ache in her crotch. Walking to her suitcase, she took out the dildo she’d packed. It had been an impulse purchase. The day before she left for this trip, she’d been running errands and paused before the store window of a lingerie shop. They sold sexy undies and nighties, the kind of things she had no use for. But she’d wandered inside anyway. On a display near the rear of the store, were *toys*. She’d eyed the dongs, vibrators, and assorted items, her gaze landing on this glass dildo. It was clear glass, with several ridges and bumps, graduating in size toward the base. Maris remembered glancing around the shop before having the courage to pick it up. She felt the weight of it in her hand and wondered what it would feel like inside her body. She’d bought it, stumbling over phrases like “wedding party gift” and “gag gift for the bride.” The saleswoman just nodded and smiled, seemingly unfazed by her need to define the use for the item. Maris knew by the time she left the shop, her neck and cheeks were fire-engine red from embarrassment. At home, she’d tossed it in her suitcase and forgotten about it. Now she knew she’d use it. She wandered to the sink and washed it, letting the soapy item slip against her fingers, getting the feel of its entire length.

Maris weighed it in her hand and it had lost its frightening quality, replaced with curiosity. It was silly, but she paused and checked to make sure the door was locked. Then she made sure her blinds and curtains were closed tight. Satisfied she was secure, the butterflies in her belly dissipated and were replaced with an exquisite need to experiment with the glass toy.

Stripping off her clothes on the way back to her bed, she licked the glass phallus as if it were one of her man’s cocks. She lay back, propped herself on the pillows, and gently inserted it between her puffy pussy lips. Her body accepted it greedily. Stroking it in and out only a few inches, soon her breasts grew heavy and she reached to ease the ache, pinching her nipples until she found the right

combination that made her come. Exhausted, she lay back, surprised by her own actions, relieved of the tension she'd carried all afternoon. Whatever her dream lovers had been, they'd left her horny and wanting. Now, somewhat sated, she understood she'd never be truly complete without their cocks filling her body.

The next day came and went with ease. Only as she drove back to the hotel did the butterflies in her stomach begin.

While showering and dressing for her evening with the men, she wondered if they'd been able to tell she'd masturbated just after Blake called with their dinner invitation. Would they care, and did it matter to her if they knew she satisfied herself? For now, only an inner calm remained from her afternoon of experimenting.

* * * *

She walked to the front entrance of the hotel and saw Nathan's truck waiting. Aminta exited the vehicle and opened the passenger door for her, taking Shin's lead and letting her in the back seat. Once belted in and away from the hotel, she turned to the older man, studying his features. Before she could ask, he seemed to read her mind.

"The masters decided to let me pick you up," he said, seemingly uncomfortable in his chauffeur position.

"Was that part of the tactical truce, or to give me time to ask you questions they won't answer?"

"I do as I'm asked, by both men."

"Did they ask you not to talk to me?"

"No, both trust me."

"Why do I feel as though I can trust you when we've only met a few times and have said fewer words?"

"It must be the familiar times we once spent together."

"Familiar as in?"

“We spent time together in the past. My family has always worked for the owners of the Chateau.”

“How many generations of them?”

“Time is only relevant in the moment.”

“Don’t give me that crap, too. Just once, I’d like a straight answer. You say you’ve worked for the past owners—did Blake and Nathan inherit you when they bought the place?”

“Yes.”

“Then I knew you before you knew either man.” She sat back and digested this new information.

“Yes.”

“How?” She could hardly force the words between her dry lips. Finally, someone would tell her about her past. She felt his discomfort as he slid his index finger under his collar. She would have laughed, but he seemed so uptight. “Please be truthful, Aminta.”

“You first came to the Chateau to redesign the gardens. The last owner had let them go to seed and only realized his error when he tried to sell it the first time. With no interest, he was advised by the realtor to make it more appealing.” He cleared his throat and continued. “That was when he hired you to bring the gardens back to life.”

“Was he a short, balding man with a leering smile?”

“He was seen that way, yes.”

“Okay, don’t remember his name, don’t care. That was how I came from Montreal to this lake region.” For the first time in years, she remembered something on her own. While it was a repulsive ex-boss, apparently her time frame of memories was coming back. “What happened next?”

“Eventually, after you had the job underway, you brought each of the men to see your progress. Both of them came to appreciate your work and the grounds. Nathan especially understood the architecture of the home and the repairs that were needed. Blake saw the lands as a canvas he needed to paint.”

“So I brought them each here to admire my handiwork. Did you know about our affairs?”

“That was none of my business. As long as the work in the gardens was progressing, your private life was not my concern.”

“Well that sounds all prim and proper, but weren’t you a bit...I mean, the two of them at the same time. I just don’t get that about myself.”

“Maybe you should look at this from a different perspective. Five years ago, you were a young graduate with a degree burning in your hand. You took one look at the neglected grounds and cried. It became your mission to bring them back, better than before.”

“Did I manage that?”

“Oh yes, to the surprise of everyone. It was a large job to tackle, and you decided to spend your budget on plants instead of workmen.” He smiled, but didn’t share the memory with her. He seemed intent on the road stretching before them.

“And?”

“During the time you spent here, almost a year on and off, sometimes you had visitors. Nathan or Blake.”

“The little stone house up near the gate. I stayed there, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you called it your oasis from the job and the glitz of the main house. As I recall, you only began to appreciate the house itself after Nathan pointed out specifics about its structure.”

“And Blake wanted to paint.”

“Both men came to appreciate the home and lands, separately but differently.”

“Was I working here when I had the accident?”

“No, you had just finished. Fall was setting in, and you were pleased with the way things were filling in. You said you’d come back after the first of the year to see how it looked in the winter.”

“I never came back in the winter, did I?” As she spoke the words aloud, she realized it wasn’t an answer from Aminta she was waiting for. She was wondering why her mother kept her from this place. “My

accident didn't happen here, on these grounds, did it?" Her palms became sweaty, waiting.

"No, Miss. You were back North when that happened. We were told through a lawyer you'd not be back in the spring."

"Nathan and Blake?"

His smile made her want to believe everything would all work out. "They continued to visit. The owner welcomed Nathan because of his background and pumped him for renovation advice. Blake always seemed to show up when he was away. Oh, he'd not make a fuss, just set up an easel and chair beside the lake or in the driveway. He'd paint for hours as if possessed by the view. That was just around when he bought the old log cabin.

"The sale of the Chateau?"

"When the owner let it be known it was back on the market again, Nathan and Blake both wanted it."

"And if I decide to leave the Chateau, if I decide I don't want either man, do you know what happens?" She saw a look of strained horror cross his brow when she asked, but he didn't take his eyes off the road.

"I sincerely hope that won't happen, Miss. Both men deserve a happy future. Both have earned it through the years."

"How many years?"

"It's been several years now that they're partners, the last two they came to terms with their situation." Hesitantly he added, "You'll recognize your inheritance with time. It will all fall into place."

"I'm asking you, Aminta." Maris knew she was putting the butler in an awkward position and didn't really care. Both of her men knew she'd talk to him on the ride, and they chose to send him instead of coming for her themselves. After yesterday's dream and afternoon of self-pleasure, she'd found a new level of contentment and self-awareness that allowed her to be bold and blunt. She liked the powerful feeling that came with confidence.

“My inheritance, that’s a new way of wording this whole charade. Just what is my inheritance?”

“Your memories will unlock your past and your future. You’ll know when the time is right. You’ll remember it all, and then you’ll make your decisions.”

They turned onto the private road to the Chateau before she was ready to end their talk. “Thank you for the ride, and almost answering my questions.”

“Miss Dusan,” he said, slowing on the private road to the main house. “Please don’t make any rash decisions, and don’t hold the situation against Nathan or Blake. They’re as caught up in it as you are. None of you asked for this, but you are all involved. Please think carefully before you make any necessary decisions. There are three futures at stake. Yours and your two men.”

Maris was startled at the tone of his words, realizing Aminta truly cared about Nathan and Blake, and apparently, her. “You knew I was having an affair with both men. Did the original owner that hired me know?”

“No, he hired you to do a job and never thought twice beyond that. He was away most of the time you were here. He preferred a social life in the bigger cities than life at the Chateau. He bought it as a status symbol, then hated living here, away from the nightlife. Oh, he liked to brag about his ownership, but he never connected with the site the way you did, or your men.”

“Nathan and Blake?”

“You brought both men to see the work you were accomplishing with the gardens. It was apparent you had feelings for both.”

“Did that bother you?”

“No. You were young and just out of university, trying to prove yourself in your field. Blake was just starting his painting career, and Nathan was still designing building and museums, along with occasional seminars at the college. But you must remember this was all five years ago, when times were different.”

“I wish I could remember. I wish my mother hadn’t taken away the chance for me to remember. I can only assume she wasn’t happy with my social activities.”

“You’re in control of your future now. You will remember when you’re ready.”

“If Nathan hadn’t brought me back to do the appraisal, I never would have known any of this. Never thought to look for my past.”

“Your appraisal work is complete. Once you choose, the other man will leave. That was the point of the appraisal, so the partnership could be dissolved equitably.”

“I don’t want to be responsible for either leaving.” The weight of this was all beginning to wear on her. She didn’t want to be the reason one of her men left the land and home they’d come to love.

“Maybe you’ll find a way to make it work for all of you. Think about it from that perspective.”

Maris caught the tilt of his lips as he held back a smile. “Aminta, I’m going back to Manhattan for a few days. I have work to clear up and files to be retrieved from the bank. Would you mind if I left Shin here while I’m gone? I know it’s an imposition, but I’ll get things done more quickly on my own.”

“Of course she can stay here. She’s made herself at home already. It won’t be a problem.”

“Thanks, I appreciate your help.”

“Why not take the time you need in the city to wrap up your old life before you start your future. Seems that would be the best solution, nothing left behind to hold you back. Then your decisions will be made with a clear mind.”

“I will,” she mumbled, and didn’t wait for him to come around and open her car door. She assumed he’d take care of Shin as she headed to the front door. Now she began to wonder if his picking her up wasn’t very well thought out in advance. The house was opened from the inside by a uniformed maid.

“The masters are in the parlor awaiting your arrival.”

“Thank you,” she managed. She drew a deep breath and wandered toward them, knowing her future as she’d expected would change tonight. She was fearful and excited at the prospect.

Both men were waiting with glasses in hand. Nathan stood beside the fireplace wearing dark slacks and a lighter button-down shirt. Blake was standing by the back glass doors. He was dressed in jeans and a three-button shirt. She glanced to each one and decided the green color of Blake’s shirt would compliment Nathan’s eyes and coloring.

“Good evening, gentlemen. I see you’ve decided to call a truce, sending Aminta to fetch me. You can rest assured he didn’t relate anything of my history I hadn’t already remembered.”

“Good evening, Maris. What would you like to drink?” Blake wandered towards the bar.

“Just mineral water for now, thank you. Nathan, good evening.” She saw his jaw tense for just a second and held back her smile. It was quite apparent he wasn’t happy with the situation.

Accepting the glass from Blake, she chose the lounge chair by the patio doors she’d favored from her last visit. Both men seemed unyielding, and she wanted to laugh aloud but didn’t. Instead, she decided to use some of her newfound courage. “I’ve made a decision that affects all of us.” She waited until she had their complete attention before continuing. “I asked Aminta to take care of Shin for a while. I’m heading back to Manhattan for a bit. I have to finish some work at the office and arrange for vacation time. I will also retrieve the files on my accident that I’ve never had the courage to read. Then I’d like to come back and stay at the stone house up by the gates for a bit while I go through all the files and figure out where this life is leading us all. It seems I’d been comfortable there in the past. Do either of you have a problem with that?”

“I’ll take you back to the city,” Nathan said quickly.

“We’ll both take her back to the city,” Blake said at the same time. She watched as the men glanced to each other and back to her.

“Down, boys, I said I’m going back alone.” She paused to see their reaction. Neither seemed happy with her decision. “I can get a lot more done on my own.” Nathan glared at her with half closed eyes. Blake chose to smile and nod.

“You’re enjoying our discomfort,” Nathan declared, “a bit too much for my liking.” His tone inferred he didn’t like the situation, and Maris decided it was because he wasn’t in control. “Why go alone? I...we could all go, turn it into a vacation of sorts.” He glared at her again when she began to laugh in earnest.

“Because this isn’t a vacation. I’m going back because I’ve finally got my courage up to retrieve the accident files, and my medical history, and any other information that might trigger something in my memory.” She stood and paced before the glass wall. “The best thing you two can do for me is be here when I get back.”

Blake stood and put his glass aside. “How about a deal. We’ll let you go without following you, if you promise not to read the files until you’re back here and we’re close by.” She saw the look of attempted mediation in his eyes, an exaggerated wink Nathan couldn’t see. Glancing to Nathan, she saw his expression turn to exasperation.

“Oh, my, you’re on a short leash,” she said, goading a response. Nathan glared at her but pulled himself back, using his drink as a diversion.

“Blake, why don’t you want me to read the files alone?”

“Because you don’t know what’s in them. It’s better to be comfortable here at home than alone in New York City. We can offer you moral support.” He glanced to Nathan. “Right about now, I’d say a good meal and answers to the questions we’ve avoided is in line, especially since we want you to have our perspective on the situation.”

“Blake,” Nathan chastised, trying to hush him.

“No, let him talk, at least he answers me, he doesn’t assume I’ll follow him blindly.”

“Oh, hell, I hate this whole charade.”

“We all do, but we decided to take our time and let Maris come into her lost knowledge naturally. It was our agreement, one I don’t plan to break.”

“Just how will I come into this knowledge naturally?”

“Your mother’s files. Surely somewhere in them you’ll find keys to the information you’re missing.” Blake watched her closely, winking at her again when he thought Nathan couldn’t see.

Maris decided this whole situation was absurd and changed the dynamic. She didn’t feel this was the best time to assert her new perspective. Nathan seemed truly upset, and she didn’t want to be the cause of his further heartache.

“Well, I agree about the food. Shall we? Suddenly I’m starved. I’m not sure if it’s because Nathan is so angry and you’re just on edge, but I find I’m famished.” She rose from her lounge and reached a hand to Blake. He tucked her hand under his arm and seemed disappointed when she paused and offered her other hand to Nathan. He took it, and the three of them walked into the dining room.

* * * *

Their meal was consumed in a lively fashion, Nathan and Blake settling into a companionable conversation, answering her questions about the Chateau and telling her bits of information about the other man. It was the first time she saw any signs of friendship, compassion, and respect between them.

“I’m stuffed, but the meal was wonderful, and thank you both for not making this a difficult evening.” She stood and acknowledged Aminta’s presence. “Please tell Cook the meal was delicious. We’ll have coffee in the parlor.” She didn’t wait for the men to follow. She wandered through the hallway alone, her fingers running along the texture of the stone wall. Back in her favorite seat, she noted that Shin slept outside the glass door.

“Sherry before coffee?” Nathan asked as he and Blake entered the room.

“Not yet, thanks.”

Nathan finally seemed relaxed. She remembered this side of him, calm and relaxed fun to be around.

“I’m done with the land appraisals. I wanted to finish one job before I start another. I didn’t want my mind to be scattered when I go through the paperwork.” She glanced at each man and could only sense they were both disappointed. Groping for a safe topic that wouldn’t annoy either man, she asked, “Who planted the gardens?” She hoped teasing them with newly retrieved knowledge would continue their eased moods. She hadn’t expected them both to burst out laughing. “Well, am I allowed in on the joke?”

“You chose the plants and laid out the gardens, Maris, albeit in a previous...” Blake hesitated.

Nathan didn’t seem bothered by her questions anymore. “I suppose you expect some tidbit of information to open the gates to my memories.”

“Hopefully, something like that.” Aminta entered with the coffee tray, not acknowledging the glares from either man. “Now that you’re at home, your memories will come, Miss. The less you force yourself to remember, the easier they’ll come.”

“Thank you, Aminta.” Maris accepted the cup and saucer he handed her and waited until he’d served the men and left before she gave them a scolding look. “He’s right, and he means no harm. Aminta seems to be a very fair person and you both respect him in this household. Don’t start second guessing him now.”

Maris put her coffee aside and stretched her limbs, relaxing into the cushions. She understood her leaving, even temporarily, and not accepting their help was almost an insult, but she wanted to do this on her own. It would be too easy to rely on these men instead of becoming self-reliant. Finishing the details of her old life was her responsibility. When she was done with Manhattan, she’d take the

next step to finding her past. Maris felt she needed this distance from both men to clear her mind. They would just have to understand and accept her decision.

“You’re both going to have to accept my timing, gentlemen. I understand you’ve apparently been waiting for me for a long time, but you’re both technically strangers to me. I’ll let you know when I’m comfortable with our arrangement.”

“To Maris being comfortable with our arrangement,” Blake toasted.

“To Maris’s memories and choices,” Nathan added.

“How about, to the future, one that apparently I will decide?” The men nodded, but not enthusiastically. She wanted to see their reaction to her next question and asked bluntly, “Blake, in my past life, we were lovers, yes?”

“Yes, and we were amazing together.” He gave her his sly grin, one she now knew came with thoughts of sex.

“Nathan, in my past life, we were lovers, too?”

“Yes. We were lovers and confidantes.”

“So I slept with you both, but neither of you married me?” Both her men looked stricken by her joke. “Sorry, I was just teasing, I guess I don’t do that well anymore either?”

“This is not teasing material. It’s just too close to the bone.” For the first time, she heard a tremble in Nathan’s voice.

“And hearts?” she added.

“Yes. We both loved you, but apparently differently. Our approaches to life and love are poles apart.”

“Neither of us had enough pride to walk away.” Nathan’s words were blunt.

“I must have been a real piece of work. Are you both that masochistic? I sound like a complete bitch with an attitude.”

“Only on occasion,” Blake said.

“Usually when you didn’t get your way!” Nathan actually laughed when he said the words, something she remembered but hadn’t experienced from him.

“I’m sorry I treated you both so poorly, but I’m glad you’re here now when I finally get my past back. I hope whatever else has changed or been hidden won’t will embarrass me or either of you.” She began to wonder what kind of person she truly was back then.

“We knew the real Maris and accepted your eccentricities. Just remember we’re here for you, whatever you need.” Nathan was trying to put up an easy front for her, but his tone was overly sweet.

“What if I need both of you now, full-time?” She watched their faces. Both men seemed stunned by her question.

Blake spoke first. “We assumed you’d finally make a choice, Maris.”

“Is that my only option? Don’t answer, I’m just thinking aloud. Thank you both for bringing me here. It was time for me to rediscover who I was five years ago and time for me to decide who I want to be in my future, and yours.” She paused to sit down but kept wandering around the room, touching objects, trying to remember being here before. “I can only imagine how frustrated you both are. But nothing is going to change until I get my memories back. Thank you for a lovely evening. I’d like to go back to the hotel. Please tell Aminta I’m ready to leave.”

Blake began to speak, but Nathan interrupted. “She’s right, in her own time, whether we like it or not.”

“Okay, her time frame. I’ll get Aminta.”

“Good night, gentlemen.” She walked to each man, kissed his cheek, and left them alone in the parlor. Hesitating at the doorway, she turned back and added, “I’ll let you know when I’m back and ready to learn my history.” This time she left and didn’t turn back. Nor did she question Aminta on the ride back to the hotel.

When she settled for the night after walking Shin, Maris knew she could have left the dog tonight, but she wanted an excuse to see the

land one more time in daylight before she left. She began to wonder if her tactics concerning the men were wrong, but deep inside she knew she had to make rational decisions for all their sakes.

Chapter Ten

The following day, with her work complete and all her reports sent, she took Shin for one last long walk around the town. Today she felt no hesitation, no stares at being alone. The time reinforced how much she loved the area, realizing she could live here, would accept the cold winters, relishing the warm fires.

The memory came in a flash. She and her two men lounged on the carpet before the fireplace. They were laughing at something, happy together. The image floated away. Scouring her mind, she recalled how they were dressed, and that they drank champagne. Her hair was much longer and puffy with layers, and her makeup was much heavier. It was a memory from long ago, she decided. Was it a fantasy? Deeper inside, she realized it wasn't a memory, it was what she wanted. How she wanted their relationship to continue.

Would both men allow her to share them? Wandering along the lake path, she smiled at her concept. Would they know this was what she'd been thinking? In a way, she hoped so. Then she wouldn't have to say the words aloud. Could she say them aloud and mean them? Yes, she decided. While unconventional, Maris decided the only way to determine her true wants and needs was by experiencing both men. She laughed aloud as she pictured sitting them down and telling them she seriously wanted them both. She assumed Blake would go along, but would Nathan?

With her walk over, she went back to the hotel and packed her bags. Checked out of the hotel, she drove her pickup to the Chateau, pausing before a small stone home on the outskirts of the property. When she'd appraised the home, it gave her a feeling of peace. The

furnishings were to her taste, and she easily pictured spending time there. She wasn't prepared for Aminta to open the front door, a broad smile on his face, the first one she'd seen. She left her truck where it was and allowed the dog to wander without her leash.

"Shin, this is home for a while. Come back after your run." The dog wagged her tail as if she understood and scampered off into the surrounding woods.

"Aminta, it seems you've predicted my mood."

"This was always one of your favorite spots on the land. You'd come here to get away from life's annoyances."

"Life's annoyances." It was an interesting perspective.

"I believe you felt at home here, relaxed in this environment."

"I see."

He opened the door wider for her to enter. She saw it had been cleaned since her appraisal, and fresh flowers were placed in several spots within view. The logs in the fireplace were glowing, small sparks filtering up the chimney.

"The bedroom and bath have been readied for you. There's food in the kitchen. Of course, anything you need, just phone the Chateau."

"Did Nathan and Blake ask you to do this, or did you just know?"

"It felt right," he said, avoiding her direct look by pausing to fluff a cushion. "I'll get your bags."

Maris stood in the main living area while Aminta brought in her luggage and followed him as he set them on the bench beside the closet in the larger bedroom. "Would you like me to unpack for you? Or I could have a maid come down and settle you in?"

"No, thanks, I'll unpack later. Do my men have plans later? I'd like to see them for supper. I'll come to the Chateau, say around seven. Please ask Cook to make something light tonight." He nodded as he headed towards the door.

"Aminta, thank you for taking care of Shin when I head back to New York." She looked around the home, felt at home, something she hadn't felt in a long time. "And for anticipating my needs."

“Of course. Ring the house if you need anything before supper. Shall I pick you up?”

“No, I’ll walk or drive myself.” She hesitated and finally added, “Do I have to censor myself around you?”

“Never.”

“Thank you. I’ll come to the house later.”

Again, he nodded but didn’t give her any verbal answer, leaving her alone in the small stone house. She plopped down on the sofa and stared into the flames. “Tomorrow I’ll go back and get my history, but today I just want to nap.” Tugging a throw pillow closer, she snuggled down on the cushions, and sleep came rapidly.

Maris woke with a start and realized Shin was outside the front door, barking to come in. “Good girl,” she said when the dog trotted in and lay before the fire. It had burned down while she slept, and she added a few logs to keep it from dying out. Refreshed from her nap, she showered and dressed for supper in casual jeans and a sweater. She used little makeup and let her hair flow free. The walk to the Chateau was longer than she’d anticipated, but the cool evening air was refreshing.

As usual, Aminta opened the front door at her arrival, not giving her time to knock. She acknowledged him with a smile and headed to the parlor. Nervous knots of anticipation swirled through her belly.

“Good evening, gentlemen.” She stood in the doorway, taking in their appearances. Both were dressed casually, in jeans and button-down shirts. Both were extremely handsome men. With that thought, her nipples budded through her bra and sweater, becoming prominent. Blake smiled, and Nathan ignored the change.

“Well, have I annoyed either of you by moving into the stone house instead of this one? It seems Aminta was aware of my decision before I was.” She laughed and moved to the bar, helping herself to the white wine that was already open. “Can I get either of you a refill?”

“I’m fine,” Nathan said, his tone tight.

“Not just yet,” Blake answered, his smile tugging at his lips. He wasn’t doing a very good job of hiding it.

“What will lighten your mood, Nathan? You seem tense.”

“Tell me I’m your choice, and I’ll be a happy man forever.”

Blake cleared his throat at Nathan’s answer. They exchanged silent glares and turned back to her. Laughing aloud wasn’t the preferred response, but it was what she gave them.

“Really, haven’t we gotten past all this? Nathan, just relax and let me get to know both of you before making any decisions.” She moved to her favorite lounge and glanced to see Shin lying by the doorway.

“For general information, I’ve finished my appraisal of the entire property and the reports have been e-mailed back to the office.” She glanced around the room. “I’m glad appraising this Chateau wasn’t my responsibility. I don’t think I could have been unbiased. I realize how much I’ve come to love this place.” She sighed, but continued on before either man could interrupt. “I’m going back tomorrow alone. I expect to be back within a week. So, with business out of the way, I’ll have a clear mind.” Blake moved to sit in an armchair across from her while Nathan stood before the glass wall.

“Are you sure you don’t want us to go with you?”

“Yes, I’m sure I need to do this alone.”

“You won’t go through the files until you get back here, with us nearby?” Blake seemed agitated.

“I told you I wouldn’t. Did I always go back on my word with you? Forget I asked, I don’t think I want to know.” She put her hand up to end any further conversation on the topic. “Let’s just eat.” She offered this as a truce, not commenting that Nathan was usually less cranky after their meals. It seemed to grate on Nathan that she and Blake were enjoying the food and the company more than he was at first, until he finally relaxed and became part of the party.

* * * *

“I’ll walk you home,” Blake offered. He studied her face for just a moment before amending his statement to, “We’ll walk you home.” His small grin made her smile.

“Nathan, are you up for a walk?” Nathan grunted, but placed his glass on the mantel and followed them to the front door.

“Good night, Aminta,” she called out in the foyer, and the man appeared instantly.

“Safe travel,” he said with a slight nod.

“I’ll be safe. I have my men to get back to.” Maris was enjoying the new position she held. Outside, she whistled, and Shin came running from the back of the house. The dog started trotting in front of them down the road. She locked her left hand around Nathan’s arm and her right around Blake’s. They wandered down the long driveway, the lights of the Chateau lessening with each step.

“Seriously, what will happen to the man I don’t choose?”

“The other will walk away.” Blake’s words were terse.

“And he’ll stay away, no interference or meddling. Once you choose...” Nathan stopped talking.

“One of you will give up your entire life here, just walk away from all of this, what you’ve built and your business? That doesn’t seem fair.”

Nathan laughed for the first time since supper. “Life is not fair, Maris. If it were, we’d all be in different situations.”

“If it were, we wouldn’t be in the predicament we are.” Blake let out a sigh and tightened his hand over hers on his arm.

“So I’m the cause of the irritation between you.”

“I know this all sounds so cryptic to you. When you regain your memories, it will all fit into place.” Nathan drew his arm from her hand, as if to distance himself from her.

“One of us deserves to have a happy life with you.” She’d never heard Blake sound so restless.

“Don’t both of you deserve to be happy, to stay on the land and in the home you’ve so carefully built?”

“In a perfect world,” Nathan mused, “but this isn’t a perfect world. If it were, we’d be long past this now.”

They arrived at the small stone home she was using. She stood on her toes and kissed Nathan’s left cheek before leaning to kiss Blake’s the same way. Maris whistled for Shin and opened the front door. The dog hesitated by the men, waiting until each gave her the required pet before scooting inside.

“Good night,” she said and went inside, pausing at the door, turning back to look at each man. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to make a choice knowing I’m sending the other from his home and land. I know what it’s like to live in limbo. I don’t want the responsibility of sending either of you into that sort of purgatory. I’ll start going through the documents when I get back. Hopefully I’ll find the explanations I need.”

She let out a heavy breath and closed the door to both of them. Shin was already lying in front of the fireplace.

“Well, girl, it’s time to find out who I was and who I want to be now. I can’t keep both of those men in limbo forever, and apparently that’s where they’ve been for a long time.

* * * *

Maris decided she couldn’t wait any longer. Realizing she was literally holding both men’s futures in her decisions, she patted Shin and left her before the fireplace. She stopped in the master bedroom and stripped as she walked through. It was a beautiful room decorated in muted tones of tan and white. It was very soothing, she decided. Nothing seemed changed from when she toured it days before to finish her appraisal work. The bathroom seemed the same, except that her toiletries and cosmetics were now laid out, along with fresh towels.

She languished under the hot shower spray, letting it work out the kinks in her neck. When she felt revived, she forced herself to dry off.

Her clothing had been unpacked anyway, and her robe was hanging on the inside of the closet door. She grabbed the old, soft chenille covering and padded to the lit fireplace. A smile crossed her lips when she realized someone, Aminta or a maid, would have seen her dildo while unpacking. She rummaged in the top drawer where her underwear was placed. When it wasn't there, she moved to the nightstand. Opening the drawer, she saw it still wrapped in the red velvet bag it came in. A bright reading light was turned on behind a large wingback chair beside it.

"I suppose this will be a perfect spot to read by," she mused aloud, then headed to the large bed. As soon as she slipped between the sheets, she felt a feeling of peace she'd not remembered. Maris fell asleep and woke rested the next morning. She felt guilty leaving Shin behind, standing beside Aminta in the driveway. Nevertheless, she knew it was the right thing to do, mainly because it would force her to come back to the Chateau instead of running away. Deep inside, she knew it was an option, but one she wouldn't take after having met and spent time with her men.

Chapter Eleven

While the trip was long and boring, her mind was consumed with thoughts of Nathan and Blake. They were so different from each other, but so much alike. When she hit the outskirts of Manhattan, traffic mounted, and she had to concentrate on staying in the correct lane or she'd wind up taking the long way around to get home.

Home. The word stuck in her mind. The apartment she rented wasn't a home. It was just a place where she spent time away from work. She'd never stopped to make it feel like a real home, keeping it and herself in a transitory state, waiting each day for some small inkling of her past life. While her mother had approved, she realized before the accident, her mother's approval wasn't valued. Afterward, it was easy to accept her version of life, not knowing where to start on her own.

Whatever her decisions were, she knew if she decided to come back to the city to live, she'd find another apartment, one she could settle in. For now, she experienced the horror of trying to find a parking spot. She walked the block and a half to her building, studying it from the outside. It was nondescript, just as her apartment inside was. She got an odd chill up her spine and quickly glanced around. Nobody seemed to be staring at her, but she was uneasy. Entering the lobby, she wished it had a doorman for security. She used the open staircase instead of the elevator and locked herself inside the apartment, the feeling of unease still with her.

While dusty now, it had been her home. Maris opened the window over the street, the cool air flushing out the musty air and bringing in all the noise of the city. Instantly she remembered the quiet of the

land and the Chateau. Going to her bureau, she pulled out the key to the bank box that held her history. She walked to the building, signed in, and took a deep breath when she was left alone in one of the private rooms with the contents of the safe box. A memory became clear before her, a memory of her mother and her, in this very room together. Her mother was wearing a black coat with a white silk scarf. She could almost smell her heavy perfume hanging in the space. It was a perfume Maris always hated, strong and overbearing. She once teased her mother that her perfume entered the room before her, but didn't get a comic response, only a stern look.

"Don't ever open these, Maris. You won't like what you find." Her mother's expression was stern, as if she were a child being chastised. The cases still held her perfume scent, and she decided that brought the memory back.

"I won't, Mom," she'd assured her mother, but now she knew she would. Maybe if she'd been honest with Maris from the start, her life would have progressed differently. Her fingers ached to open the first files, but she refrained. It dawned on her that Margo could have destroyed all this documentation if she truly hadn't wanted her to see it.

On the flip side, her heart attack had come out of the blue. Other than her typical ornery and rude attitudes, her mother hadn't been sick. Maris got a queasy feeling realizing that if Margo had lived longer, she might never have known Nathan or Blake. Never known her men or what they once meant to each other.

There were three large, black leather portfolios. None had any markings or labels. She took them and stuffed two in the tote bag she'd brought. The third she had to carry. After turning back the empty box and keys, she left quickly, knowing she'd never set foot in that building again, even if she did decide to stay here in the city.

Taking a taxi back to her apartment, she put the portfolios in an old suitcase, hoping to keep the perfume smell from her living space. She left a second time, just wandering around her neighborhood.

While she always felt safe, today she was apprehensive, unable to shake the feeling that she wasn't alone. She wondered if Blake or Nathan followed her even after they promised they wouldn't. But that didn't feel right. She called the Chateau on a whim, instantly relieved when Aminta answered.

"Good evening, Aminta."

"Good evening, Miss. Your trip was unhindered, I hope."

Maris held back a laugh but smiled. "Yes, longer than I remembered. I just wanted to let my men know I arrived safely."

"They'll appreciate that. Would you like to talk to them?"

What would she say? *I feel like someone is watching me, following me. Come and guard me, take care of me?* No, she decided quickly, she wouldn't put her paranoia on them.

"No, please tell them I'm safe, that I have the files, and I'll be back in a few days." She paused, adding, "Is Shin giving you any problems?"

"Of course not. She's welcome here at home."

"All right, I won't be too long. Tell the men I said... Just tell them I'm okay."

"I will, but they'll be disappointed they didn't get to speak with you."

"I'll smooth it over when I get back. Night, Aminta."

"Travel home safe, Maris."

She hung up feeling better, at ease in her space. It was silly that a few words from a fatherly figure would make her feel better, especially since she never experienced the same feelings in real life. Maris knew her real father abandoned them. To her stepfather, Walter, she was just baggage that came with his second wife. He seemed annoyed that she existed. She sighed aloud and wandered around the apartment.

"It just feels strange because Shin isn't here." Saying the words aloud to the empty space was one more step of separation.

Her supper was take-away, eaten behind her locked door. Maris missed Shin more than she realized she would and wondered again if she'd made a mistake leaving her up in the mountains.

Sleep didn't come that night, and she was at the office before seven. Her boss, Ron Conleth, seemed to have anticipated her return, accepting her request for vacation time and a leave of absence. There was little to take from her desk and few goodbyes to the people who worked in the cubicles around her. She had no plants or personal objects in her workspace, no photos or mementos. Leaving the office, she felt she'd never go back. It wasn't a bad feeling, instead it felt very freeing in an abstract way.

Maris forced herself to stay in the apartment one more night, not wanting to arrive in the mountains after dark. She decided she'd start out first thing in the morning and began to access her packing duties. There was no food to toss from her fridge, she'd cleaned it out before she left for this assignment.

Shin's spare leash and the rest of Maris's clothing fit in two small suitcases. She left the bed made and a few towels in the bathroom. Other than paper products, the place could be re-rented without her return. It was then she realized how stark the place truly was. Again, she had no plants or photos, no artwork hung on the walls. Even the small television was left behind without regret. She did call and cancel her cable and she'd never set up a phone line, choosing to use her cell as most people did these days. Her computer was already in the stone house, waiting for her return.

That night, she tried to sleep, but the dreams woke her several times. Nightmares, she decided, of a very dark man stalking her. Watching her every move, every step. She gave up at four a.m., dressed, and made several trips to her pickup with her possessions. While the streets were almost empty, she still felt the heavy foreboding of being watched.

With two cups of coffee in their holders, she was through the city before the sun broke.

Her trip to the mountains the first time had been angst-ridden, not knowing the roads. This time, she remembered the few turns and interstate changes with ease, finally relaxing when she was well away from the city and the mounting traffic heading towards it.

She forced herself to stop along the way several times to stretch and gas up whether she needed it or not. At each stop, she'd looked over her shoulder more than once, not noticing anything to be concerned by. A few times she'd thought to call Aminta and let him know she was arriving back much earlier than originally planned. Each time she reached to push the button, she hesitated. By noon, she was well on her way, and by late afternoon, she was entering the Lake Placid area. It was so familiar she decided it was welcoming her back.

* * * *

Maris arrived back on the property to find Shin waiting for her on the doorstep of the stone house. Aminta was there, helping her in with the few bags she'd brought. He was polite, but not talkative.

"Do my men know I'm back?"

"By now they do." His statement was fact.

"What did they do, monitor my movements by the chip in my phone!" What was said in jest made her anxious in a strange way, her stomach souring.

"I don't believe so, Miss." He glanced around the living area as if checking for anything out of place. "Call the main house if you need anything."

"Thank you for taking care of Shin." He nodded and left without further conversation. Maris noted the dog was already asleep before the fireplace, even though it wasn't lit.

She wandered into the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee. While it brewed, she decided to take the portfolios of papers and put them on the bench on the back porch, hoping the perfume smell would

dissipate. As soon as she opened the back door, Shin came running, sliding to a halt beside her at the door on the shiny tile floor.

“No carpet here, Shin. Take it easy.” She reached down and ruffled the dog’s ears, but she didn’t run out. Instead, the dog sniffed around the room and settled in front of the now closed exterior door.

Coffee mug before her, she checked her e-mail. It was then she realized that other than work and spam, she never received anything personal. Today she found two separate mails. One was from Nathan: “Come back soon, be safe, N.”

“Well, that was short and to the point.” She opened the second one, from Blake, which was even shorter:

“Waiting, Blake.”

“I suppose they’re both still pissed I wouldn’t take them with me or let them take me.” She reached to pet Shin and closed the computer. Pushing it aside, she paused, as if a bolt of lightning went through her. Pulling it forward, Maris put her name into a search engine and wondered if it would turn up any information. She wasn’t prepared for what she found.

Chapter Twelve

An hour later, she pushed the machine away from her, unsettled to say the least. The information that was general knowledge amazed her. What annoyed her most was that she hadn't done this sooner, like when she that realized Nathan and Blake were more than just landowners. What really pissed her off was that she hadn't done it years earlier, deferring to her mother's wishes to regain her memories naturally.

While some of the sites listed her name and degrees, they were all work or university related. Then there were the newspaper articles. Scanning to find her name, it became clear she had been the victim of a crime, that her accident, as her mother always referred to it, was actually an act of assault.

Apparently, it was assumed she'd slipped on the wet walkway surrounding Niagara Falls. They related tidbits of her rescue and injuries. While she'd only suffered bruises and scrapes, it did mention she had no memory of the incident. She scanned a few more articles, which related the same facts. She was about to give up, contemplating this new information, when the next link brought her to an article dated a few days later.

Several witnesses had come forward and said they'd seen her arguing with someone and she'd been pushed. None of the eyewitnesses could tell who the person was, as he or she was covered with a yellow rain suit, making it impossible for any of them to see the actual person. The next articles related the same facts, adding that while an investigation had been launched, it was still undetermined who her companion had been.

Maris took deep breaths to control the panic welling inside her. She had no memory of being at Niagara Falls or why she would have gone there. Considering what she'd read, she began to wonder if it had been Nathan or Blake. But that just didn't feel right. Yet there was blankness when she tried to think back. It only made her head ache. The harder she tried, the worse the ache became.

On impulse, she snapped her fingers, and Shin came to her side. "Let's go, girl. I need fresh air." Grabbing her jacket from the front closet, Maris wandered outside and walked the main road towards the Chateau. About halfway there, she left the road and wandered through the grounds, pausing to stare at a flowerbed or tree. Nothing came back to her.

If she thought she'd been frustrated, this was worse. Before, it had just been an accident, now it was assault. And robbery, she decided, knowing the last five years of her life had been taken from her by someone. The same years had been taken from Nathan and Blake, who waited for her to remember them.

* * * *

Maris sat heavily on a wrought iron bench in the center of a large garden, the stone fountain spilling water down the front of a lion sculpture, his mouth open in a roar. She still had no memory of designing the space around her, yet she could name each plant.

The content from the newspaper articles swam in her mind. Whom had she been with, and why was she at the Falls that day? While she'd visited them often to enjoy the majestic sight, she usually went alone, using the time to put her thoughts in order. Had she gone there while drafting the plans for this property? No, her men said her job was finished here. She did remember stopping there the first time, the day she met with the Chateau's previous owner. Clearing her mind for the interview, she remembered wandering the area and looking for inspiration. Did she remember the interview? No, not

really, only that she'd gotten the position, and according to Nathan and Blake, did an amazing job.

Frustrated, she snapped her fingers and waited while Shin scampered to her side. "Come on, girl, let's go back."

Wandering the road towards the stone home, she saw two vehicles parked in front of it. Both black SUVs, which meant her men were waiting. The chill of anticipation that ran through her made her lower lips moist and her breasts heavy. Approaching, she noted they were sitting side by side on the steps.

"Hello," she said, hoping to sound upbeat.

"Welcome back," Nathan said standing and stretching to his full height.

"Any problems with the trip?" Blake inquired.

"No, over and done with. Why didn't you go inside to wait?" She paused in front of the two men and studied them carefully.

"This is your space now." Nathan reached in front of her and pushed the door inward, Shin racing to be the first inside.

"It's your property. I'm just spending some time here." Those words felt wrong as soon as she said them. "What would you like, wine or something stronger?" Heading inside, Blake followed first.

"How about some information?" Blake said with a smile. Nathan exhaled heavily and shut the door behind him.

"We said we would let her tell us what happened."

"Oh, please, Nathan. She was gone for days, and if you weren't standing here, I'd sweep her up in my arms and take her upstairs to bed. Maybe she'll remember me then." His lips curled into a mischievous grin as Nathan shook his head. "He's annoyed you wouldn't let us come with you."

"Maybe I should have," she said, more to herself than to her men. "It was all very mundane. I cleaned the apartment, emptied out my desk at the office, and arranged to use my vacation time." She didn't mention the odd feeling of being watched while she was there, or on the drive back.

“And?” Blake prompted. She watched Nathan pace before the front window, listening but not watching her.

“And I gathered the files I went for.” She glanced at Blake and back to Nathan, who stiffened. “But before you ask, I didn’t open them. In fact, I’ve stayed as far away from them as I could.” Blake’s facial expression asked questions without words. “My mother’s perfume was so heavy on them, it turned my stomach. Every time I go near them, her scent lingers on my skin. Funny, I remember her always using the same scent, but I don’t remember it making me nauseous. It’s probably just because they were sealed away in the bank vault for so long.”

“You’ve done something, Maris. I can see it on your face, your eyes. You’re troubled.” Nathan walked to the bar and held up a container of bourbon. Both she and Blake nodded their acceptance. She listened to the clanking of ice hitting the bottom of the short, thick crystal tumblers. When each of them had a drink in hand, she settled before the fireplace in the center of the sofa. It was a definite ploy, wondering who would choose to sit next to her. To her surprise, Blake sat on the hearth, and Nathan sat on the edge of the club chair beside it.

“Maris, we’ve tried to be as patient as we could, but neither of us can wait much longer.”

“All right, I did do something. Something I should have done years ago.” Both men leaned forward to better hear her words. “I went online and found some newspaper articles.” Her words came out in a rush. “I didn’t like what I found, and I never got past the first few links.”

“What did you find?” Blake asked.

“I found out that my accident wasn’t an accident at all. Apparently, I was pushed in an attempt to send me hurtling to my death into Niagara Falls.” Maris paused to sip her drink. “I don’t believe it was either of you, but I still don’t know who did it and why. After finding out that information, I took a walk to clear my head.

But, now that you're both here, I suppose I should start at the beginning."

She stood and walked to the bar, taking the cut glass bourbon decanter with her. "I'm not sure where to do this," she said, leaving them to follow her. Standing in the kitchen holding the three leather portfolios, she glanced around.

"Wow, I remember that scent," Blake said.

"So do I," Nathan added. "Every day when I left the trial I had a migraine from it."

"The trial? There was a trial? You were both there, in the courtroom? Why didn't one or both of you approach me?" Maris glanced from one man to the other.

"Because we were threatened with expulsion if we did." Nathan didn't censor his angry tone.

"We were only allowed to sit in the last row, in the very back." Blake shook his head in anger, "Felt like we were the black sheep of the family, being seated by the bathroom at a family function."

"I was only there a few times for meetings." As she spoke aloud, she started to remember the circumstances after her fall. "The lawyers said I couldn't sit in. Margo said it was in case I had to testify. My testimony wouldn't be colored by other things I'd hear in court."

"Margo made sure you never heard any of it." Nathan exhaled, as if he were relieved to speak without overthinking his words.

"I never saw or noticed either of you, never gave you a confused look or acknowledged you?"

"You were hustled in and out of the courthouse. We were expressly never told when you'd be there."

"You know who hurt me, who tried to kill me." It was a blatant statement, one she didn't want to believe. "How could you both make me wait this long, especially after the last weeks here? Why?"

Nathan put his glass on the table and moved behind her, his hands going to her shoulders. "We were told by outside authorities it would

be best for you to remember on your own. That pushing you would make it more... traumatic as you remembered.”

“Neither of us wanted it this way,” Blake said, glancing to Nathan’s hands on her shoulders.

Maris noted his small indication of jealousy. “I don’t want to wait any longer. I want to know my history.” Pausing, she looked from one man to the other. She wasn’t sure what she wanted from them—reassurance, she surmised, but wasn’t sure just why. Technically, they were strangers to her, but she knew that wasn’t right deep down.

“Any suggestions where to open these?”

“The barn,” Blake said with a wink of his left eye.

“How about the greenhouse? Maybe the other smells and fertilizer there will counter the perfume.”

“It sounds like a plan, but let’s take the bourbon with us.” She handed Nathan two of the portfolios and Blake the third. Reaching for the decanter, Blake told her to leave it, that Aminta would bring them whatever they wanted from the main house. “Are you sure you don’t want to wait until after supper?” she asked.

“Are you hungry or just procrastinating?”

“Procrastinating,” she admitted.

They were quiet as they walked to the greenhouse. Both her men seemed surprised when she didn’t want to ride there. She’d told them both to take their vehicles, but both stayed at her side. Shin, on the other hand, bounded ahead, chasing leaves and anything that caught her eye.

* * * *

While she’d examined the greenhouse for the appraisal, it had been very clinical. Today it felt different, personal. She loved the scent of flowers and dirt when the door was pushed inward. There was no doubt in her mind this was a settling place for her, anxiety

leaving her mind and body, and she wandered back and forth along the aisles of seedling planters, all now empty.

“These will need to be started soon if you want plants for spring,” she said as she walked. Back at the front, she noted the men had cleared the worktable of gardening supplies and set the folders down. Each looked at her with an apprehensive glance. Blake seemed nervous, Nathan angst ridden.

“I guess we start at the beginning.” She pulled a folder forward and pulled out a few pages, checking dates. After the order had been established, Maris took the last two files and put them to the side. Then she emptied the pages and sat heavily on the stool Nathan pushed behind her. When they were all seated, she finally began.

“Should we each take a stack?”

“Why not glance over each page and pass it along?” Blake offered.

The first pages she came across were her mother’s marriage license to Frederick Dusan, dated three months before her birth, and their divorce papers, dated three months later. It seemed both parties wanted nothing from the other monetarily. Margo asked for full custody and got it. The next were Maris’s birth certificate, inoculation records, and school records.

There were old report cards and certificates of her achievements from high school, mainly debating and science projects. With each one, an image formed in her mind. She was standing before a full auditorium, pushing her point and discounting her opponent’s argument. She remembered the applause, remembered she liked the rush of adrenaline at being the center of attention. She remembered accepting the award for her science project on composting and recycling. She laughed at how far society had come in this area and frowned when she realized how much further there was to go.

“Maris,” Blake said, getting her scrutiny.

Handing the papers to him, she simply said, “I didn’t know she kept these.” The next were house leases and university letters of

acceptance. "I know this is tacky, but I have no idea where our money came from. I mean, when she divorced Frederick Dusan, she took no settlement or child support. I have no recollection of her ever working or holding a job. How did we live?"

"It must all be in there," Nathan assured her.

"I suppose." She continued to leaf through the pages, nothing of importance catching her eye. She watched as Nathan left the worktable to make a short call on his cell phone and turn on the overhead heaters, the warmth instantly welcome.

"Thanks, I didn't realize how cold it was in here."

"Aminta will bring us drinks."

"Good, I can use one," Blake teased, bumping his shoulder against hers. "You really don't know how your mother supported you?"

"No. I suppose at one time I did, but now, no."

"Keep going, maybe we'll find something."

"There's no bank statements, no financial records here."

"Maybe they'll be in the next one." Nathan was interrupted as Aminta entered with a large tray. She noted the bourbon decanter, along with a coffee pot and a tray of sandwiches. "Thanks," was all Nathan said, taking the tray and placing it on the far end of their work surface. Aminta nodded and left quickly.

"Who wants what?" Blake asked, going to the tray.

"I'll take coffee," Maris said, sidetracked by the form she held. Nathan took coffee, too. Blake poured himself a drink. He took the plate with the sandwiches and put it within reach of where they sat gathered around the files.

"These are all just...junk. There doesn't seem to be anything here except school and housing records."

"Don't get discouraged," Blake said, offering her the sandwich plate. She took a half, nodded her thanks, and went back to the pages. It seemed to take forever to go through the first portfolio, and Maris was disappointed. Nothing seemed important.

"But I can't imagine she'd keep all this without reason."

“Maybe just sentimental,” Nathan observed, continuing to scan the pages.

“Or a parent proud of her daughter’s accomplishments.” Blake clinked his glass against her coffee cup.

“I want to keep going, but I’m bleary-eyed.”

“Then it’s time to walk away. You had a long day, a long drive, and now all this information. You’re tired.” Nathan stood and stretched to his full height.

“You two must be tired, too.” They had been careful to keep the pages in order and pushed them back in the leather case. For the first time, Maris realized how dark it was outside. “Oh, my, it’s late, isn’t it? I forgot to feed Shin.”

“Aminta took her when he came with refreshments.”

Maris stood and stretched, taking the few steps to where Nathan stood. “Thank you for remembering her.” She kissed his cheek lightly and turned to Blake. “And thank you, too.” She gave him the same light peck on the cheek and turned in the space. “I’m going home for a bath and some sleep.”

“What about food?”

“You two go, I’m gonna walk back and try to relax.”

“We’ll both walk you back,” Nathan said, then added, “Our vehicles are parked there.” He smiled for the first time that day, and Maris laughed.

They walked with her between them, her arms wrapped around each of their waists. “When would you like to start the second folder?”

“Tomorrow,” she said, and felt Nathan hesitate. “What, we left them in the greenhouse, I promise I won’t walk back in the middle of the night.”

“Do me a favor, Maris. Stay off the internet tonight, too. Tomorrow we’ll get back to this, but for tonight, just relax.”

“Yes, sir. Besides, I’m too tired for anything else.”

“I could give you a backrub, great for relaxing.” Blake ignored Nathan clearing his throat.

“I’ll take a rain check on that. Tonight I just want to forget about all of this.” When they reached the house, Shin waited on the front step.

“Good night, gentlemen. Thank you for your help.”

“Why not come to the house for breakfast, and we can get back to work after?” Nathan paused, glancing to Blake. “Does that work for you?”

“Yeah, it will work. I haven’t been able to concentrate on anything else lately.” He turned and smiled at Maris. “I’ve lost my muse these days, not able to paint a stroke worth keeping.”

She laughed at his tone. “I’m sorry, Blake. What will get your strokes back?” Maris understood her double meaning, but was shocked she’d come up with the sexual overtone.

Blake laughed aloud and hugged her tightly. “That’s getting more toward the Maris I remember. See you in the morning. I’m staying at the Chateau if you need anything.”

“I’ll be fine, both of you. Go home and get some sleep. I realize how I’ve screwed up your lives these past years, and I’ll not keep you waiting much longer.”

“Take as long as you need,” Nathan told her, pressing his lips to her forehead. She waited until both vehicles had pulled away before locking herself in. As she promised, a hot bath and bed were in her immediate future.

* * * *

Maris settled in the huge bed. It felt even bigger because she was alone. Punching her pillow, she pulled the covers up to her chin. Counting backwards from one thousand, she drifted off to sleep.

Maris woke with a start, sat up, and scanned the darkened room. There was no ambient light from outside, but the blue hue of the

digital alarm clock acted as a night light. If asked, she would have sworn she was in the greenhouse, her hands braced on one of the planting tables with Nathan fucking her from behind. It was all so clear, she could remember each detail.

She'd been pruning the seedlings, telling him what each variety was and what the flower would look like, smell like, and when it would bloom. He'd joked about being more interested in her flower. Now, years later, she had a vivid memory of turning to him and resting her butt on the table edge, her legs wide apart. Her hands pulled her skirt up to her waist, an offering Nathan didn't resist. He'd dropped to his knees before her and drew her panties down her legs. She smiled when she remembered him tossing them over his shoulder.

His lips lightly brushed against her pussy, over and over until she was wiggling forward to get the pressure she wanted. He'd taken her cue and used his large hands to pull her forward by her hips. His mouth covered her, his tongue slipping along her lower lips, taunting her before he finally pushed it inside her.

She sighed aloud in the empty bed as she had sighed that day. Maris knew her hands had gone to his shoulders, holding him to her as she asked for more. Nathan had released his grip on her hips, using one finger to slide along her folds, his tongue following. Soon he had buried that finger deep inside her. Again, she asked for more and he accommodated, slipping a second finger in her pussy. His fingers and mouth worked in conjunction until the pinpoint lights flickered on the inside of her closed eyelids. Her orgasm hadn't been silent.

Maris knew they'd spoken, but couldn't remember the words, only that they were wants for more. It was very clear in her mind how he'd pulled from her body and grasped her by the waist. He'd turned her around and pushed her forward. Maris knew she'd wiggled from his grasp and dropped before him, taking his cock from his pants and swallowing it. She knew she'd made love to his cock, using her teeth to tease his skin on each outward pull. She knew he'd groaned and

pulled her upward. Turning her to lean on the table a second time, he'd pushed his erection deep in her already wet and needy pussy.

They'd fucked that way until she came, her hands clasping the table edge to balance her weight for each penetration. He'd leaned his body forward over her back and whispered how tight she was, how hard it was not to come inside her immediately. She knew he'd pulled out and her cry had been of anguish for the empty feeling. He'd dropped behind her and licked her, pussy to anus. Glancing over her shoulder, she'd watched his arm moving up and down as he stroked his cock while licking her. When he stood, he pushed his cock back in her pussy. One of his hands reached to her shoulder, holding her tight. The other slipped around her waist, holding her to his body. They moved in unison.

Maris remembered glancing up at the sky, watching the clouds move above the glass ceiling as he continued to fuck her. She knew she'd asked him to go harder and faster. In that instant, Maris remembered the shattering orgasm that made her body shudder, clasping Nathan's cock so tight, he came within her walls. He'd relaxed his weight for just a bit before dropping behind her again and licking his cum from her pussy. His tongue made long passes on her thighs to catch each droplet. Then he'd risen behind her and grasped her by the waist, turning her until he met her lips with his, sharing both of their releases.

Maris licked her lips as if she could still taste their mingled juices on them. She let her right hand slip down under the covers, using her fingers to dance across her pussy. Her lips were puffy with need, and she didn't hesitate to rub them, using her own moisture to ease her middle finger inside herself. Her orgasm came quickly, but it was small, just a jolt that left her more horny and needy than before. Pulling her hand from her body, she brought her finger to her lips and sucked it clean. Relaxed from her self-satisfaction, she dropped back onto the pillows and tried to go back to sleep. The image of Nathan on his knees before her licking and fingering her pussy made her smile.

She remembered how large his cock was, how thick and long, how he stretched her inner walls with each inward push.

“My slim fingers aren’t near enough to get that same feeling,” she said aloud. She thought to get her glass dildo, but decided it, too, was slimmer than Nathan’s fingers or cock. Glancing to the side table, the clock read just after two a.m. Maris punched her pillow and settled back, hoping she’d sleep now.

Chapter Thirteen

Maris jolted upright in her bed, the sensations her body were feeling so acute, so real, she assumed she wasn't alone. Blinking in the darkened room, she was able to focus somewhat, realizing she was alone. The clock told her it was just an hour later. Disappointment filled her immediately. This dream had felt just as real as her first one. Only Blake fucked her this time.

They were in his studio, she remembered, the one that he'd used when they first met. It was no more than a garage, but he'd made it work, leaving the metal door open to let in the light. They were in a secluded area, no other homes or building in sight. It was warm outside, and she wore only a T-shirt and shorts.

She had been sitting on a stool in front of a piece of black velvet material, hung from above as a backdrop. Blake had been sketching her face. They'd talked and laughed, his frown reminding her she wasn't supposed to move when he drew. That had started their game.

Maris had a clear memory of tugging her shirt up over her head and off, tossing it to the floor. Blake's eyes lit up, and he'd started toward her.

"Oh, no," she'd said, "you're supposed to be sketching." She'd used her hands to lift her breasts, her fingertips tweaking her nipples to fullness.

"Oh, baby, you're gonna make me come in my shorts."

"Not while you're sketching," she'd told him and continued to massage her own breasts. While she wasn't large, each breast was a handful, and she liked the feelings she was creating inside.

“Are you getting horny?” Blake asked, licking his lips with an inference to licking her.

“A little bit,” she’d teased and dropped her left hand to her crotch. “My pussy is damp,” she’d continued, one hand palming her breast while the other rubbed along her clit through the material.

“Maris, I can’t concentrate.”

“No wonder, look how hard your cock is.” She’d licked her lips and stood. Turning her back to him, she’d undone her shorts and let them drop to the floor, lifting each foot in turn to kick them away.

Maris knew in this reincarnation of her life, she’d never have the guts to do something so bold. She only owned white undies now, not a single black thong like the one she wore that day. Turning back to face Blake, she again started pinching her nipples and stroking her clit through the thin black silk. When he paused to shift his erection in his shorts, she let her finger slip under the material, pulling it aside to reveal her completely shaved pussy. Never in this life would she think to shave herself down there. She trimmed a bit but never shaved it. Just the idea gave her a thrill, and she began to wonder if it felt different against material. That was a memory she couldn’t retrieve.

Maris knew she’d been the one to leave her spot and drop before Blake. She’d taken his cock from his shorts and teased him with her tongue and lips, her mouth forming a tight seal around him as she sucked him deeper down her throat.

Blake had groaned and whispered she’d make him come. She continued to suck him until she tasted his droplets of pre-cum. While she’d swallowed him, she continued to use her other hand against her clit. She’d come rubbing herself while Blake emptied down her throat. She licked him clean and went back to the stool, sitting as he’d posed her. His shorts were still on his hips, his cock exposed. She was naked except for the thong that was now pushed between her pussy lips. Maris continued to stroke her pussy and clit as Blake continued to sketch her, his cock still slick from her saliva and his cum.

She'd used her own fingers to pull the sodden material from her lower lips and plunged her finger inside her. Blake had broken out in a sweat and dropped his charcoal. He approached her with an evil grin on his lips, dropping down to lick her several times before standing and replacing her finger with his. He attached his mouth to her nipple and used his fingers to make her come. When he released her, he quickly moved away, returning with a wood handled paintbrush. The handle was about four inches long, thick but tapered in the center. It had a glossy red finish. The brush side was short but thick, one he used to rough in background colors.

"Are you game for some fun?" he'd asked, in between kissing her mouth, neck, and tits.

"What do you have in mind?" Maris knew in this day she'd never strip before him like that or use her own hands for pleasure. With a jolt, she remembered him sucking the brush handle between his lips before he lowered before her. His fingers pulled the material of her thong away from her pussy and gently replaced it with the handle of the brush. Maris had let him fuck her with the handle of it while he sucked her tits, making her come harder than ever before. She'd groaned with disappointment when he slid it from her pussy.

Maybe it was the setting or the forbidden brush handle she'd allowed him to use on her. Maybe it was the dare that he tossed at her. "Let me sketch you, don't move."

He'd repositioned her on the stool, tearing her thong from her body and tossing it at her feet. He'd licked her thighs and pussy, using his hands to push her legs far apart, her butt balancing on the stool. He took the brush and gently pushed it back in her pussy and took her right hand to cup her breast.

"Don't move, Maris. Just don't move."

"Don't move my position or don't fuck myself with the brush handle?"

"Both," he'd answered, intent on the canvas before him. She did stay basically in place, but didn't resist the urge to tweak her nipple or

slowly stroke the brush handle in and out of her body. “You’ll make me come in my shorts, Maris, I’m almost done.”

“You’re shorts are hardly on, Blake, but I can see your cock getting hard again. Want me to suck it, or are you going to fuck me?”

She continued to play with herself for a bit before he tossed the charcoal to the floor and walked before her. He slid the brush handle from her and replaced it with his erection. He stroked her only a few times before pulling from her body. He pushed his shorts down and off and grabbed her around the waist, carrying her to the small sofa where she’d left her purse.

He dropped her playfully on to it and kneeled beside her, sucking her tits while his fingers invaded her body. Maris had writhed under his touch. He inched forward and she’d managed to grab his cock, pumping him with the same rhythm he used to finger fuck her. When he added a second finger, she adjusted to the intrusion. When he added a third, she’d grasped his cock harder, pumping him until he came on her tits. Leaning forward, he’d licked his cum from her while continuing to use his fingers inside her. She came when he latched onto her nipple and shifted his fingers in her pussy.

Maris knew, even after all this time, it was one of the most erotic things she’d ever done. Even now, just thinking about it made her pussy wet. Her nipples were hard and tingling. She knew it was silly, but she glanced around the darkened room just to make sure she was alone.

Sliding from under the blanket, she pulled open the nightstand drawer and reached for her glass dildo. She tugged off her sleep shirt and lay on the center of the bed, trying to recapture the feeling of pleasure she’d felt that day in Blake’s studio.

She sucked the phallus as if it were a cock and lowered it between her thighs. It slid between her lower lips easily, and she began to push it in and pull it out. Grasping her breast helped. She had a small orgasm, but nowhere near as intense as that time with Blake. Tossing

the toy aside, she drifted off to sleep, naked with her juices drying on her thighs.

* * * *

Maris woke the next morning and was instantly embarrassed. What if the maid or Aminta had come to the door? She rose quickly, washed the toy and herself before dressing, and headed downstairs to make coffee. She was alone in the house with Shin. Nobody had invaded her privacy, and technically, her subconscious mind had conjured the sex memories.

She found it hard to wipe the smile from her lips, feeling satisfied in a way she'd not known in...in years apparently.

Skipping breakfast, she sipped coffee until Shin came back from her walk and ate her dry kibble. With a resigned breath, she grabbed her jacket and wandered to the greenhouse. Arriving, she saw both her men were waiting. Both held coffee mugs, but neither had moved the portfolios.

“Good morning, men,” she said, and realized her cheeks and neck were heated with embarrassment.

“You look rested,” Nathan said, brushing a light kiss to her lips as she paused in front of him.

“I feel rested,” she answered, pausing to pour coffee for herself. Then she moved beside Blake and kissed his cheek. “Did you both sleep?”

Nathan grunted, and Blake just shook his head no.

“Then we should probably get through these papers and see where the day takes us.”

It was easy to move around them while they settled on the stools with the second portfolio in front of them.

“Any reason not to continue?” She glanced to each man, and neither gave her a negative response. “Well, let’s find my history.” As

Maris pulled the first pages from the file, the smell of perfume hung heavy in the air around them.

Halfway through the file, they stopped for lunch, all three of them disappointed by what they found or didn't find. Maris knew both her men were frustrated, Nathan scowling at each paper passed to him, Blake fidgeting. Of course they knew what to look for, what they were waiting for. That single piece of paper that would jog her memory.

"If I thought it would help I'd suck you both off." She knew it was a blatant ploy and waited for their reactions.

Nathan seemed startled and confused. Blake leaned back with a sly grin on his lips.

"Well, at least I have your attention," she teased. Maris rose and opened the skylight directly above them and one at the far end. The draft seemed to pull the perfume smell away from them. She had an instant visual of all three of them, Blake lying on the worktable while she straddled his thighs, his cock in her pussy. Nathan was behind her, fucking her ass. She knew she'd never felt so full and wondered how she'd make this fantasy come true. She roused herself from the fantasy, not knowing where the idea had come from, but now that it was formed, she couldn't get rid of the visual.

"Maris, what's wrong?" Blake asked, but she just shook her head, hoping to clear the idea.

"Maris, do you want to take a break, go for a walk or something? Just get away from this?"

She heard true concern in Nathan's tone and smiled.

"Let's just get through this file, and then we'll take a break. I will say this, I'm extremely disappointed."

She watched each man glance toward the other. No, she wouldn't tell them she was disappointed because neither had made a sexual advance. Instead, she defaulted back to the lack of important information they were finding.

Chapter Fourteen

The next item she pulled from the stack was an old envelope, faded yellow with defined creases. While the flap was tucked in, it hadn't been sealed. She pulled the contents from it and ceased breathing.

"Oh, my God," she managed. Nathan was beside her, his arm protectively around her shoulder. Blake stood on her other side, a look of concern on his face.

"Breathe, Maris, just breathe. Come on, baby, take a deep breath." His fingers stroked her cheek, and she finally found a pattern to her breath.

"What's wrong, what did you find?" Nathan leaned forward and took the photo from her hand. He glanced at it first, then handed it to Blake. He held it in front so they could all see. "Maris, who is the baby in this photo?"

"It's you, isn't it? That's your mother. My God, look how young she was. Look how little you were." Blake turned it over in his hand, but there was no writing on the back. "Who's the man, is that Frederick Dusan?"

"No," she managed, the word almost a hissing noise.

"Put it away, Blake," Nathan suggested.

"No, let me see it."

Blake glanced to Nathan, but she reached for the old photo, the colors muted and faded.

"We said I'd find my history here, and we just did." Maris studied the photo, too many emotions swamping her to define any of them. She stood and started pacing the aisles between the bedding tables.

“Maris, do you know who the man is?”

“I don’t think that’s Fred Dusan,” Blake said to Nathan, his tone low but audible.

“No, it’s not.” Something clicked inside Maris’s brain and suddenly so many things became clear. Too many to process at that second, but she had no fear she’d forget. Now she wondered if she was sorry that she’d pushed to find her history. “Just give me a minute,” she told her men. Nathan walked to the far end of the table and poured them each a glass of the bourbon they’d left there the night before. He handed one to Blake and met her halfway down one of the aisles, handing her a glass.

“Sip this,” he told her, wrapping his arm around her shoulder, directing her back to the table. Maris took a sip, then a second, and promptly choked on the strong liquid.

“Come and sit down, darling, whatever it is, we’ll work it through.” Blake reached his hand toward her.

She sat heavily, finished her drink in two gulps, and handed it to Nathan, nodding to the decanter for a refill. He didn’t question her. Handing her the glass, she forced herself to sip it. The warmth from the first drink was circulating through her bloodstream, suppressing the angst and the scream she so wanted to release. Nodding towards the photo, she finally managed to say the words aloud.

“That is Margo and me. Even though I was still an infant, I know it’s me.”

“And the man beside Margo?” Blake prompted.

“It’s my stepfather, Walter Garnett!” Neither man seemed surprised, and she realized they knew. “But you knew that already, didn’t you?”

Her men glanced at each other, but neither answered.

“Did I know? Did I ever tell you my stepfather was really my father? That he must have been married and...”

“All right, enough for now.” Nathan stepped forward and took her hand. “Let’s get some air.”

Blake stood quickly. “That’s a good idea. The perfume is getting heavy in here.”

“Thank you both, you’re being very diplomatic. But you knew, and didn’t tell me.”

Maris decided fresh air was a good idea and paused only to refill her glass before pushing open the side door. She wandered down the path towards the fountain, mumbling aloud.

“My God, he was my father, and then they made me believe he was just my stepfather. Why weren’t they together?” Maris sipped her drink and heard her men approaching. “They weren’t together because he was married.” She was debating the situation aloud for her clarification, not expecting answers from either man. “Whoever Fred Dusan was, he was just a cover. All these years I hated the man for leaving us. Now I understand he was just a name for social reasons, probably a well-paid man. When did you find out?”

“After the accident,” Nathan said.

“We all found out in court. Needless to say, your mother wasn’t very happy.” Blake held up his hand to ward off her questions. “You weren’t allowed in the courtroom for that testimony. They said you couldn’t hear some parts until you testified.”

“But I never testified, I couldn’t remember anything.”

“We knew that, but Margo didn’t want you to find out. Even at that time, she still wouldn’t tell you the truth.”

“What if I’d remembered on my own?”

“It was a calculated risk on her part. She figured if she moved you far away and didn’t let you have contact with anyone from your past, you might not remember.” Nathan shook his head. “Believe me... us, Maris, if it was up to us, we would have told you immediately. That and who we were, and how we loved each other.”

“And we didn’t because Margo’s lawyer slapped injunctions on us. She was very careful to let us know that if we approached you at any time in the future, she’d figure out how to have us put away.” Blake shook his head. “I should have just taken the contempt of court

charge at the time and told you. All our lives would have been drastically different.”

“You know who hurt me.” She didn’t ask it as a question, but as a flat statement. “That’s why you both had your men in town to keep an eye on me when I first arrived. You know someone is out there, after me. For what reason after all this time?” She glanced over her shoulder, her men looking wounded and put out. “I get it, you were just trying to protect me, but didn’t you think letting me know who was after me would have worked, too?” She threw her head back and laughed. “You’re both afraid I can’t take the strain. Are you afraid I’ll have some kind of breakdown and neither of you will get me?”

Finally, the enormity of it all started to weigh heavily on her mind. She put her glass down and drew a deep breath, letting it out in the longest, loudest scream she could muster. The second one made her feel better as she listened to the slight echo off the mountains. The third was an almost strangled growl at the way she’d been manipulated by Margo. The way she was still being manipulated, only now it was by her men, the men she trusted without thought.

She picked up her glass and took a few sips, wetting her lips. “Well, I feel better, though I’m not sure why.”

“What do you want to know first?” Nathan had sat on the bench beside Blake, looking very forlorn. Blake sat forward with his elbows on his knees, holding his head. It made her realize that even though they knew all this time, telling her was affecting them more than they’d realized. She could only assume it was because their lives would change, too. For now she wanted information, and later she would decide who to be mad at.

“What did my stepbrother and sister do when they found out?” She sat heavily, realizing she knew the answer. “They found out when they started calling Margo a witch and a whore. That’s why they despised me so. I wasn’t just their father’s second wife’s child, I was his blood, too.” She laughed aloud and added, “No wonder they hated

me. In addition, that's why they didn't fight his will and let Margo and me have our shares. It's all so clear, it's all so...sorted."

Shin wandered beside her and dropped her head on Maris's knee. She patted her absently, too many thoughts and memories going through her mind. All the fights that stopped when she walked in a room, all the glaring looks from the rest of his family. How had she been the only one who didn't know?

"If I was such a smart woman back then, why didn't I realize this? It seems so clear now. It all falls into place, the animosity, the anger."

"Margo went to great lengths to keep that secret, so far as to move you away and threaten us. She hoped by putting you in unfamiliar surroundings you'd be wrapped up in a new life and not remember." Blake sounded wistful.

"Well she surely recognized her desires. I was clueless for five years. Damn, she didn't have the balls to tell me when she was alive so I couldn't confront her. She was a whore, having a child with a married man, using another as cover."

"Maris, our assumption is that your stepfather was supporting you all along, that's why there's no financial records. He must have been taking care of you and your mother."

"And in the process it was incentive to keep Margo quiet. As long as she didn't tell her secret, he continued to pay. But why?" She left her glass on the bench and wandered to the fountain, dipping her hand in the cold water. "He would never leave his wife for her, and they only got together after his wife died."

"Only by then they'd grown into different people, probably married out of guilt. Neither was happy, according to the divorce papers that were being drafted when he died."

"All the rest of this is in the folders, isn't it?" She put up a hand to ward off any answer. "I've had enough for today. I'm going to take a nap." She wandered away, Shin at her heels. "I'll talk to you later," she said over her shoulder, not turning to look back.

* * * *

Maris wandered the property, Shin staying close. So, finally she found her history, and it was not what she had expected. She tried to deal with the emotions that swamped her. First, anger. She pulled a few dead plants as she walked about, but it didn't help. Then came shame, although she knew she was not the cause of her birth, merely a by-product of her mother's affair. Then came resentment, for all the lost years she grew up without a father. Finally, she accepted there was nothing she could do about her history. There was no one she could scream at or ask for answers. Now she was truly alone. Before, it didn't seem important. She was an intelligent woman who was self-reliant. She'd just continue on that way—only she knew it was all different.

For five years, she'd wondered who she was and why it was kept from her. Now she knew it was because her mother and father were both cowards who wouldn't face their actions. While she rationalized that her father was married and apparently didn't want to divorce his wife, her mother was the one she resented.

Wandering further into the woods, she pulled the collar of her denim jacket up around her neck. The temperature had dropped, the sky darkening, but she hadn't noticed the storm rolling in. Pausing when she heard the thunder in the distance, she decided to head back. However, when she turned, her stomach dropped. She would have sworn someone was watching her.

"Nathan, Blake, if you're out there following me, I'm not going to do anything stupid." She glanced around, but couldn't pinpoint the person's position. Deep inside, she knew it wasn't an animal she'd spooked from its spot. This was someone human watching her. As she turned in circles checking the woods, she became disoriented. Panic set in, and she ran blindly for several minutes until she realized she didn't know where she was, tripping on a branch and falling flat on

her face. Her hands braced her fall, but they were scraped and stinging.

Pausing to catch her breath, she gave herself a pep talk. “Okay, you’ve been here before. Look for a landmark, anything that will give you a direction.” Shin sat beside her, waiting.

“Shin, take us home,” she said, hugging the dog to her. “Shin, home.” Maris was never so relieved as when the dog scampered ahead, even though it was a different direction than she thought to go. She decided it might be the long way out, but the dog would find a way. Within the stands of trees, the rain only sprinkled down. Lightning struck nearby, the light reflecting against the rain. The thunder that followed made her jolt. “Shin, take us home,” she said again and followed the dog. After what seemed like hours, she saw the woods clearing ahead and finally paused to catch her breath.

A few hundred yards further, she caught sight of the Chateau in the distance. The rain was much harder against her face now that the trees gave no resistance, the winds kicking up. Maris didn’t care that she was wet. She just wanted to be away from the woods. She followed Shin’s lead, running across the lawns instead of following the winding paths. When Maris finally reached the greenhouse, it took several tries to open the door against the winds. She was so thankful to be inside, she dropped to her knees inside the doorway. That was when she heard her men arguing.

“We should have followed her,” Nathan said to Blake.

“We can’t be with her twenty-four-seven.”

“Today was not the day to let her wander. I’m gonna call the groundskeeper and get his crew out looking for her.” Nathan paced the small area near the worktable they used earlier.

“We could each head in a different direction until we find her,” Blake offered, but she realized he stopped short. “No, you wouldn’t like that, would you, Nathan? What if I find her first, it would give me an advantage. You can’t handle the thought of her running into my arms instead of yours.”

“Jealousy won’t bring her back. Let’s just agree to find Maris, and when she’s safe we’ll continue this argument.”

Not wanting them to fight over her, she stood on shaky legs, using the planting tables to steady her steps. Shin ran ahead, alerting her men she’d returned.

“She’s back,” Nathan said, rushing towards her. Blake followed at a slower pace.

“I’m okay. I just got turned around in the woods.”

Nathan scooped her up in his arms and brought her to the work area, gently placing her on the edge of the table. Blake switched on the heaters as he passed, bringing the bourbon decanter with him. He poured her a drink and pressed it into her hand, using his to wipe her wet hair from her face. “Maris, are you okay?” He pulled several pieces of pine straw from her hair and jacket. She sipped the drink and relished the heat it brought. “Something happened, besides getting lost. You’re all cut and scraped.”

“Let her catch her breath,” Nathan sniped.

“Stop it, both of you.” She jumped down and realized her legs were still shaky. “I’m cold and wet and highly annoyed.”

“Annoyed at what?” Blake didn’t hold back the smile forming on his lips. “Us, because we didn’t tell you about your history?”

“That, too. But I wasn’t alone in the woods. Someone was out there with me.”

“Who? Did you see someone?” Nathan sounded worried.

“I don’t know who it was, but it was definitely human, not animal.” She hesitated and finally added, “It’s the same feeling I got when I was appraising the woods.”

“The day I found you there and you refused to come with me? You were so close and so angry and so cute, you have no idea how hard it was not to grab you and kiss you silly.” While Nathan seemed to be holding back his anger over his conversation with Blake, he smiled, giving her a sidelong glance. When she caught his gaze, he

turned back to Blake. “I told you we needed more security. Anyone can access the property if they know the woods.”

“We can’t fence in all the acreage, Nathan, we’ve discussed this before.” This was the first time she’d seen Blake apprehensive. “From now on, if she wants to wander, one of us goes with her.”

“Excuse me, are you admitting you knew there was someone watching me out there?” Something snapped inside her, and anger rose first. She slammed the crystal to the dirt floor and headed to the doorway. “That’s it. I’m going back to the house for a shower. I can find my own way, and right about now I don’t care to see either of you for a while.” She huffed out of the greenhouse and into the storm, not caring that she was being hammered by the rain and wind. It seemed to Maris the stone house was much farther away than she remembered.

During the strenuous walk, she acknowledged her anger wasn’t outrage at the situation. She’d stormed out because she almost ran to Nathan. That slight smile had opened a door to her past, to their past together. In an instant, it all flooded back, how he made her feel, how they loved each other. How poorly she treated him and Blake, using them both because they let her. “I was a total bitch,” she declared, thankful she was close to the house. “And those two should get a set of balls between them. They should have respected themselves and ditched me, long ago. But we weren’t finished, and neither of them would let go after all this time. They bought a home and business together. They banter like old washwomen, yet they stay together.” She was pushing the back door open, Shin running ahead, when an image flashed before her.

It was the three of them, naked and sprawled on the huge, ornately carved bed in the master suite. They were all relaxed, smiling, their bodies covered in a layer of sweat, their limbs intertwined. Then it was gone, the image faded. “Damn, I took them both to the master suite of someone else’s house and fucked them at the same time.” Maris decided she was a rude bitch to boot. Then it dawned on her

that Aminta would know all about her escapades in the Chateau. “Oh, God. I’m definitely not ready to face him just yet.”

Inside, she stripped off all her wet clothes on the back porch. She stood naked and freezing in the kitchen for several seconds, deciding what she wanted. With shaking hands and numb fingers, she set up the coffee pot and hit the switch as she headed to the shower. Pausing, she grabbed a bottle of vodka from the freezer, not bothering to take a glass. She took a long swig from the bottle and decided to take it with her.

With the hot water spraying over her, she finally started to defrost, the feeling in her fingers and toes starting to come back. Maris stood before the bathroom mirror, her robe snuggled tight against her, her hair wrapped in a towel. With a second slug of the vodka, she wiped the fog from the mirror and looked at herself.

Besides the scrapes on her hand and one on her cheek, she decided she’d live. But she also decided she had to make some decisions, and quickly. Who was after her, and how did her men know about it? And why didn’t they tell her?

She took her time drying her hair and getting dressed in old, comfortable sweats. The smell of the coffee wafted upstairs. Grabbing the vodka, she headed down, only to find Nathan and Blake sitting at the kitchen table, mugs waiting to be filled.

“Well, are you ready to tell me the rest of my horrible past and why someone is stalking me now?”

“Sit down, Maris, we need to talk.”

Chapter Fifteen

It felt familiar, sitting around the kitchen table with coffee mugs before them. She hesitated at the refrigerator door, wondering how many times they'd done this in the past. She took the milk container to the table and retrieved several small glasses from an overhead cabinet, placing them in the center of the table with the vodka bottle, and poured the coffee. She instinctively went to an overhead cabinet near the stove and grabbed two packages of shortbread cookies. One was just a buttery cookie, and the second had a dollop of jam in the center of its swirled layers. Maris opened both packages, placing the plain ones near Nathan and the jam ones before Blake. He didn't hold back a smile.

"I don't know how I knew that," she mused, taking the seat between them and cradling her hot mug between her hands. "I have a hundred questions, but don't know where to start." She sipped the steamy brew. "Aminta, he had to know what we did in the Chateau. Why did he allow us to use the house for our sex games?"

For the first time, she saw both her men blush with embarrassment. While Nathan's cheeks turned pink, Blake's complexion went white first, then bright red.

"Aminta knew how much you'd come to love the land and the house, much more than the owner. He didn't spend much time here, as it was an investment he lost interest in and wasn't willing to fund properly." Nathan took a cookie from the package and ate it in two bites.

"You lived here in this house while you were working, but you always were in awe of the main house." Blake turned to look out the

back window. “You saw the repairs it needed, and it angered you that he let it stagnate.”

“What kind of repairs?”

“Paint, paper, new roof, the heating needed updating. There was a lot of work to be done, Maris, and we’ve spent the last years bringing her back to this level of habitation. With your input, it could be a grand house again.”

“From what I’ve seen, you’ve already done that.” She reached forward and took a cookie from each package, placing them on a paper napkin before her. She snapped each in half and tasted each kind.

“You’ve only seen the entry and some of the downstairs rooms. The dining room and solar,” Nathan offered.

“The upstairs still needs renovations.”

“What is the hesitation in your voice, Blake?”

He finally looked directly at her. “We, Nathan and I, decided not to redecorate those rooms, because we wanted your input. Wanted you to be comfortable.”

“So you wasted five years waiting for me to pick paint and paper? I don’t think so.”

“Fine.” Nathan stood and pushed his chair from the table. “We didn’t redecorate because we didn’t know which one of us would live in the space. We each took a guest room and bath and made ourselves comfortable there, waiting.”

“Neither of you uses the master suite?”

“No, not after what we shared in that room.” Blake took a jam cookie and popped the whole thing in his mouth.

“Just what did we do in that room?” She leaned forward and took another taste of each cookie. Neither man answered, and she didn’t hold back the smile forming on her lips. “You’re embarrassed, both of you. What happened between us there?”

“Maybe it would be better if you remembered that on your own.” Nathan topped off their coffee cups before taking his seat.

“Damn it, I’m tired of waiting.”

Blake turned to stare at her. “You, my dear, are still are a rare woman in many ways. Five years ago you had a power over us that took us...out of our comfort zone.” He squirmed in his seat but didn’t look away. “You managed to get us both here one night, introduced us, and told us you weren’t going to give up either of us and we’d better learn to get along.”

“So you each knew about the other, but I introduced you?”

“Yes. We all were caught up in the forbidden ideas that swirled in your mind. We did what we did to please you.” Blake finally looked away.

“Was I pleased? What did I ask of you?” Maris tried not to let on that she’d had a flashback of the three of them together. “Well, what was so bad that you can’t verbalize it?”

“We all wound up in bed together, the three of us.” At that second, she realized Blake wasn’t as worldly and sophisticated as she’d thought. While her memory of their time together was mere snippets of their actions, she understood he hadn’t been the instigator. She was the one who took him out of his comfort zone, she orchestrated their sex games, she pushed each man to see just how far he’d go.

“Nathan, your perspective?”

“We wanted to please you, Maris. Neither of us was as adventurous as you wanted us to be, but you coaxed us to let down our guard and just feel.”

“The problem is, Maris, once we tasted your style of erotic, neither of us could go back to just being our old selves. We missed the part of you that brought out our deeper wants, ones we wouldn’t share with other women.”

“And since then?” She glanced to each man, neither giving her an answer. Clearing her throat, she asked again. “Since then?”

“Since then, women have come second to fixing the lousy house, to waiting for you to show up and tell us you remembered how you changed our lives.”

“Blake, that’s enough,” Nathan’s tone sounded like a warning.

“No, let him talk, tell me.”

“Neither of us was interested for a while, especially right after the accident. Then there was the trial, and we both assumed you would regain some memory of us.”

“And when I didn’t?”

“We focused on the house.”

“Surely you dated, had some kind of recreational sex?”

“I eventually did,” Blake said, not looking at Nathan. “But it was never the same. Every woman I met was measured by your memory. You’re a hard act to follow.”

“Nathan?”

“I’ve dated in the last years, nothing important.”

“I can’t believe you both wasted five years of your life waiting for me. Why didn’t one or both of you just go to Manhattan and show up at my door one day? I had a separate apartment from Margo the last four years, why not come when I was alone?”

“You were never truly alone. Your mother had eyes and ears all over the city. Other residents in your building regularly reported to her on your schedule and any company you might have had.” Blake nodded to Nathan to continue. He shook his head at a memory he didn’t share. “We did try to contact you, at work and at home. Your boss was one of her informants, too.”

“Are you saying I only got the job because of Margo paying Roland to spy on me?”

“We figured you got the job on your own, but she made it clear once you’d started what was allowed and what wasn’t.”

“We never got a call through to you there, either.” Blake picked up a second cookie but put it on the table before him.

Maris rested both her elbows on the table, using her fingers to massage her aching head. “Talk about being manipulated, all of us were.” She stood and walked to the refrigerator, studying its contents.

“I can have Aminta bring us supper if you’re hungry, or we can go back up to the main house.” Nathan’s voice was questioning.

“I’m not ready to confront Aminta just yet.” She continued to rummage, pulling out a package of bacon, a dozen eggs, and butter. “So, I’ll keep occupied cooking while you tell me who caused my accident.” She paused and turned to her men. “I’ve referred to it so long as an accident, it’s hard to believe it wasn’t. So, who tried to kill me?” She turned away, reached under a cabinet beside the stove, and pulled out a frying pan. When the bacon was sizzling, she glanced over her shoulder. “Nathan?”

“You’re not going to believe it,” Blake muttered.

“Right about now I’d believe almost anything.”

“You were right earlier.” Nathan hesitated, but finally continued after considering his words. “You said things changed after your mother married your stepfather. Apparently, that was about the time your stepbrother and sister found out about your parentage. They blamed Margo for all the turmoil in their lives growing up.”

“We don’t know the specifics, only that their history was sprinkled with incidents. Their mother apparently found out about you and Margo. She refused to divorce your father and never let him forget his shortcomings.”

Maris spun on her heel to face the men. “You were about to say his mistake, weren’t you?”

“Apparently, he promised Margo he would leave his wife and family for her, but she controlled the money. She found out he’d been supporting you. She wasn’t happy, but wouldn’t let him go and wouldn’t let him ever forget.”

“I wonder how all our lives would have differed if she had thrown him out?”

“He wasn’t willing to find out, he liked her money. It seems he wasn’t very good at his job, and only kept it because of his wife’s influence. It was more of a social position than earned job.”

“He died before my incident. Who continued the grudge?” She pulled out a large bowl and started cracking eggs into it.

“Blake, you’ve been quiet, please continue.”

“Once I say this, you’ll never be able to go back to who you were. Are you sure you want to know?”

“It seems I have no choice now. Better to go forward armed with the truth than the lies I believed were true.”

Blake squirmed in his seat, glancing to Nathan. She watched a look cross between them, but Blake finally continued. “After your stepfather’s...father’s death, your step-sister...” He paused, but she gave him an exaggerated roll of her eyes. “Your stepsister, Robin, decided to confront you. About your parentage and the inheritance. She was highly annoyed you got part of their mother’s money.”

“I don’t know that I’d blame her, I’d be pissed too.”

“She went beyond pissed, Maris. She lured you to Niagara Falls that day on the pretext of making amends and healing the family. When she confronted you, she apparently didn’t like your response.” Blake looked away.

“And?”

“And,” Nathan continued, handing her the salt and pepper shakers. “And in a fit of temper she claims she lost her...perspective, and she shoved you. She said you slipped and she tried to save you, but others had seen what happened.”

“She shoved me over the side of Niagara Falls?”

“The walkways were wet. She claimed you two argued and you slipped.” Nathan shrugged his shoulder. “It was the best defense they could think of under the circumstances.”

“So I slipped with her help.” Maris kept occupied by setting the table, digesting the information her men finally gave her.

“What happened to her?”

“More important, what happened to you right after? What do you truly remember?”

“I have no memory of being at Niagara Falls. My last true memory, or at least I think it is true, was being at the lawyer’s office, settling the estate. I wasn’t in on the meetings, just brought in to sign the papers after it was explained about my share. I have no memory of finishing school or working here.” She looked in the microwave and found a fresh loaf of bread waiting. Taking several slices, she popped them in the toaster near the stove and pulled out the cooked bacon, dropping it onto paper towels to drain. Then she poured out most of the bacon fat and set the pan back, using a fork to beat the eggs before dropping the liquid into the pan.

“Go on, how long after that meeting was I thrown?”

“About two years. The concept festered inside Robin, made her crazy, her brother claimed. She’d become so wrapped up in the betrayal as she saw it, she wasn’t able to move on. Your stepsister was livid. There was definitely premeditation about the meeting. She chose the spot, saying she wanted to be away from familiar settings and people, wanted to talk to you on neutral ground. You’d been working here, so she came to you. Apparently she figured no one would recognize her there.”

“Wait, why did I block out working here?”

“We don’t know,” Nathan offered, “but when you finally roused from the fall, you thought you’d just finished college. Margo wouldn’t set it right because she wanted you to forget your history.”

“And Robin, what happened to her?”

“She chose poorly, it seems. While she figured no one would recognize her dressed in the rain gear, some tourists saw you two arguing and her push you over. They snapped photos while others ran to help.”

“So some unknown person just trying to enjoy a holiday got wrapped up in all this, too.” Maris used the fork to scramble the eggs

in the pan, pausing to put more bread in the toaster after the first slices popped up.

“They didn’t get involved, just left their photos with the authorities and gave statements to what they saw.” Blake hesitated and went to the refrigerator, pulling out a carton of orange juice. “In the end, the family plea bargained her charges.”

“Go on,” she prompted.

“Well, when it was all said and finished, she copped an insanity plea. It was better than assault and premeditated attempted murder charges.”

“So what happened to her?”

“She was remanded to a facility for the insane until she could prove she was stable.”

“How long was she there?”

“Until six months ago when she was finally considered cured. She was released into her brother’s care, but after a few weeks, she ran away from him. That’s how we knew she was out there, apparently still harboring all the old animosities. Nelson called us to let us know. He wanted you warned she was coming for you.” Blake ran out of steam and sat down.

“We’ve had police and private detectives looking for her. That was when we decided it was time to bring you home, here where we could protect you better.” Nathan took the second slices of toast from the machine, added them to the first ones, and put the plate on the table.

Maris was quiet while she finished the eggs and divided them onto three plates. After dropping several slices of the crispy bacon on each, she brought them to the table. None of them talked. They all became very intent on buttering their toast.

“We’ve tried to find her, Maris, but it’s like she disappeared from the face of the earth. We’ve had reports of her being sighted back in Montreal and in Vancouver. But none of the leads panned out.”

“So she’s the one who’s been watching me these last months. At least I wasn’t crazy. Instinct told me something wasn’t right.”

“Once we find her, she’ll go back to the facility. Running away voided her release terms.”

“So we just have to wait for her to find me and...and what? Kill me this time, or just fuck with my life so I never have any peace? And your lives, too. Did she know about you?”

Nathan became very interested in his eggs. Blake finally looked directly at her. “She found out about us at the hearings. Their lawyer used us to ruin your reputation, to make it seem like you deserved the comeuppance.” He shook his head. “All the transcripts are available if you want to read them.”

“So she hated me, hurt me, but didn’t succeed in killing me, and used you two as pawns?”

“Her lawyers tried everything to make it seem she was insanely jealous and not in her right mind instead of criminally responsible.”

“Holy crap! If I read this or saw it in a movie, I’d say they were stretching it. To actually have it happen to me, I can’t quite comprehend it all right now. I’d like to read the transcripts later.” She drew a deep breath and smiled. “For now, I’m hungry.” She tucked her fork into the eggs and ate heartily. “It’s hard to believe I can’t remember any of this.”

“Margo said it was a blessing in many ways, all in her favor.” Blake didn’t manage to cover his disgust.

“I don’t understand why you two didn’t just move on? Why would you give up so much time not knowing if I’d ever come back to either of you.”

“Sometimes we don’t understand it either,” Nathan conceded. “Eat before it gets cold.”

They finished their meal in silence, fed Shin, and loaded the dishwasher in relative quiet and all hesitated when it was done.

“I’m not sure what to feel or how I feel right now. Ambivalent, I think, and very tired. Thank you both for finally telling me the truth.”

“Why not get some sleep? We’ll talk about it in the morning.” Blake reached to run his fingers down her cheek until Nathan cleared his throat.

“You’ll be safe. We’ll sleep down here to make sure of it.”

Nathan’s offer was sweet but unnecessary. “No, I’ve caused enough trouble to you two. I’ll lock up and be fine. Go home, both of you. I’ll see you in the morning.” She paused to kiss each man on the cheek before heading to the stairs. “Come, Shin,” she said and waited for the dog to join her. “Seriously, I’ll be fine. I’m exhausted.”

“Call the house if you need anything.” Blake sounded insistent.

“I will, I just need time to process all this information. Good night.” She turned and headed up the stairs before she changed her mind and asked them to stay. Only she didn’t know which one she’d ask, and taking them both to her bed, even just to sleep, didn’t seem right.

Chapter Sixteen

Maris woke with a start in a cold sweat. She was nauseous, and her head throbbed. Every limb in her body ached. She threw back the covers and turned on the bedside light. Shin slept peacefully before the closed door. Glancing to the bedside clock, she saw it was just after midnight.

The dream had felt so real. She was tumbling off a cliff towards the rushing water below, her arms and legs flailing as she descended. She woke before she hit the water. Now she had to decide if it was a real memory or just a dream from what her men had told her today.

She dropped back on the pillows and tried to find a comfortable spot. After punching her pillows for a bit, she snaked her hand out from the covers and snapped off the light.

Maris woke an hour later with the same feeling of dread she had from the first nightmare. She decided that's what they were, since she had no control over them. This time she was teetering on the edge, grasping at air, when a feminine hand, the arm covered in yellow rain gear, reached forward and shoved her. This time she got up and went to the bath. Water splashed on her face didn't help the anxiety. "Cookies," she said to the face in the mirror. She watched a smile cross her lips and wondered who she'd turn out to be. The mild-mannered woman who spent her life playing with numbers and other people's real estate, or the freethinking landscape artist who used men without thought. "It would be nice if I could find a balance between them. Come Shin."

The dog looked up at her from a lazy sleep before finally stretching and standing so she could open the door. The dog ran

ahead, and Maris paused on the stairs looking at her two men, asleep in the living room. Blake had stretched out on the sofa, and Nathan was in the club chair before the fireplace, his neck bent at an odd angle. His long legs were stretched before him.

“He’s gonna be sore in the morning,” she said to Shin and continued on to the kitchen. One of her men had left the stove light on as a night light. Her destination was easy—the microwave where she’d stowed the rest of the cookies earlier. Aminta had taught her that trick. Instead of having a separate breadbox, the microwave was an easy, bug-free stash.

Pulling out a chair from the table, she tried to let her mind go blank. It didn’t work. Even the cookies didn’t help. “I wish I had brought the files back with me,” she said to the dog, knowing she wouldn’t walk to the greenhouse at this time in the dark, alone.

She paused in the living room and glanced to the staircase. She decided to stay there with them for a while, taking a seat in the club chair across from Nathan. Studying each of their faces, tidbits of memories started to surface.

* * * *

Maris watched Nathan’s chest rise and fall with each breath. His body size and bulk attracted her, his large hands excited her. The silky hairs of his beard would tickle her thighs. In an instant, she remembered his fingers stretching her pussy wide, pushing deeper until she climaxed against them. She knew he’d gently pulled from her body and drew her own moistness across her lips, then descended to lick her lips clean. They had been in the forest, a small clearing beyond the gardens, when their amorous necking had gone further. Maris didn’t know exactly when the incident happened, only that she had instigated the encounter. The memory cleared as she studied his face. They’d been walking the gardens, her showing him some of the changes she’d make. He was interested but distracted by her hands

roaming his chest and shoulders. He'd told her she should be careful what she asked for, and she dropped her hand to cover his crotch. His cock had been semi-hard, but her touch made him completely erect. Maris knew she'd directed him into the woods. He'd been hesitant. Once inside the tree line, she'd dropped to her knees and rubbed her cheek across his erection. He'd groaned and allowed her to unzip his pants and pull him to her waiting lips. She'd devoured his cock, hard and thick, until she tasted his droplets of pre-cum. That was when he'd tugged her up to kiss him. During the kisses, he'd turned her back against the tree and let his hands wander along her body. He'd pulled up her T-shirt and sucked her braless nipples until they were puckered and erect, needy and wanting more of his attention. Her hand had come to the back of his head and held him in place. He let his hand drop and opened her jeans, sliding his palm against her mound. A shiver ran through her body as if he'd just touched her clit this very second, but she knew it was a long time ago.

Maris found it hard to comprehend how she'd been so free and responsive, especially in an outdoor setting. She remembered her head dropping back against the tree as he stroked her puffy pussy lips, his mouth still to her nipple. During the process, he'd slid his hand lower and let his middle finger slide inside while the heel of his hand continued pressure on her clit. She'd come quickly when he slipped a second finger inside her. Nathan had held her tight, and she knew he could feel her muscles contracting around him. That was when he pulled from her and wiped her cum on her lips only to kiss it away. They hadn't fucked that afternoon, she'd gone back to her knees before him and swallowed his erection down her throat, her sucking motions too much for him to hold back.

She had a vivid memory of him drawing her up along his chest a second time and kissing her to share his cum. They'd arranged clothing quickly and all but ran back to the house. Inside, she'd drawn him upstairs to the master bedroom and locked them in. While he'd been cautious, she knew she'd stripped off her clothing without a

second thought. Standing before him with her breasts still full, her nipples still puffy, she'd used her own fingers to penetrate her pussy, pulling them out and sucking them in her own mouth. He'd stripped off his clothes while watching her and tackled her onto the bed, landing on top of her. She'd moved her hips only slightly to put his full cock at her entrance, thrusting upward until he finally slid inside her. Maris remembered their lovemaking as if it had been this week, not years earlier. Worse yet, she found she was tensing her thighs together to stop the ache the memory created. Nathan had fucked her with abandon that afternoon, setting their pace, slow and fast at his whim until she'd clenched around him. He'd thrust deeper and let himself come. Only seconds after, he'd pulled from her body and crawled between her legs, using his tongue and fingers to make her come again. Her breathing was shallow, and their bodies were covered in a layer of sweat. It was his grin she remembered most, his head peeking from between her legs with a very satisfied grin. She knew she'd reached down and tousled his hair and offered her hand to help him back onto the bed. They'd lain together for a long time, not talking, just relaxing.

Rousing herself from the memory, she almost let her fingers drop to rub her now moist pussy lips. Instead, she gripped the arms of the chair, forcing the image away.

"Well," she whispered aloud, "apparently I wasn't a prude and Nathan was an amazing lover."

Letting go of the fabric, she used her fingers to massage her temples, the ache in her head retreating. Blake groaned and turned onto his side on the sofa where he slept.

Watching him settle back to sleep, she remembered their day in his studio. Remembered she'd been the one to choose the paintbrush for him to use as a fake cock on her. His expression had questioned her move, but she'd only smiled at him, a silent go-ahead to penetrate her. She could still visualize how he'd sucked the handle before pushing it inside her.

She also remembered something else. She'd taken Blake to the master bedroom, too. A different time than Nathan, but she'd enticed him to fuck her on the same bed.

Maris shut her eyes and remembered how she'd drawn him up the stairs, couldn't remember what they were laughing at, but that he'd been hesitant. Once upstairs, she locked the door and turned to him. His smile would always be her complete undoing, she knew. The wicked little grin his lips spread into when he thought about sex.

They had kissed in the center of the room for a long time, slowly peeling away layers of clothing, tossing them where they fell. They'd wound up on the bed fucking in a missionary position at first. She'd changed their position, turning on her side with him spooning behind her to take him deeper. None of the words they shared came to mind, only the hazy image of them making love. He'd pulled from her several times and licked her pussy and anus before going back to fuck her. In a moment of clarity, Maris remembered taking his hand to her butt, an invitation he didn't resist. At first, he'd palmed her cheeks, pinching her skin while his cock slid in and out of her. She had taken his hand to her mouth and sucked his middle finger, his cock throbbing harder inside her. She also remembered she'd taken his hand and put it back on her butt. He'd questioned her with a look, and she knew she'd given him permission to penetrate her anus. Sliding his finger inside her while fucking her pussy had been enough to push her over the edge into orgasm. He'd come inside her and paused to catch his breath before moving from her. She reached back and drew his cum-coated cock from her pussy and drew it higher. Her intent became clear as she made the same move several times. He'd come alive in her hand, getting harder each time she rubbed his cock head along her anus.

Maris knew she'd rolled onto her stomach and propped her butt high in the air. Blake hadn't refused the invitation, using his fingers to draw his cum from her pussy and wet her higher. She knew they'd talked as lovers did, but still couldn't find the words they'd used, only

that she'd wanted the invasion. When his cock was hard, he'd stroked it, making her turn to watch while his moist finger invaded her. She'd pushed back, talking it deeper until he finally replaced it with his cock.

Maris knew she'd wanted him to fuck her ass, had enjoyed it, and knew she missed the different climax it afforded her. They'd stayed that way for a long time, him slowly fucking her butt while she used two of her own fingers to push inside her pussy.

Her body shook as she remembered the powerful orgasm that had led to. Sitting in the living room now, she was tired and horny. While she still pressed her thighs together, the ache wouldn't subside.

"Maybe," she wondered aloud, but neither man roused. Deciding she didn't have the courage to start something now, she quietly went back upstairs to her bed, alone. Even Shin stayed sleeping before the fireplace.

She'd left the door ajar, knowing both men were downstairs. She paused at the nightstand drawer and pulled out the glass dildo, shaking off her robe, letting it fall to the floor. Climbing back into her bed, she lay in the center, naked, sucking the glass phallus. Her fingers rubbed her pussy until she took the saliva-coated toy and slipped it between her lips. Shaking her hips to seat it in just the right spot, Maris used one hand to fuck her pussy with the glass and the other to pinch her nipples. She came, but not like she remembered orgasms with her men.

* * * *

Nathan woke early, his neck cramped and his body aching from the position he'd slept in the chair. His shifting woke Blake, who startled and sat up on the edge of the sofa, forcing sleep from his being.

"Is she okay?" he asked.

"I think so. I haven't heard anything from upstairs."

They stared at each for a long time in the still dark room, neither saying what they were thinking. Finally, Blake broke the standoff.

“We both know if we don’t make a move, she won’t, at least for a long time.”

“I realize that. She’ll be afraid of hurting one of us.” Nathan shook his head at their predicament.

“My worst fear is she’ll walk away from both of us to avoid that situation.”

Nathan stood and stretched. “What do we do?” He’d watched a sly grin cross Blake’s lips and knew he probably wasn’t going to like the answer.

“I say we give her an opportunity to get to know us both again. We always said the one she didn’t choose would walk away. I can’t stand not knowing where my future lies and if it’s with her or not. If she’s going to leave me, then I have to let her go and find some kind of new situation.”

“I know I censor every word, afraid I’ll say the wrong thing.” Nathan strode towards the kitchen and started to make coffee. He glanced up and saw Blake in the doorway. “What?”

“We’ve done it before, I could do it again. Long term, if it meant keeping Maris with us.”

“With us? Don’t you want her all to yourself?” Nathan finished spooning coffee into the filter and put the canister aside. “I mean, hell, I guess I have to admit some of her time is better than none. But I always assumed we’d have a conventional relationship.”

“We’re talking about Maris. She’s never been conventional. Hell, that was part of her appeal. She was a free spirit, willing to experiment, willing to be different among the masses. Quite honestly, I don’t want ordinary any longer. If I did, I’d have had relationships in the last years. Women I’ve met are just ordinary.”

“I agree. I never met any woman like her. Did you ever imagine before meeting her that you’d share a woman with another man?”

“Honestly,” Blake hesitated, “no. Especially with you after she first introduced us. Just the idea of you grated on my being, meeting you was like being taunted with my successor. But what were our options? We both knew years ago it took both of us to satisfy her.”

“We surely managed to do that, but unfortunately we couldn’t keep her safe.”

“If she’d told one of us of her plans that day, we might have.” Blake stretched to his full height in the doorway. “We can’t go back. I can’t stand the limbo. She’s starting to remember her history. I’m afraid if we wait too long, she’ll revert to the personality her mother instilled after the accident.”

“She’s just starting to smile like she used to. But,” Nathan paused, “none of us is the same person anymore.”

“Look, we’ve forged this truce because of her, our business is because of her. Hell, we even refurbished that old monstrosity of a house because we knew how much she loved it. I say it’s time to show her how we can love her.”

“You’re saying initiate a sexual situation and see who she chooses?”

“I’m saying I’d rather share her with you than wonder who would be next if we fuck this up.” Blake grinned.

“In the last days I’ve noticed how her speech has reverted. She’s much freer around us, as if she’s let her guard down.”

“Or as if she’s finally getting comfortable with the woman she became. We all know she won’t go back to the Maris we knew before, but I’d like to experience the woman she’s become, beyond her mother’s influence. And it’s apparent she wasn’t happy with that lifestyle. Why not let her know the possibilities. If she rejects us, we’ll take a step back. But...”

“But?” Nathan prompted.

“But if we don’t take a step, she may never find that piece of her personality that let her experience us, together or individually.”

“So do we plan some romantic night or what?”

“Hell, my cock is so hard right now, why not offer her an early morning encounter? She’ll be sleepy, maybe she won’t think, maybe she’ll just react. I say it’s worth a try.”

“I suppose it can’t be worse than the ache I’ve carried all these years. What do you have in mind?”

“Let’s just go present her with our morning erections and see how she reacts. If it’s badly, we’ll know.” Blake laughed, but it was a guarded laugh.

“I never thought I’d agree to both of us being in bed with her again. I so wanted her for myself.”

“But that may not happen now.” Blake’s statement was too true to refute.

“You’re right. I hate to admit it, but you are. All right, I’ll give it one shot and let her decide. Hell, I’m sick of jacking off every morning and night to her memory. Let’s just approach her and see what happens.”

“Fine, but with one caveat. If we do this, it might be permanent. If she decides she wants us both, can you live with that?” Blake stared at Nathan.

“If I have to share her, better with you than another man.” Nathan shook his head. “I can’t believe we’re contemplating doing this again. But I can’t see any other way.”

“Come on,” Blake said, “my cock is strangling in these jeans.”

“Just remember this was your idea.”

“Yes, Nathan. If it goes horribly wrong, I’ll take the blame.”

“If I’m beside you, I have to accept the blame, too.”

“Then let’s just go upstairs and see what happens?” Blake turned and walked away. Nathan stood for several seconds before following, his cock twitching in his pants, deciding for him.

Chapter Seventeen

Maris woke to find both her men standing beside her bed, naked. It was early morning, the sun just peeking through the trees and invading her room.

“Are you real or a memory?” she questioned, sitting forward and pushing her hair from her face.

“We’re real,” Nathan said, using his left hand to tug his already erect cock.

“Question is,” Blake said, reaching to the middle of the bed where she’d tossed the used toy, “Are you interested?” He took the toy to his lips and licked her dried juices from it. “Do you want us to leave?” His other hand stroked his cock, a drop of pre-cum at his tip.

“I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do, but I know what I want this very moment.” Maris leaned forward, letting the blanket fall from her body, and took the toy from Blake. She saw his questioning expression and pushed it gently into her pussy. She shook her hips until she found her spot and rolled onto her belly, reaching to both men. “Come where I can reach you,” she prompted. Each man took a step forward and she immediately grasped each erection.

“God help us all,” Nathan uttered as the tip of her tongue teased him.

“There’s enough people in the room,” she’d said while reaching to take Blake’s erection to her lips. She licked the droplet of pre-cum and took the whole head between her lips, teasing the underneath with her tongue. Back and forth, she went between them, relaxing into the act, enjoying the power she held over their releases. With all the memories that were fading back to her weary mind, this would be a

new one to cherish. One side of her wanted to tell them to go away, that she didn't do things like this. Hell, she didn't even have sex with one man in the last few years. However, with them standing before her, erections in hand, nude bodies within reach, she didn't ignore the stirring in her belly. Already she'd gone too far. The dildo inside her shifted each time she took the other man's cock to her lips. There was no turning back. Her body wanted the release she knew they would bring her. And why not? They were all willing adults with the same needs.

Settling further onto the dildo, she let her mind clear, keeping only her men's enjoyment forward. What happened later would happen, but for now she just wanted to feel. Continuing to lavish each cock with affection, she was relearning their body's reactions, how Nathan's cock would twitch between her lips when she used a bit of her teeth to tease him on an outward pull. How Blake's cock surged when she teased the underneath of his rim with her tongue.

"Maris, I'll come soon," Blake told her, his voice hesitant.

"I don't want this to end so quickly," Nathan added.

"It doesn't have to," she said switching to the other man. "I can't believe I'm doing this, sucking both of you and humping the mattress to move the dildo inside me."

"I can fix that. Let me fuck you." Blake said the words hesitantly. Nathan cleared his throat but didn't interject with words.

"I'd rather you both come on my breasts and suck them clean. Can you make me come that way? Does either of you have a problem with that?"

Nathan shook his head no, and Blake only gave her his sexy smile. Maris rolled onto her back and centered herself on the bed. She tugged each man by their cocks, Nathan kneeled beside her chest while Blake climbed over her, pausing only for a second to rub his erection against her clit before taking the same position on her other side. With a hand on each man, she pumped their cocks until they came on her breasts. Nathan came first, spraying on her chest and

belly. Blake came only moments later, adding his cum. Without prompting, both men moved to lie beside her, each taking a breast to their lips.

Maris figured she'd never have this opportunity again and decided she wouldn't waste this time. She rocked her pelvis up and down to shift the toy while the men sucked her nipples and licked their cum off her. With a hand behind each man's head, she drew first Nathan, then Blake to kiss her mouth.

"I'm so close," she whispered. Nathan reached between her legs and lightly stroked her clit. That was the last instant she remembered before the pinpoint lights filled her closed eyelids, forming a kaleidoscope of colors and patterns. "Oh, my," she managed, letting the orgasm linger as long as possible. Nathan still stroked her clit but paused to pull the toy from her. Tossing it aside, he slid first one, then a second finger in her wet pussy, prompting her to begin again. Not to be left out, Blake lowered his head and licked at her clit while Nathan fingered her. She took her breasts in her hands and pushed them together, pinching her nipples harder than the men had. In a moment of clarity, she paused and put her hand on the back of Blake's neck, prompting him to continue.

"Both of you, lie down." She squirmed out from them, hesitant to move Nathan's fingers from her. She stood by the side of the bed while they followed her request. Lying naked side by side, she leaned over them and repeated her earlier loving. Sucking each man in turn between her lips until they were hard, she wanted to feel them inside her. Maris paused, realizing she didn't have any protection. Her words tumbled out before she thought to stop them. "I'd fuck you both, but I don't have any condoms."

Maris looked down at the two men, both eager and ready to please her. Her nudity before them wasn't a factor. Maybe she was finding her true self again. Hell, all she could remember after the accident was being staid and virtuous. She hated her yearly physical when her doctor would touch her intimately. Even with a nurse in the room, it

still seemed lewd to her. Now she stood before two men and openly wanted them to touch her, wanted them to do all the sexual things she'd shut out of her life.

In unison, both men said, "I do," which made her laugh. Breaking the moment of uncomfortable memories, she left them, going to the piles of clothing. One pile, Nathan's she knew, was draped over the back of a chair by the fireplace. Blake's clothes were in a heap in the middle of the room. Reaching his first, she found his pants and drew out his wallet. Flipping it open, she found two condoms and took them both, tossing the leather back to the floor with his clothing. Returning to the bed, she crawled in between the men, reaching a hand to each erection.

"Handle these," she said, and each man grabbed his own cock. With little procedure, she sheathed each man and sat back on her heels. "I feel like I've been here before," she mused, moving to straddle Nathan's erection. Maris let herself slowly slide down over him, relishing the feel of him stretching her pussy to accommodate him. She fucked him only a few moments before moving off and straddling Blake. His cock was a bit smaller, but just as thick.

Maris used her weight to push her pussy over his cock, straining to the side to pump Nathan's. When she moved back to his cock, she pumped Blake's. Back and forth she went, stroking and fucking both men at her whim. While she fucked Nathan, Blake fisted his cock and sat forward to suck her tit. When she fucked Blake, Nathan reached over and kissed her mouth, sucking her tongue between his lips with the same rhythm she ground against Blake.

Maris knew she would come soon but didn't want to stop. When she realized both men were straining to hold back, she moved between them, kneeling near their cocks.

"Come on my pussy and lick me clean," she said, somewhat hesitant of her own words or wants.

"Lie down," Nathan told her as he moved to kneel beside her. Blake wasted no time and did the same. Maris waited as each man

tugged off the condoms. With a cock in each hand, she manipulated them until they came. Blake came first, his load landing on her lower belly and pussy. Nathan came with a few tugs, his cum spraying on her thighs and pussy. Maris dropped their cocks and relaxed back on the bed. Her men didn't need prompting. They both maneuvered so their heads were near her crotch. They took turns licking her clean and teasing her clit. Again her own fingers tugged on her breasts, pinching her nipples to just the point of pain until she came. Nathan used his cum to moisten his fingers and slid one in her pussy. She lifted her hips and he slid a second one beside it. Blake reached to fondle her breast, his fingers lightly pinching her nipple. Back and forth the men went, in an unspoken arrangement. One would lick her for a few strokes, then the other would. It seemed to Maris they'd done this before, but she had no memory. She came while Nathan sucked her tit and fingered her pussy. Blake was sucking her clit between his teeth, tugging harder until the orgasm passed. When she lay limp between them, they finally stopped their movements.

Blake moved up her body and kissed her lips while Nathan slowly drew his fingers from her.

"Oh, my, did we always start the day like this?" She meant to tease them but was curious.

"We usually ended the days like this," Nathan told her, settling beside her, his hand stroking her belly.

"I'll take it whenever I can get it, morning, noon, or night." Blake laughed, and Nathan gave him a scowling look out of habit.

"Where do we go from here?" she asked, hesitant to hear their answers.

"I say we sleep for a bit," Nathan decided, moving to lie closer to her, his arm protectively over her hips.

"I could nap," Blake added, snuggling on her other side.

Maris didn't let herself think about what they'd done, what she prompted. Instead, she let herself drift off to sleep, the reality of them both fucking her at the same time forming in her mind.

* * * *

There were no awkward morning moments when she woke later. The shower was running, and both men were gone from beside her. Nathan exited the bath with a towel wrapped around his hips, using a second to dry his hair.

“Morning,” he said with a huge smile.

“Morning,” she managed, suddenly embarrassed, grabbing for the sheet to cover herself with. She heard the water shut off, and Blake was beside the bed, toweling his naked body.

“No covering up, Maris. We get to look at you all we want.”

Maris felt an embarrassed heat chase up her chest, past her neck, and land on her cheeks.

“Why not jump in the shower and meet us downstairs for coffee?” Nathan tossed the towel he was holding to the foot of the bed and began dressing. Blake watched every move she made, laughing at her embarrassment.

“Darlin’ it’s nothing we haven’t seen before,” he said, smiling while he picked his clothes from the floor.

“Maybe to you two, but this isn’t normal behavior for me.”

“Thank God it wasn’t, or we might never have gotten you here.” Nathan’s tone spoke more than his words.

“Shower, my dear, or we’ll both jump you again.”

“Promises, promises,” she mused, dropping the sheet and crawling to the bedside. She stood to steady herself and let her body reach to a full stretch, her arms high above her head as she worked out the kinks.

“Standing like that will get you two hard cocks again,” Nathan mused, tossing the towel he’d had tucked around his waist at Blake to stop his forward reaching hand.

“Yeah, coffee sounds good.”

“I’ll be down in a bit,” she said, and managed not to run to the bathroom. Inside the already steamy room, the hot spray felt wonderful against her cum-coated skin and her aching muscles.

“My, my,” she mused, knowing they couldn’t hear her. “Maybe I can have the best of both worlds.”

* * * *

Standing under the hot spray, she let her hands wander along her body with a soft washcloth. It amazed her how normal everything seemed, at least from the men’s actions. She saw a familiar camaraderie between them, each pausing before staking his claim to her, as if they’d planned ahead who would do what and how.

“That’s silly,” she said, using her fingers to massage the soap through her hair. In the confines of the shower, she mused aloud. “Who was I, and how did I manage to get these two men in my bed, at the same time?” She knew it was true in the past, but wondered what would have happened if they hadn’t taken the first step. She was thankful they hadn’t made her decide who to love first. That was a step she was finding hard to contemplate. With the memories she was retrieving so clear, Maris understood that years earlier their bonds had been strong. She wondered what would have happened if she hadn’t been pushed over the side of Niagara Falls by a deranged half sister she never knew was family.

Standing before the mirror, she used her towel to wipe the steam away, tugging a comb through her wet hair. Staring at the reflection before her, an image formed. Another memory, she decided, and tried to focus on it. Instead of one of her men coming to mind, it was a feminine hand reaching from a yellow rain coat, pushing her backward. In that instant, she saw the long red fingernails her stepsister, Robin always agonized over. The scream she let out was involuntary. To Maris it was as if she were falling backward that very moment.

Chapter Eighteen

Nathan and Blake were in the kitchen after their morning interlude, both just short of strutting like peacocks after their morning in Maris' bed. They sat at the table, coffee cups in front of them. Nathan broke the silence. "I don't remember it being that easy with the three of us together. This morning, it was like we did this every day."

"That's our Maris. Once she decides what she wants, she makes it happen."

"Can you live like this?" Nathan walked to the pot and brought it back, topping off each of their cups.

"Look, I understand in some unspoken way, she'll always see you as the true alpha male. Maybe because you're older."

"Thanks." Nathan frowned at Blake.

"Or maybe because you met her first. But together, we seem to fill all her needs. Isn't that better than always wondering what if?"

"She is one hot bitch in bed, I can't get around that. When we were alone together it was good, but when it was the three of us, it seems to put her over the top." Nathan's admission cost him a part of his pride.

"I get it. It's the same when she and I were alone. It was amazing, but never the fever pitch she works me into when it's all of us."

They heard her scream, and both vaulted from the room, Blake reaching the bedroom first. "Maris?" He pushed ahead, glanced in the room, and when he didn't see her, headed to the bathroom. Nathan was just behind, all but stumbling into Blake when he stopped short in the bathroom doorway.

“Are you okay?” Blake turned to look at Nathan. She was standing at the sink, her fingers white-knuckled at her grasp.

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I had a bad memory.”

“What was it, honey?” Nathan moved into the room and grabbed a bath towel, wrapping it around her. “Come on, let’s get you out of here.” She led them back to the bedroom on shaky legs, dropping her weight on the chair beside the fireplace. Nathan bent down before her, and Blake sat on the edge of the ottoman between the chairs.

“I was combing out my hair, and I got a glimpse. It was Robin, her hand pushing me over the edge. And I knew it was her, those deep red acrylic nails she always futzed over.”

“It’s okay now. It was a bad memory, that’s all. You’re safe with us, and we won’t let anyone hurt you again, do you understand?” Nathan waited until she nodded.

“Come on, let’s get you dressed.” Blake hesitated and said, “Did you ever think I’d want you dressed?” He laughed and saw the smile Maris was trying to hold back.

“Coffee,” she whispered, and stood. Nathan watched her take several unsure steps toward the closet. “I want to finish the files today, and I want to get beyond all this.”

“Not a problem, coffee and files. Want some breakfast first?” Blake headed toward the door, and Nathan realized it was a sign of acceptance of their situation.

“No, just coffee.”

“I’ll call Aminta and have him bring us a tray in an hour or so to the greenhouse. In the meantime, you get dressed before we both tackle you to the bed and have our ways with you.”

“Promises, promises,” she said, but didn’t turn to look at him. “Nathan, I’m sorry to be such a pain.”

“Not a pain, Maris. I can’t believe I’m going to admit this, but Blake and I both love you. Whatever it takes to make you whole and happy again, that’s all we want.”

“Is it that simple?”

“It might work out that way. Let’s just find you your history and we’ll go from there. Come on, coffee’s waiting.”

“I’ll be right down.” Nathan knew leaving her alone in that bedroom was a necessity, but he didn’t have to like it.

* * * *

The next hours went by in a flash. Being in the greenhouse centered her, but the information she found was hard to believe on several levels. Beyond confirming her mother’s marital situation and their financial situation, she found glimpses of the woman she used to be in the trial transcripts. It seemed her whole, torrid sexual history had been laid open before a jury of strangers. There were copies of the lawyer’s letters to Nathan and Blake, warning them to stay away from her. There were copies of the restraining orders her mother had taken out to do just that. Finally, there were copies of the newspaper articles recounting the completely awful incident, including her mother’s infidelity and ultimate marriage to her father along with the sentence for her stepsister, Robin. She’d been remanded to the custody of a mental health facility until she proved stable to join society again. They gave no projected terms. The last papers were the worst. It was a copy of the letter to her mother from the facility, dated just before her death, that Robin’s release was imminent. Attached to it was a curt note from Nelson, confirming that Robin had been released into his custody, but that she’d disappeared and he had no information about where she currently was.

Maris dropped the pages and started to pace between the planting tables in the greenhouse.

“She’s out there again, trying to hurt me, isn’t she?”

“We don’t know for sure, only that she left her brother’s care without telling him, and he hasn’t seen her since.”

“She’s been on the run for over a year, so why hasn’t she found me or tried to hurt me again?” She continued to pace the aisles.

“Maybe she has, and that’s why the last months in Manhattan I felt so vulnerable. So am I supposed to live in limbo until she tries again and hope she doesn’t succeed?” She paused and looked directly at her two men. “Is this how you’ve both felt all these years, empty and hollow?” She watched the men glance toward each other and back to her. “Tell me, how did you get through the days?”

“One at a time, my sweet.” Blake stood but didn’t approach her. “While it seems a cliché to say, it really was one day after the other until we started to form some kind of rational life. But, having you back here with us is much better, well worth the wait.”

“I don’t know what to say or think. This morning,” she hesitated, feeling her cheeks heat with embarrassment. She stood tall and shook her hair from her face. “This morning, it all seemed so natural, so easy.”

“That’s how it was with the three of us. Do you really think we would have waited all this time if we didn’t love you enough to share you? Granted, I always thought I wanted a regular, ordinary relationship, one man one woman, but in the last days, I’ve come to realize there is something undeniable about the three of us together. It’s hard to admit I’m not man enough to please you, that it takes Blake to make us complete.”

“Man, I never thought I’d hear you say that.” Blake gave Nathan a mock salute.

“I never thought I’d say it, but it’s become our reality. The three of us together are a fully functioning unit, one I don’t want to put on hold any longer. If it takes both of us, I’m in for the long haul. I’m not saying I won’t have bouts of jealousy and contempt for Blake, but I understand he’s part of us, of this place, this land, and our relationship.”

“Oh, Nathan, I’m so relieved. I knew I couldn’t decide between you. I was prepared to leave you both and hope you’d find someone who made you happy.”

“Maris,” Blake interceded, “If that were possible, neither of us would have waited for you.”

“So where does this leave us?” Her tone sounded hesitant to her own ear.

“Let’s just take it as it comes.” Blake seemed relieved, and she noted a twinkle in his eyes that had been missing. “How about we all get out of here for a while, go to town for lunch, window shop, anything? Just away from here.”

“Okay, is that all right with you, Nathan?”

“Yeah, it sounds like a plan.”

* * * *

Their time in town turned into a short history lesson of the area, with both men filling in bits of information she’d forgotten.

“You used to love hockey, but hated it when they started using so much padding and protection. You always said it wasn’t a great game unless there was some blood on the ice.” Blake reached to brush the curls from her face.

“I didn’t, I mean, really I was bloodthirsty?”

“Not bloodthirsty, but you liked a good show.”

“I remember you wanting to bring home every stray animal you came across.” Nathan pushed his almost empty lunch plate to the side and leaned forward. “You couldn’t keep any of them, and started to volunteer at the shelter so you could spend time with the animals. I always knew when one was adopted. You’d be so relieved it was going to a good home, but you missed seeing them.”

“So my having a dog wasn’t a surprise to you.”

“No,” Blake interceded, “only that you only had one!” They all smiled, and she had a flash of the kennels and the feeling of dread that passed through her each time she had to lock the dogs and cats behind the fences.

“I think Shin is enough for now,” Maris answered quickly, not wanting the men to start bringing her home strays. She was having enough trouble reconciling her feelings for these men, let alone puppy training again. She stared out the restaurant window, watching the bustling sidewalk. Besides, accepting responsibility for another animal wasn’t smart right now. Her apartment only allowed one animal. What if she didn’t wind up staying with her men? Where would she go? Finances weren’t an issue, but she had to start thinking about her future. Together with her men only the past weeks, she knew she couldn’t judge their true personalities during that time. They’d all been on edge since she arrived, albeit for different reasons.

After this morning and the ease with which they fell into the sex acts, she understood why she’d been attracted to these men. Learning who they’d grown into in the years she’d been away was just as important as who they’d been. This made her start to consider who she’d been and who she wanted to become in this incarnation.

It seemed to Maris that she’d been a wild child in her youth and into her mid-twenties. Then she’d been a coddled woman who hadn’t had the ambition to look into her past and why she’d lost her memory. Surely, after the first years, she could have researched on her own, but she hadn’t. Now that she was finding bits of herself, she was angry she hadn’t had the ambition to look. It was so much easier to let her mother handle things, to just take each day and wait. Five years was a long time to wait when she could have helped herself.

Blake lightly touched her hand. “Where are you, Maris?” Shaken from her thoughts, she smiled, but knew it was weak. “What’s wrong?”

“Maris?” Nathan noted her silence, and his brow furrowed.

“I’m just accepting that I let it all go on for so long. That I let my mother take over and basically run my life. I did it because it was easy to be so dependent, not bothering with everyday things.”

“You had no way of knowing she was lying...I mean, that her truth wasn’t your old reality. In the beginning you were very fragile.

We understood,” Nathan glanced to Blake, “that she needed to protect you. Everyone expected you to wake up one morning remembering your background and be really angry about the whole situation.” He sat back and the telltale sign of a smile crossed his lips.

“I do that every morning. I wake almost afraid to open my eyes for fear of what I’ll find out.”

“You had a lot of people lying to you for a long time.” Nathan cleared his throat, but Blake continued. “What, it’s the truth. We waited all these years, at least let’s all be honest.” Blake glanced at Maris, and she nodded for him to continue. “I’d think finding out your parentage and extended family aren’t what was represented for your entire life would jolt anyone. Being tossed over the Falls because of jealousy is hard to get past.”

“*Blake.*”

“No, Nathan let him talk. I’d rather he be blunt and honest than have more lies. Go on, I can handle all this. I’ve had five years of *resting* to fall back on.”

“Nobody thought it would be long-term.” Blake let out a sigh and reached for his coffee. “At first the doctors said it would take a few weeks for you to remember your past. That dragged on into months.”

“Frankly, your mother didn’t help. She wouldn’t allow you to see or talk to anyone. She returned our mail and flowers. We were turned away at every try. She didn’t want you to remember because it reflected badly on her.” Nathan turned away in disgust. “I’m sorry, blunt is difficult.”

“I know, Nat.” Maris reached a hand toward him, and he swallowed it up with his large one. Blake closed his grasp tighter over her other hand. “I’m learning a lot of things I don’t like. Things about me and my past. I can’t change any of them now. I can decide how I want my future to work out.” Maris paused, and as she looked to each man, a new image formed in her mind. She licked her lips at the idea of having them both snuggled beside her, their hands roaming her body. She shook off the image and smiled. “I’m learning I’m a lot

stronger than I ever thought I was. I won't let that slip away." She squeezed each of their hands. "Besides, I have two wonderful men who seem anxious to spend time with me. I'd rather put our time to good use than ponder the past we can't rectify."

She pulled her hands from theirs and sat back in her seat. "I'd like you both to think about something, and I'm not looking for an answer now."

"Go on," Blake said, his sexy grin slipping to his lips.

"I'd like you each to think about what your perfect vision of us was, individually of course. I'm curious what each of you thought about us sexually all this time. What was the one recurring fantasy that always got you off?" Maris hesitated and frowned. "My language has changed dramatically since I've been up here. It flows out so naturally, but my vocabulary is so different."

"Not different, just relaxed." Blake glanced to Nathan and back to her. "You now know what happened on paper, and in your own way you're processing the information and dealing with it. With that, you're starting to relax. That's allowing you to find yourself again. It may sound like a verbal slip, but to us, it's the Maris we knew coming home to us."

"Blake, I don't ever remember you being so poetic. Then again, I only have snatches of our time." Maris laughed and eased what might have been a difficult situation. "Nathan, do you mind my slang? Did I ever call you Nat, the way it just came out?"

He leaned forward, his lips close to her ear. "You used to call me Nat, and now you can call me just about anything as long as you call to me. Let's get out of here and I'll teach you a few new words." He sat back with a satisfied smile, his eyes clear and bright.

"So my speech aside, I'd still like to know your image of the perfect fantasy. And you both have to accept that I will spend time with each of you alone." Maris glanced from one man to the other. Neither seemed happy, but neither interrupted. "I'm not trying to ruin a lovely day, just make you realize how I see us going forward. I've

lost too much time for my men to be jealous. You've spent five long years together, apparently begrudging your arrangements. Nevertheless, you have to remember you made them together, I had no input. I was the excuse, but the two of you bought a home and a business together and have run it successfully. Deep down you respect each other, and I need that to continue. So, if I'm with one of you or the other, no wondering what's going on and how or where."

"Not an image I prefer to dwell on," Blake mused.

"Nor I, but we accept you will be personal with both of us at separate times."

"That's how this all started isn't it, my being unable to choose between you back then? Nothing has changed, I still can't choose between you. In the end if I have to, I'd walk away before hurting either of you." She stared out the window, waiting for their response.

"Maris, we've come to terms with all this. Blake and I have accepted the only way to keep you happy was to accept we are a threesome. There's never been anything conventional about our relationships, and I doubt there ever will. I don't care about what the rest of the world thinks. I just want to enjoy our time, in our home and on our land."

"Blake?"

"I'm with Nathan on this. Alone, neither of us could satisfy you back then, why would we think it should be different now?"

"You two seem all too accepting all of a sudden. A few weeks ago, you were sniping at each other and having assistants watching the other. What's changed?"

"Everything. We've got our miracle. You're home with us, and we'll do whatever it takes to keep you here." Nathan looked out the restaurant window, not at her.

"Speaking of home, should we head out? I'd like to get back to walk Shin in the gardens."

"Is that an invitation or a plea for privacy?" Blake laughed and stood, tossing several bills on the table.

“Exercise,” she said and stood.

“I have one quick stop to make,” Nathan added.

Chapter Nineteen

At home, as she was referring to it, she and Shin wandered the gardens, staying in sight of the old Chateau. She'd been strangely pleased when Nathan's last errand was to get small radios for them to use when they were away from the house. Cell phones rarely worked on the land and couldn't be counted on. While the staff all used handheld radios, this setup would be to keep the three of them in contact. By tomorrow, they'd be fully charged, and then she'd start wandering the land, trying to remember working there. Maris thought it was very sweet for Nathan to think of it and hated that she'd second-guessed him in the store. Asserting her independence would come in other ways. He'd been right to remind her of how she got turned around and felt she wasn't alone.

Wandering back toward the house in the late afternoon with Shin frolicking beside her, she paused to reflect on the changes in the last days. Even the dog seemed calmer, having the run of the place rather than four walks a day. She'd instinctively taken to the land, but Maris was having trouble connecting. She'd yet to remember her actual days there working the land. Instead, she only remembered glimpses of her sexcapades. Maris laughed. Never did she contemplate the possibility of a lover left behind, let alone two. The breeze blew her hair in her face, and she brushed it impatiently away.

"Maybe I need a makeover. What do you think, Shin?" Suddenly she felt lighter. Just the idea of a haircut made her happy, as if the change would strip away the dull existence she'd fallen into. "Tomorrow, I'm going to town and shop a bit." Shin turned her head from side to side as if she could understand. Continuing their walk

home, she wondered if her men would initiate sex tonight, or if she'd have to suggest it. And if she did, how did she want it?

* * * *

For days, life was quiet. She'd gone back to the greenhouse and rummaged through the files again. Finally, she packed all the pages back and asked Nathan to put them in his safe. The rain had kept them all indoors, and she was using the time to wander the Chateau, to get used to the old house again. While it was familiar, each room she walked into brought a memory to life. Some good, some bland, but she was remembering.

Remembering how easy life used to be. How simple it was to make love to one man in the afternoon and take another to her bed that night. It all seemed so harmless at the time. The sex had been incredible with each of them, and she was coming to understand their personalities.

Nathan was all business during the day. She noted how he hesitated to take time away in the evenings to check his e-mail or answer his business line. Blake was back spending time at his studio. While she'd been invited, she hadn't visited him there yet.

She'd been keeping a wary distance from them both during the days, not wanting the other to think she was favoring one. Their evenings were amazing. She was stunned a few days ago when she realized they'd left the master suite untouched. The old monstrosity of a bed still anchored the room, along with the faded wallpaper. The drapes needed replacing, as did the linens. She'd been more surprised how they'd taken the bedrooms on either side of it and made private spaces for themselves, each with access to the master suite.

Nathan's room was very masculine in dark brown tones. She'd been stunned to find an enlarged photograph of herself above his fireplace, finished in sepia tones. It was a candid Blake had taken

years earlier. She never thought about any of Blake's artwork hanging in their private spaces.

Blake's room showed his artistic side, his bedroom in jewel tones of emerald and sapphire. What caught her eye was the painting over his hearth. It was her on canvas, naked with one hand dropped before her crotch, the tip of her index finger penetrating her pussy lips. Her other hand held her breast, her nipple full and puffy. There was a gleam in her eyes, a mischievousness she almost remembered. Maris remembered glimpses of the situation, but not sitting for this specific painting. She'd left quickly after seeing their rooms, her image in both startling and unsettling. She'd invaded these men's lives and never knew it. Maris still found it hard to believe they'd waited all these years for her.

She was still sleeping in the old stone house, comfortable there. Maris knew the Chateau was waiting for her, but she hadn't made the move yet. They'd joked about her waiting for it to be renovated, but she hadn't made any decisions about what to do with it, even though in her mind she visualized the perfect patterns and colors.

* * * *

Nathan seemed loath to leave the land, but his scheduled meeting couldn't be pushed back yet again. He left early, promising to be home in time for supper. Maris decided his hesitation was because he knew she'd spend time with Blake, alone.

She wandered the back roads in her pickup until she came to his log home and studio in the late morning, a picnic basket in the back holding their lunch. She'd diplomatically waited until both men had left for the day and asked Aminta to have it prepared. Maris went back to the stone house, showered and dressed, skipping makeup. The lunch was ready when she stopped back at the Chateau, leaving Shin with Aminta. She'd noticed he and the dog had formed a bond of

sorts, and she didn't want to worry about the dog running on unfamiliar land. Today was for concentrating on Blake.

Approaching his private home, she got a chill of anticipation. She knew it would be up to her to initiate any sexual encounter, but she was prepared. She wanted this private time with him, needed to know how they would be together without Nat.

Blake didn't seem surprised to see her, but she noted he continually cleaned his paintbrushes on a cloth while she wandered around his studio. She glanced to him for permission to look through the completed canvases and got a nod to go ahead. What she saw surprised her. Blake's style had changed. When they first met, he'd been doing landscapes and eventually portraits of her. There were some landscapes, but they had an angry feel. All the skies were stormy or cloudy. A few were downright depressing looking. In amongst them were sketches of her done from his memory. They all held her youthful appearance, something long gone from her today.

"These are interesting," she commented, pulling one from the stack and taking it to the window where the light was better. "I didn't sit for this one. Just like I didn't sit for the one in your master bedroom at the Chateau. That was from memory, too."

"I did that from memory just for myself. I'll never forget that afternoon." He sighed and turned from her view. "Just about all of them are from memory."

"You made me look so young, almost virginal." She laughed at the irony of her words.

"That was how I remembered you."

"Or how you wished I truly was."

"No, if you were some virginal angel of a creature I never would have touched you. Yes, you were young and beautiful, but you knew what you wanted, and how and where."

"I remember sitting for you in the old garage."

"I still have that painting. It's hung in my master bedroom in this house."

“Did you paint in the brush handle you fucked me with?” His smile told her he did, but he didn’t offer to let her see it.

Maris felt her cheeks heat with embarrassment. “You hung it in your bedroom. Didn’t your dates ask you about it?” She asked without thinking, and got a strained look from him.

“I never brought dates back to the Chateau to bed, Maris. That place was sacred to you and to us. This place has been my private retreat. I didn’t bring women here, either.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to sound flippant.”

“Neither did I, it’s just...”

“Go on, please be honest with me, Blake.” She put the canvas back in the stack and continued to scan others.

“All right, it’s just that I’m nervous.” He laughed, and she turned to look at him. “Silly, isn’t it? We’ve done just about any and everything two people can do sexually, but right now my palms are sweaty, and I’m wondering if I should make the first move or wait for you.”

“We’ve done everything two and three people can do together. Was I that free back then?”

“You were just you. I accepted you for who you were and how you made me feel. I’ve missed you all these years, wondered if we’d ever be together again.”

“Have I disappointed you? Surely you must have wondered how I aged?”

“Actually, Nathan and I knew how you were all the time you were away.” He hesitated and cleared his throat, deciding to continue. “Since we couldn’t get close, we hired a private investigator to keep an eye on things in New York. He wasn’t intrusive, just checked to make sure you seemed happy and didn’t need anything.” He walked to the far corner of the room and opened a closet door.

Tacked to the inside were photos of her, candid from the last years she’d lived in Manhattan. They progressed from her first months there to recent snaps of her walking Shin or carrying groceries

home. Maris wasn't sure if she was comfortable with the idea they'd had her followed, but she understood from the files they couldn't approach her directly.

"I look so different here." She pointed to a snap. "So uptight. I suppose I was, waiting for each breath to return my memories. I think that was the hardest part, just waiting, but then you and Nathan know all about waiting."

Blake didn't answer her. He moved behind her and rubbed her upper arms, pulling her against his chest. It seemed so natural to turn in the circle of his arms, to reach hers up behind his neck and lean forward to accept his kiss.

"Are you sure, Maris?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure." His sexy grin crossed his lips, and she decided not to think too hard. Instead, she decided to feel and experience. Her hand slid around to cup his neck and direct his mouth to hers. Their kiss started lightly, just a press of skin against skin, but she wanted more. Her other hand dropped to his shoulder, squeezing and testing the strength of his flesh and muscle.

"This all seems so familiar. The scent of the paint and turpentine."

"I'm familiar too, Maris." His kiss changed, taking them to the next level of intimate, his tongue sliding across her lips, asking permission to enter. She let her lips part and accepted his offering.

Their hands stroked each other, relearned each other, and ultimately started to remove the clothing for skin to touch skin. She took the initiative, taking his hand and directing them to the rear of the room where the light streamed in from a skylight. She tugged a soft throw from the back of a nearby sofa and tossed it on the wood floor, dropping before him. Maris glanced up, saw his face and the expression of anticipated pleasure and knew this was right. She rubbed her face against his erection, finally opening his jeans and carefully lowering his zipper over his full cock. She sighed and settled before him, her hands pulling his clothing away until her lips

contacted with skin. His sigh reinforced his want as his hand dropped to her shoulder.

Maris loved him with all her pent-up energy, making love to his penis, accepting it deeper and deeper down her throat until her nose was pressed against his lower belly. Her onslaught of nips and touches continued until he pulled from her mouth and dropped before her. She took off her shirt and lay back while he pulled her jeans down her legs, lifting her butt to help his progress. His sigh of approval greeted her naked skin. With the touch of his hands on her body and the tip of his tongue to her clit, Maris came alive.

She writhed under him, trying to reposition them into a sixty-nine where they could both be pleased. Ultimately, he moved with her and she reveled in knowing she could please him. His cock would throb between her lips when she pinched his butt cheeks. It surged deeper down her throat when he watched her suck on her finger before gently gliding it in his anus. His ass cheeks clenched and he bucked at the intrusion, taking it deeper within him.

“Maris, let me fuck you before I come,” he managed to whisper, but she didn’t release his cock. She sucked him harder, using her teeth to hold him when he would have pulled from her grasp. “You want me to come down your throat, then come for me.”

She felt him shifting but didn’t relinquish her hold. His tongue laved her from pussy to anus and finally his finger probed at her opening. “Oh, yes,” she sighed on an outward pull of her teeth. “Fill me, Blake, make me come.”

“Anything you want, my sweet.” His middle finger teased her full pussy lips, penetrating easily. Slipping another beside it, he fucked her with his fingers while suckling her clit. His other hand came around her back, sliding lower, his index finger grazing her repeatedly until he gently pushed it inside, the double filling too much for her to comprehend. She came with both his hands pumping her body and his lips to her clit. He surged between her lips and came down her throat,

his hips bucking forward. They collapsed on the floor, sweaty and sated.

Chapter Twenty

“I still need you to fuck me,” she said, laughing as he tried to catch his breath.

“Fine, but feed me first.”

“If I must,” she said with a laugh, rising and stretching before him. Their picnic lunch was just a few feet away on a table near the door, and she flexed her aching muscles on the walk toward it. She watched Blake roll onto his back and push himself up, taking a few of the pillows and cushions from a sofa nearby. They sat naked and explored the basket, opening the wine and sipping it as they ate the sandwiches. There were several pieces of fruit in the basket, and he pulled out an orange. Maris watched as his fingers stripped away the peel, the orange essence strong in the air around them.

She lay back on the cushion, relaxed with a full stomach, watching the afternoon sky above through the skylight. The first drops of juice ran across her belly, with Blake’s tongue quick to follow. The rest of the fruit was devoured in stages, a few sections squeezed on her nipples and licked off. Droplets on her lips were kissed away. Maris paused when Blake drew back and pushed her legs wide, crushing the fruit between his fingers so the juice would drip on her pussy. He lowered between her legs and cleaned her with his tongue. That process brought her a small orgasm. When he tossed the rest of the fruit aside, his sticky fingers invaded her, pumping in and out while he suckled her breast.

“Blake, fuck me, I want to feel your cock inside me.”

“I’ve waited to hear you say those words again for so long, Maris.” He pulled away from her and rummaged in his pants, a smile

forming on his lips when he found the condoms. She reached to take it from him and sheath him but he shook his head, no.

“I’m so close and on the edge, if you touch me now I’ll come.”

“Come inside me,” she whispered, drawing her knees higher, widening to accept his body between them. There was no teasing. He dropped down and in one full push was deeply embedded in her pussy. “Oh, God, you’re so hard,” she told him, her fingers running along his chest in lazy patterns, pausing to pinch his nipples. “And so long. Fuck me, Blake. Come for me.”

“I have to change positions, or I’ll do just that. Wrap your legs around my waist.” She did as he asked and held tight as he changed their place. She was amazed at his upper body strength when he rose with her still riding his cock, taking only a few steps until her ass rested on the back of the sofa. He centered her weight and sucked her nipple while he plunged inside her, taking short, then long strokes in and out of her body. She felt his body tense and knew he was finally letting his release come. He shuddered inside her and sucked her nipple harder, making her orgasm impossible to hold back.

They held tight for a long time, their sweat and juice-covered bodies sticky. When he finally stood, he released her legs from behind him, letting her weight down onto the sofa back.

“Welcome home, Maris,” he said and kissed her with a passion she’d known in the past and welcomed back.

“I’m glad to be home,” she managed, pulling him close, hugging him tight to her body. In a playful gesture, he pushed her back so she was lying on the sofa on her back. He moved beside her, and she rolled to her side, giving him space to stretch out, their arms interlocked and holding tight. “Rest a bit,” she told him as her body relaxed and her mind cleared.

Their shower together turned into an exercise in touching in small spaces, their laughter and smiles making her believe this was right. As the day grew long, they reluctantly dressed. Maris sat on the arm of the sofa and pulled on her T-shirt. As she drew her panties up her

legs, Blake paused, forgetting to zipper his pants. He moved beside her and tackled her onto the sofa, kissing her playfully.

“I know what I want next time,” he said, pulling back to watch her face.

“Next time, why not now?”

“Because I want to sketch you next time, my way.”

“Okay, what’s your way?”

He pulled back and reached for her hand, helping her to stand and then pushing her forward so her arms rested on the back of the sofa and she kneeled on the cushions. His fingers drew her panties down over her buttocks and left them halfway to her knees. He took the hem of her T-shirt and bunched it up so the bottoms of her breasts were visible. His hand came down and playfully spanked her butt. Maris froze, then relaxed back into position, wiggling her ass to accept his touch. He tapped her a few more times and took a step back.

“God, you’re beautiful.”

“And your cock got hard with each spank of your hand to my ass.”

“It’s just a light pink,” he offered with a smile as she turned to look at him.

“I’m sure you can do better,” she bested him.

Maris watched him hesitate and reach a hand to help her up. “What?”

“Nathan will be home tonight, I don’t want him to see your ass fire red from my hand. He’ll know we were together.” He paused. “And I don’t how much you want him to know about our afternoon. I also don’t need him angry. I assume he’ll be cranky and blame it on the meeting.”

Maris sat back on the sofa and jumped involuntarily as her ass hit the cushion. While it didn’t hurt, she felt a heated tingle throughout her body. “You really do respect him. In your own strange ways, the two of you have come to accept and respect each other.”

“It’s been a long five years, my sweet. Small steps until we all relax into our new life.”

“All right, I appreciate your concern for his feelings.”

“Don’t go all gushy on me unless it’s your pussy.”

“Too late, Blake, you made me wet pulling my panties down, made me liquid with your palm to my butt.”

“Talk like that will get you fucked again.”

“Tonight,” she whispered and reached to pull her shirt down and into place.

* * * *

Her drive back to the Chateau was short, and Maris knew she couldn’t stop smiling, even if her rear did ache a bit. She dropped the picnic basket at the back door of the Chateau, thanked Aminta for watching Shin, and drove back to the stone house. Shin settled before the fireplace. She drew a hot bath and sunk down under the water, reliving each kiss, lick, and stroke from this afternoon. When she finally roused from the hot water, her whole body was pink, her cheeks a shade darker. She dressed in comfortable flannel pants and a larger overshirt, skipping her underwear completely. Later, it would be less to take off. Drying her hair, she felt no anxiety after her afternoon with Blake, instead she was reminded of how they would be together. She pressed her thighs together when the ache in her lower lips came back as she pictured herself braced on the sofa, her ass in the air.

“Oh, my, I am a long way from the Maris I knew just a short time ago.” She smiled at the reflection in the mirror. “You, girlfriend, are very lucky in many ways. Don’t ever forget that or take these men for granted.” It was a short mantra she repeated throughout the rest of the day and all through supper.

They discussed Nathan’s meeting, but he didn’t ask for details of her afternoon or Blake’s. In fact, she realized, he went out of his way

to avoid those questions. Later that night, the three of them languidly made love before the fireplace in the solar. If Nathan noticed her butt cheeks were pink, he didn't verbally comment. As they lay intertwined and sated, Blake cleared his throat.

"My special order of paints came in today. I have to head to town tomorrow." He winked at Maris when he knew Nathan couldn't see. "Either of you want to come or want me to bring something home for you?"

Neither she nor Nathan could immediately think of anything they needed and Blake relaxed back, saying, "I should be home in time for supper, but if I get stuck I'll call."

* * * *

The three of them shared breakfast at the Chateau the next day. She had come back to the stone house to shower and dressed with a definite purpose. Blake diplomatically headed into town, and Nathan went to his home office. Letting Shin out of the truck to run, she wandered the Chateau, appreciating the moldings and carved balusters while winding her way toward Nathan.

Maris found she wasn't nervous just anxious with anticipation as she tapped lightly, turning doorknob. He was behind the large mahogany desk that sat before the garden window, as she expected.

"Can I interrupt?" she said, pushing the door open enough for her to enter and closing it behind her.

"Of course you can." Nathan pushed a few buttons on his keyboard and pushed back from the desk, the swivel feet of the chair aiding his movements. "You look lovely this afternoon."

"Thank you." His words confirmed her choice of outfit. Since she'd been at the Chateau, she found herself falling into worn, comfortable jeans most of the time. Today, she wore an ankle-length skirt with slim, heeled boots. She pulled on a bulky white sweater that buttoned down the front. Would he be surprised when he found she

wore nothing under them? Holding back a wicked grin, Maris wondered where she got the courage to do this.

“I’d like to talk, if you’re in the mood.”

“What would you like to discuss?” He seemed anxious to her, tugging on his shirt cuff. Maris locked the door before sauntering to his desk. She let her hip ride on the edge and leaned closer to him.

“Actually, I’d like to forget the discussions and just kiss you for a while. Is that a problem?” She stood and slowly walked around the desk, dropping her weight onto Nathan’s lap, her arm resting behind his neck. “Is this all right?” she asked, leaning to nuzzle her chin against his as her other hand ran patterns across his chest.

“Maris, are you sure you’re ready?” His voice cracked and he cleared his throat.

“I’m ready, Nathan. Are you?” She realized he was a bit nervous, too. Her tall, strong hulk of a woodsman was anxious about making love with her. The thought passed through her mind that she ought to be, too, but she didn’t let it fester, she knew to take charge this time. She let her hand drop and cupped his hard cock. “It seems you’re interested.”

“You have no idea,” he whispered, using his hand to turn her mouth to his. His kiss was determined and just short of angry to start, melting into a lust-filled haze of unrequited feelings. Maris continued to rub his cock as their kisses pushed away their time apart.

Nathan’s hand rose and cupped her breast as they kissed. He pinched at her nipple and flexed his hand over the whole thing. “You’re not wearing a bra.”

“No, I’m not, easier access for you to suck my nipples.” The tingle felt in her breast found its home directly anchored in her womb. She didn’t help as his large fingers fought with each button on her sweater, each one finally opened to reveal more of her bare chest.

He groaned as his hand roamed her warm skin, her nipples hard and needy, waiting for his attention. He shifted her on his lap to bring her breast to his lips, sucking greedily. Maris cupped his head with

her hand, holding him to her. “Oh, that’s wonderful,” she told him. He switched to her other breast and repeated the same motions, licking, sucking, and palming it until her nipple was puffy. “I love the feel of your beard against my skin.”

She reluctantly drew his head from her breast and back to meet her lips, his full and moist. They fought a wordless battle of wills with their tongues and hands, fighting for superiority. He dropped his head to her neck and nipped a patch of her skin between his teeth, sucking harder as he’d suckled her tit. Suddenly he let go and drew a deep breath.

“I don’t want to leave marks on you, just yet.” He grinned at her before going back to her nipple.

“Nat, I need...”

“I think I know what you might like,” he raised his head and looked at her. “And right about now, I think you want my cock in your pussy. I can feel how you’re tensing your thighs.” He licked her nipple and let his hand drop to her lap, his fingers pulling the material of her skirt up in small increments. Maris tugged the rest of it out of his way, leaving her pussy naked to his touch.

“I was right. You’re all hot and bothered, aren’t you?” His fingers slid up and down her puffy lips, and her hips arched to accept them inside her. “In my own time, Maris,” he admonished, and she relaxed back onto his lap.

Their kissing and touching was driving her insane as he held back the penetration she so wanted. Her hand closed tighter over his cock, pumping it in the same rhythm as he sucked her nipple. Finally, he let the tip of his finger nudge between her lower lips only to take it away before fully filling her. She flexed her fingers over his cock when he did and began stroking him when he finally pressed it inside her.

“That’s it,” she told him. “More.”

His exhaled breath was almost a growl as he lifted her and put her back down on his desk. Nathan stood over her, studying her. His fingers brushed a lock of hair from her face, then slid down her

ribcage, pulling her sweater fully open. Brushing her crotch, he took her skirt and pulled it up, baring her pussy to him.

“Stay there,” he said, his tone just short of harsh.

“Why? What will you do to me? Finally fuck me?”

“Eventually,” he said and took a step back to his chair, scooting himself forward until he was between her thighs, his head at crotch height.

Maris watched his head lower and relaxed back onto the desk, waiting for his touch. Just the tip of his tongue sought out her clit, teasing it while reaching to pump her breast. Her fingers closed over his, pushing harder, giving him permission to use more force.

“Lick me, Nathan, make me come.”

“In time, Maris, my time.” He continued to lave at her, taking her thighs in his palms and tugging her closer, holding her higher. His lips went to her pussy and licked her up and down, each pass going further until he licked her pussy and anus.

She groaned at his motions and was disappointed when he stopped. He stood, looking down at her, and pushed his finger in her. Maris’s pussy muscles grasped at him, and he pushed a second beside it. She leaned forward, bracing her weight on the desk with her elbows, offering her breasts. He needed no verbal direction, dropping to suck her breast while fingering her pussy.

“I’m so wet, almost fluid. God, Nathan, how could I forget this, I’ll never forget this.”

“Good.” He switched to her other breast, and she sighed as he continued to penetrate her with his fingers. She felt his thumb circling her anus and pushed forward, accepting it, needing it to push her over the edge and into the abyss. When her climax struck, she saw the now familiar pinpoint lights she’d come to relish. Nathan worked her through her orgasm and slowed, finally releasing her nipple and moving his hand.

“Don’t,” she said, reaching to hold his hand in place.

“Don’t you want my cock?” he teased, and she leaned forward to watch him. His hair was mussed, his shirt half-open, and his cock was hard against his pants. He tugged his shirt off over his head instead of unbuttoning it, and she noted how careful he was lowering the zipper on his pants. His cock sprung free, hard and thick, a droplet of pre-cum escaping from his tip. She didn’t acknowledge he wore no underwear either. Great minds think alike, she decided.

“Let me suck you,” she told him and pushed her body backward until her head lay just at the far edge of his desk. With his pants still on his hips, he walked around the desk, stroking his cock before coming to stand at her head. “I’ve missed you, Nathan, even though I didn’t know you, I missed the promise of you.” Maris grasped his erection and pumped it a few times, directing it to her waiting mouth. For a long time she sucked him, learned him, and teased him until he released more droplets for her to lap up. Nathan leaned forward and grasped her breast, his pumps in time with her mouth. He pulled from her lips and moved back to the other side of the wood. He opened a side drawer and pulled out a condom, holding it for her to see.

“I had high hopes,” he teased, tearing open the package and covering his cock. “Maris, I’ve missed you,” he said as he guided his cock directly into her waiting pussy.

“I’m so full,” she managed, shifting her hips to seat him just where her body needed his touch. Maris grabbed at the wood to hold herself in place for Nat. His hands grabbed her hips and drew her body to his, holding her tight to him while he thrust his hips, pushing his cock deeper. “That’s it, that’s where you need to fuck me, make me come, Nat.”

“A lady’s wish,” he said with a grin. “Rub your clit for me, I’ll feel your movements.”

“Yes,” was all she could utter as she moved one hand to rub her clit in small circles, each revolution brushing her fingertips against his body. Her other hand reached behind her, holding onto the edge of the desk to better absorb his thrusts.

“Where do you want me to come, Maris? In your pussy, or on your tits?”

“Or in my ass.” She leaned forward and stared at him. “Fuck my ass, Nat. Take out all the aggression you’ve pent up all these years. Make me come fucking my ass.”

There was no further discussion. He pulled his cock from her pussy and tugged her further toward the edge of the desk. In one deft push was inside her again. “Oh, God, I won’t last, Maris, you’re too tight.”

“You’ll last until I come,” she told him, her tone demonstrative, leaving no room for him to misinterpret her words. “We’ll come together.”

“Rub your clit and pinch your nipple. Let me watch you.” Her hands moved as he asked, and she closed her eyes, picturing how they looked. The image gave her pussy a tingle. “Nat, finger me, too.”

He used his right hand, pushing first one then a second finger in her pussy. She came immediately, her muscles milking him until he didn’t hold back. He emptied inside her and paused, his breath erratic. Gently, he pulled his fingers from her and took a step back. Maris lay on the desktop sated and sweaty, feeling fulfilled like never before. When his breathing normalized, he took a step back and tugged off the condom, tossing it in the wastebasket under the desk. He grasped her around the waist and lifted her to his chest, stepping back and dropping both their weights onto the chair.

“My goodness, Nat. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“You were angry at me, weren’t you, just a little?” Her hand stroked his shoulder, but it was all the strength she could muster.

“Just exasperated at the situation.”

“Well, I’ll remember to exasperate you when I want to get fucked again.” She smiled and started to laugh.

“I think we can find other ways to tell me your moods.”

“I think I’ve never felt so free and relaxed.”

“I’m glad you’re home, Maris. Even if I have to share you, I’m very glad you’re here. I just want you to be happy. With the house, and with Blake and me.”

“You’re resigned to the three of us?” She leaned back to look him directly in the eyes.

“Yes. I never thought I’d agree, but whatever this is between us, it works. As the old saying goes, if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, and our relationship is like that. It works, I won’t question it. I’ve waited too long. I just want to enjoy you now. Screw convention.”

“And screw me?” She grinned, and he shifted under her.

“Maris,” he started, but his cock was hard again, her squirming making it harder. It was easy to move her position and drop her pussy over it. She sat with her back to him, leaning forward to take him deeper.

“Maris, the top drawer, the condoms are in there.”

“It’s okay this one time, I’m due for my cycle and I wanted to feel your thick cock inside me, skin to skin.”

Nat wrapped his arms around her, his hands holding her breasts. He thrust upward and she used her fingers to rub her clit and their joining. Their pace was frantic and needy, neither bothering with words. His fingers closed harder over her breasts, and she rubbed harder and faster.

Maris came with her fingers locked around his cock, pulling him out of her body in time to watch him spurt several long strands of cum on her pussy and thighs. Finally, she relaxed back against his chest. His arms banded around her, holding her tight for a long, quiet time. She wouldn’t have known what to say, was thankful for the silence. Maris used her fingers to wipe his cum on her pussy, not resisting the urge to thrust her wet finger inside herself.

“Do that again, Maris. I can feel your butt cheeks clenching over me.” For a few minutes longer she fingered her pussy, letting her hand graze his testicles. When she had no energy left, she let her hand drop from inside her, snuggling back against Nat.

Her breasts were tender under the sweater when it was buttoned back in place. She tugged her skirt back into place and ran her hands through her hair to tame back the loose curls. “Thank you for a lovely afternoon.” She kissed his cheek and remembered to unlock the office door before trying to leave.

Maris knew she’d never forget the look of calm on his features. He sat in his chair, shirtless and sweaty, his hair mussed. His pants were around his ankles and his cock lay against his thigh, an invitation she didn’t resist. She sauntered back to him, kneeling before him to lick him clean.

“Keep doing that and you’ll have to deal with the result,” he teased her.

“Later, after supper.” She rose and kissed him one last time before finally leaving him to rest.

Chapter Twenty-One

Their evenings were quiet ones, spent before the fireplace in her house, sometimes with the radio on, others watching television. Each night ended with the three of them in her bed doing delicious things to each other. It all melded so easily, how they loved her and accepted their situation. She noted each man was careful not to consume her time in any act without offering to switch places. For Maris, she was learning what her body liked, what made her horny, and what made her come.

Maris had gone online the day before and ordered some new toys, ones she never would have considered just a month ago. Now she anticipated her package's arrival with abundant fantasies. She liked the anonymity of purchasing without having to deal with a sales person, knowing they knew what you would do with the items.

This morning she'd woken with her cycle and was relieved on several fronts. First, she wanted a break from her men and sex. She needed to decompress in a strange way from their fucking and sucking marathons each night and a few mornings. Granted, she had initiated most of the encounters, but she wanted time to evaluate her new personality and her men's. A few days without sex would give her perspective. Now that she had her timing, she would start the birth control pills she'd acquired just yesterday at her doctor's appointment. While she still didn't look forward to the process, she understood to stay healthy and not get pregnant, this was her best choice. She'd still continue to use condoms with her men, but she liked the idea of the added control.

She hadn't been prepared for her men's reaction when she came home. She'd told them she was going to the doctor for the pills and refused their accompaniment. Just the act of driving herself into town made her feel competent. Afterward, she'd gone into a salon on a lark and let them restyle her hair. Her curls now fell in short ringlets around her face, light and airy instead of thick and heavy, hiding her face from view. With new shades of makeup, she was pleased with her new appearance. While she hadn't gone crazy, just the change made life interesting.

When Maris joined the men for supper last night, she saw they were both taken aback. Each one stared at her as if she'd been a different person. She'd laughed it off and said they'd get used to her haircut, but she knew there was more behind it. Just asserting herself was liberating. There was no sex for the next week, but she marveled at how they managed to chill out together in the evenings. With sex out of the equation, they fell into an easy companionship. Maris was thankful for the diversion, to see they could just relax around one another.

Their down week seemed like four weeks in her mind, anxious to get her men back to bed, or at least some flat surface where they'd fuck and suck. Maris finally understood her previous life. She was a woman who enjoyed men and sex and wasn't ashamed of it. She'd enjoyed being a woman, and she knew she enjoyed the company of these men. She'd thought about new ways to enjoy her men during her down time, each one more enticing than the last. Maris couldn't wait to try out her new ideas. She wasn't sure if they were actually new or just recovered from her memory, but she didn't care.

* * * *

When her cycle ended, they made love on the floor before the fire in the solar, each man tousling her short curls as she knelt before them, taking their cocks down her throat. She didn't remember if

she'd been this cock crazy before, but it was becoming a habit she didn't want to give up. Maris decided she liked the control of the act, liked stalling her men's climax or forcing them over the edge with her mouth and hands.

It became habit for her to grab a radio each afternoon and wander the grounds with Shin, not caring if the drizzle of rain made her damp. They'd had one evening of snow flurries, and she couldn't wait for the snow to come. Maris anticipated how the whole Chateau would look covered in a glossy halo. It gave Nathan time in his office and Blake time to paint.

It gave her time to think through all the memories that stumbled into her conscious mind. There had been too many to reconcile, so she tried to take each one at face value for now. But that was getting harder, for the times she remembered with her mother and family before the accident weren't pleasant. Now she knew why everyone was always so uptight, but it didn't change the day-to-day angst in their household. Images of somber holidays lingered, with outbursts of anger at the dinner table, and always someone stomping from the room. When she stopped to think, she couldn't remember any meals that were pleasant, especially on holidays.

Pushing the thoughts aside, Maris realized how far she'd walked and whistled for Shin. She whistled and clapped her hands, but the dog didn't come. "All right, you know your way home," she said, hoping the dog would hear her. "And you know where your meals come from." She had an uneasy feeling as she headed back, taking the paths faster with each step. When she reached the clearing near the Chateau, she paused to catch her breath. Behind her, she could have sworn she heard someone. Hitting the radio, she asked both her men where they were. Nathan was in the office and heard the angst in her tone, offering to come help her look for Shin. Blake said he'd close up the studio but she told him to stay.

"If you're out there, Robin, I won't let you hurt me again." She hollered the words several times to whoever might be behind her.

That was when reality struck. Robin might not try to hurt her this time. She might go after her men. The concept angered Maris and made her queasy. The last thing she wanted was for either man to be further affected by Robin's actions. Tears welled in her eyes at the mere thought of losing one of them or something hurting them. She let the tears flow, but resolved to find Robin and put her away where she couldn't hurt them again.

* * * *

Aminta met her at the back door of the Chateau with a fluffy towel to dry her sodden locks. He'd helped her off with her raincoat and waited until she looked at him.

"Would tea help?" His smile made her relax, and she followed him into the kitchen. Cook smiled at her and put the kettle on, fussing around until it boiled and the tea tray was set. Then she excused herself, and Maris and Aminta were alone around the old wooden kitchen table.

"I'm remembering things I shouldn't be proud of, Aminta. I'm sorry if my antics put you in an awkward position."

"Not a problem, Miss. I knew from the first time you set foot on the land you understood it had a spirit of life that needed rejuvenating."

"God, I remember how overgrown the gardens were, weeds choking out any life that dared to peek its head."

"That, too."

He smiled, and she suddenly remembered them doing this often in the afternoons. "We've been here before. We used to have tea in the late afternoons."

"Yes, we often did."

"Tell me honestly, please. Didn't you think badly of me when I brought Blake and Nathan here? I mean, it wasn't my home. It must have been very awkward for you?"

“Not so much. I understood how much you loved the house and land. The previous owner used it as a possession, but he never enjoyed his time here. It was just something to brag about.”

“And bringing the men?”

“That was your personal life, not mine to comment on.”

“I still can’t believe I had an affair with both of them and had the guts to bring them here.”

He sat back in his seat and appraised her openly. “You were young and unattached. From my perspective, both men complemented you and each other. There was never a choice to be made in your mind, you always wanted both of them. Each had his strengths and weaknesses. Together they satisfied you quite nicely. It was good to hear laughter here, to see smiling faces. All your hard work certainly changed the old place. You breathed life back into an old stone structure that had been all but abandoned.”

“Well, I still apologize if my actions embarrassed you.” She reached for a cookie from the tray and broke it in two before dunking one-half in her tea. “You know I can’t choose between them now, don’t you?”

Aminta refilled their teacups and reached for one of the cookies. “I would think at this point, choosing one of the men over the other would make matters worse. Together, the three of you are a fully functioning unit, all complementing each other and filling the voids.”

“So it doesn’t bother you that we are unconventional?”

“It’s not my place to judge any of you. It’s my job to keep the household running smoothly so Nathan can keep the business running, Blake can paint, and you can find your path.”

“That’s part of my problem. I’m not sure what I would do here full time. I mean, the land and gardens are pretty much handled. Other than seasonal plantings, I’d have to find something to do with my time.”

“Maybe spending some time in the library would help. You always said that one day you’d dive into reorganizing the old space. That you’d turn it back into the reading room it was meant to be.”

“The library, I passed by it this week. Somehow I couldn’t bring myself to go in.”

“Towards the end of your time here you spent many hours going through the books. You had just started sorting and cataloging when...”

“It’s okay, you can say it. I prefer open and honest. Before my step-sister went crazy and pushed me over Niagara Falls in an attempt to kill me.” He nodded but didn’t answer, sipping from his cup. “Thank you for the tea, Aminta, and for not being judgmental. And I appreciate you reminding me about the library.” She stood and took her cup to the sink, rinsing it and placing it in the drain board. Before leaving the kitchen, she went back to him and bent beside him. “I remember you were always very kind to me, no matter how I treated you or the house. Thank you for taking care of Nathan and Blake while I was away.”

“They care for you, Maris. They spent all these years caring for this place so you could come home to it. They’ve even forged a friendship through the years. Your being back here has made them both very happy. Their maudlin days and boring nights are over. Just remember, here at the Chateau, the three of you make the rules of life. As long as nobody gets hurt, why not just enjoy the life they worked so hard to protect for you?”

Maris leaned down and kissed his cheek. “Thank you.” Her eyes welled with tears at his kind words and advice, and she left quickly. She wandered to the solar and stood before the fire, warming her hands. Shin appeared at the back door, wet and shaking. Maris opened the back solar door and scooped her up, taking the dog with her to sit beside the fire until she dried off. It was then she noted her collar was missing.

“That’s strange, you’ve never lost your collar before.” She cuddled the dog, who seemed appreciative of her body heat. “Tomorrow we’ll get you a new one. For tonight, don’t go too far.” Maris placed the dog on the floor, and she immediately crawled before the fire and settled down. She brushed the dog’s hair from her jeans and decided she’d waited long enough.

“The library waits,” she said aloud, waiting as Shin rose and followed her across the room, through the entryway and into the old monstrosity of a library.

* * * *

Taking a deep breath, she steeled herself for the memories that might be lurking. What she got was a rush of heat from the burning logs in the fireplace. “Aminta,” she said, and reached down to pet Shin. Entering, she stood just inside the doorway and closed herself in. The warmth felt good, relaxing. Shin went directly to the hearth and settled down before it. “Smart dog that you are,” she said, and finally reached to turn on the overhead lights. She assumed the space would be dusty, but it wasn’t. Instead, she found a mass of books, stuffed everywhere. Every shelf was full, every flat surface covered with stacks. Along the entire perimeter of the room, books were stacked to the point of sliding over. Maris turned in circles several times, taking in the sights.

There were two old leather high-back chairs on either side of the hearth, their brown hides worn soft with time and use. A large four-seat couch faced the fire, and an old oblong ottoman anchored the space. Behind each chair was a pole lamp for reading. There were several old wooden trestle tables and wood-back chairs scattered along the perimeter in several places. In that instant, Maris remembered.

“Those two tables should be centered under the windows for light.” Walking to the windows, she knew she had been here before,

had the very thoughts about the tables being in the wrong places. Had resolved to one day put this space back to its original splendor. There was a door in the far corner, and when opened, it revealed a second room, lined with wood shelves, with others free standing in aisles down the center. Each was stuffed full, and cardboard boxes holding more books ran down their aisles stacked on the floor. "Oh, my God." She took a step further, noting the auction house address on some of the cartons. "These were not here," she mused. Slinking between cartons of books and the shelves, she noted several other addresses, all from auctions or antique dealers. These were all purchased recently and never opened. Either Nathan or Blake, or possibly both, had taken to buying books in her absence. "I suppose they wanted to keep me busy so I would have a reason to stay beyond sex."

She left the area and went back to the main library, heading to the master desk at the far end. She touched the green glass shade on the banker's lamp. Pulling open the top center drawer, she found what she hoped would be there. A fading manila folder held her notes to reorganize the space. She'd started category lists to do inventory with, and there was a sketch of the other room and how it should be organized.

"After five years, this is just as I left it." Maris sank down in the swivel seat behind the desk, clutching the folder to her chest. "They bought more books to keep me happy." Maris sighed, and the enormity of the situation struck her. She let a few tears roll down her cheeks, angry at what had been taken from her. Sniffing back her sorrow, she sat straight in the chair. "I make the decisions from now on. I won't let anything or any person take away what my men have built for me. They each loved me enough to put up with the situation. I hope I'm woman enough to satisfy them." Pushing back, she propped her feet on the edge of the desk, the folder still against her. "I wanted to stay here," she said as Shin came to sit beside her. She reached down to pet the dog. "I loved this place, all of it, the land and

this monstrosity of a house. I'd figured out another way for me to continue to stay here."

Maris knew she'd not leave the Chateau or her men. For as long as they were willing, she'd stay with them there. For her and for them, this was where she belonged.

Chapter Twenty-Two

At supper that night, she noted both her men seemed to relax after she mentioned seeing the library. There were a few snickers between them, and Nat finally spoke.

“We knew you’d just made a deal with the old owner to stay on and inventory the library, to reorganize it. We figured the more books you had, the longer you’d stay.” Maris watched Nat’s cheeks heat with embarrassment.

“Too much?” Blake questioned.

“No, not too much. Although we’ll have to rethink the space. I think it’s very sweet that you bought more inventory for the library. You both know how it drove me crazy to see it left so haphazard. It was a beautiful gesture, and I appreciate it.”

“There’s another reading room beside the storage room. You might think about expanding into that space. It’s not been used in years.” Nathan glanced away.

“Thank you, Nat, I’ll look at it tomorrow. So, it’s basically settled, I think. My mission here, besides taking care of you two, is to put the library right. Is that correct?”

“Only if you want to.” Blake hesitated. “We figured it would give you a winter hobby when the snows came. But if you don’t want to, we wouldn’t be upset.” She smiled at Blake and glanced to Nathan.

“I’ll think about it, but for now I’d rather think about taking you two before the fireplace in there. I have an image of the two of you fucking me before it.” Maris took the napkin from her lap and placed it beside her plate. “Anyone interested in joining me?” As she stood,

both her men did, too. Shin approached, and Nathan reached down to pet her.

“What happened to her collar?” he asked.

“I don’t know, she came back today after a run without it.”

“We’ll get her another one next time we’re in town.”

“For tonight,” Blake chimed in. He held up a new bottle of wine for their inspection. “Shall we? The library awaits.” Maris went to the sideboard and took three clean glasses in her hands. No further discussion was needed as they walked across the house toward the library.

* * * *

Their time in the library was easy and languid. None of them was in a hurry, and they spent a long time just stroking and necking, each man taking his turn kissing her. Eventually Nathan’s hand dropped to her breast when Blake kissed her mouth. When Nathan kissed her, Blake moved his hand between her legs. They were all very relaxed, clothes coming off and being tossed aside without thought. Maris maneuvered herself to sit on the ottoman, her back to the fireplace, the heat warming her almost naked body. The silk panties she still wore were a pale shade of pink, the firelight turning them almost translucent. She noted the crotch was moist and pushed between her pussy lips from her men stroking her.

“Come and stand before me,” she said and waited while both men struggled to get rid of the rest of their clothing. Finally naked, they stood shoulder to shoulder before her, their erections full. With a hand on each man’s cock, she leaned forward, flicking her tongue against their bellies while stroking their erections. There were low moans and groans, but she was in control. Eventually she let her lips cover Nat’s cock head, then turned to Blake’s, going back and forth between them until she felt Blake’s thighs start to quake. His hand squeezed her shoulder.

“I’m going to come soon, Maris, sooner if you keep doing that with your teeth to my cock.”

“Nathan, are you close, too?” She swallowed his erection and slid her teeth along his length on an outward pull.

“You can taste me already, Maris, I’m surprised I lasted this long.” He groaned when she did it again. Maris reached behind the men, taking a butt cheek in each hand, using her fingers to pinch their skin, directing their movements in her mouth. Suddenly she stopped and sat back.

“I want you to fuck me,” she told them and reached to Blake. “Condoms, please.” They waited until he found his pants and took them from his wallet.

With his sexy grin on his lips, he declared, “We’ll get a stash for each room so we don’t have to go looking.” Maris laughed, and Nathan just nodded. When Blake was back standing beside Nathan, she lavished their cocks with her lips and tongue a bit longer before sheathing each man. She stood and slipped her panties down her legs, Nathan’s hand reaching to steady her as she lifted each foot and finally kicked them away.

“Blake, you lie down on the ottoman.” He moved quickly into position and held her waist as she slid down over him. Nathan needed no prompting moving beside her head, within her reach when she wanted. Settled on Blake, she fucked him slowly at her whim, feeling him tense under her when she squeezed her pussy muscles around him. At the same time, she reached to the side and swallowed Nathan’s cock. He pulsed between her lips as she coated the condom with her saliva and looked up at him.

“Fuck my ass, Nathan. I want to feel both of you inside me tonight. Both at the same time.”

“Whatever you want, Maris.” He moved behind her and took his time licking her. His fingers pinched her butt cheeks while he licked at her anus.

“Stroke your cock while you lick me, Nat.” She looked down at Blake. “And you, sir, should be fondling my tits.”

“Happy to comply,” he managed to say, reaching to grasp her breasts, pushing them together as he pumped them in rhythm to her sliding up and down his shaft.

Nathan moved behind Maris and grabbed her hips, holding her steady over Blake’s cock. He bent slightly and rubbed the head of his erection all over her ass cheeks before centering his weight and nudging at her opening. Maris pushed back to accept him, taking him inside her tight space. It was always tight when either of her men fucked her ass, but with Blake’s cock in her pussy, she was full beyond reason. Nathan paused behind her until she shook her hips, helping him to settle where she needed his bulk.

“Oh, God, this is amazing.”

“Your ass is pink from my pinching it,” Nathan told her, using his fingers to pinch them again.

“I’d tell you to let me see it but we’d all have to move,” Blake added, using his fingertips to tease her puffy nipples.

“That’s it, that’s what I crave, both of you filling me beyond reason. Make me come, please.” The sigh that filled the room was hers. “Nathan, go faster,” she whispered, allowing Blake to hold her torso, bracing her on top of him while Nathan’s push-pull motions became almost frenzied. Maris dropped her hand to her crotch and used her fingers to rub her clit. “Oh, God,” she said in a strangled voice and tossed back her head, riding out the swell of climax that swept through her body. As she tightened, Nathan grunted behind her, and she felt his cock throb inside her as he let himself come. Blake juttet upward only once more before dropping his hands from her and holding the side of the ottoman as he rode out his release. Maris let herself drop over his sweat-coated chest, Nathan following her move, dropping over her back for only a bit before he finally started to move.

“Don’t go,” she whispered.

“Wine and relaxing a bit, then we’ll talk about seconds.” She watched him strip off the used condom and toss it in the flames.

“Oh, all right, if I must.” Slowly she disentangled her body from Blake’s and grasped Nat’s outreach hand to steady her climb over Blake’s thighs.

“Shower first.” Nathan grasped her around the waist and all but tossed her up on his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. He headed to the hallway door and turned to Blake, asking, “Can you get the wine?”

“Yeah,” he managed, and slowly started to stretch out his muscles before standing upright. “Who’s bedroom shower?” he asked, tossing his used protection into the flames, too. Grabbing the wine, he following them into the hallway. They proceeded across the entry and up the stairs to the master bedroom.

“Anyone could see us,” she said, glancing around, knowing a servant or Aminta might be anywhere. Nathan reached up and tapped her butt with his palm. “Good, let them see that, too.”

“I’ll get you for that,” she teased.

“And me, too,” Blake added, following up the steps. They used the old master suite, fucking and sucking in the same place she had taken them years before. Exhausted and settled to sleep, she sent up a silent prayer of thanks for the men that wanted to be with her and waited until she found her way home.

The next morning, Nathan brought her clothes up from the library floor where they were tossed last night. She dressed quickly but didn’t put her panties back on. Instead, she pushed them in her jeans pocket and resigned to head back to the stone house to clean up and get fresh clothes.

“Maybe it’s time to move in here with us, then your clothes would be here in the morning.” Blake’s statement was fact, and she glanced to Nathan, who was coming from his bedroom in clean clothes.

“I don’t want to push you, but don’t you think it’s about time you moved in here with us, made us the threesome we’ve become?”

“Is that what you truly want? Both of you?”

Their positive answers came at the same time. Maris laughed and nodded. "All right, I'll bring in some spare things, but I'm not moving in until we redecorate this room."

"Well, it's about time, Maris. You have no idea how long I've waited to hear you say that." Nathan went to her and pressed his lips to her forehead. "Thank you."

"What colors do you see?" Blake asked, turning in the space, studying the layout. He moved around the room easily, his nakedness not a factor, even though Maris licked her lips watching his cock jostle with each step.

"Smoky blues and grays. I saw a fabric I'd love to use for the coverlets. It's a very masculine paisley and stripe print, but the silk is extraordinarily soft and inviting."

"How about we go today and look for samples? Nathan, can you get away for lunch?" Blake asked.

Maris froze and wondered how he'd react. He glanced to them both and kissed Maris on the lips. "You two go shop and find whatever you need to make this place the master bedroom you dreamed of. Make it so comfortable, you'll never want to leave it." He winked and turned to leave. "I have work in the office. Call me if you need anything." He hesitated in the doorway, turning back. "Blake, you'll keep her safe," he said and turned to Maris. "Have a good time, and I'll see you tonight."

When he'd left, Blake dropped on the mussed bed. "Wow, I never thought I'd experience that. Nathan is actually letting us alone, without a chaperone."

"That's because he trusts us." She glanced at Blake.

"Yeah, I get it, fair play and all that crap. It doesn't mean I won't grab your tit in the store if I get a chance."

"I'm out of here. Come pick me up in an hour after I've changed clothes."

"Wait and I'll drive you down." He finally pushed from the bed.

"No, you take your time. I'll walk Shin down and clean up."

“Okay, see you in a bit. I’m going to take a couple of measurements before we go shopping.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Maris enjoyed the cool morning air cleansing her lungs, the temperature just short of taking her breath away. Shin scampered beside her, redirecting to chase a leaf until she called her back, “No excursions today, I have plans.” Reaching the back door of the stone house, she saw Shin’s missing collar hanging on the door handle. “I guess one of the workmen found this,” she said to the dog as she reached down to slip it over the dog’s neck. “There, now you’re perfect again. Well, almost perfect.” Maris opened the back door and Shin ran ahead. The dog started barking before she hit the living room, making a growling noise Maris knew wasn’t her friendly bark.

Hesitating, she reached to the radio in her pocket and switched it on. Cautiously, she headed toward Shin, coming to a halt in the living room doorway. The room had been trashed. Breath caught in her throat, and she quickly hit the call button on the radio, using it as a panic button. She kept pushing it, hoping one of the men would come. From the shadows, she saw a figure come forward. Maris froze, recognizing Robin.

“Oh, my God,” she whispered, her body starting to shake. Shin started to snarl at the woman, and Maris could only watch as she picked up her dog and tossed her out the front door into the yard. Shin continued to bark at the front door, scratching at the wood.

“Don’t panic, Maris. I didn’t do this.”

“Why are you here, how? You’ve been following me.”

“Yes, but not because of why you think.”

“The last time we were together alone, it didn’t end well for me.”

“That’s what we need to talk about. Please Maris, I’m very calm and very serious. This is how I found the house this morning. I came to talk to you, to explain what happened five years ago.”

“You don’t need to explain that you were a crazy jealous bitch who tried to kill me.”

“*No.*” Robin shook her head and stood tall. “Yes, I was a bit crazy and I was a bitch to you, but I didn’t push you into the falls.”

“If you didn’t, then who did?”

“Look, this is all screwed up. Can’t we just sit and talk this through?”

“I’m not your therapist. I’d like you to leave now and never come back.”

“Maris, you know nothing about our family life before you became a part of it.”

“It seems I was always a part, just not acknowledged.”

“I can’t change what my father, my mother, or your mother did. I can tell you I didn’t hurt you.”

“Who, then?” Maris leaned into the doorframe for support, trying to keep Robin talking until one of her men showed up.

“It’s all screwed up, but I wasn’t there, I didn’t push you.”

“But you know who did?”

“Yes, it was Nelson.” Robin let out a defeated sigh and sat on the arm of the sofa. “Look, it’s hard to admit, but I took the blame so Nelson wouldn’t. He couldn’t, don’t you understand? All his life he’s been afraid of small spaces. I couldn’t stand by and have him shut away in a cell for any length of time. He would have gone permanently crazy. As it was, he was a bit off-kilter back then. But, that was because my father used to lock us in the hall closet when we were naughty children.”

“What? Why are you telling me this?”

“Because Nelson has had a setback. He thinks it’s five years ago and wants to hurt you.”

“Oh, please, what do they call this, transference?”

“I know this all sounds crazy, but when we found out about your existence, my mother became jaded. She hated our father for his affair and for fathering you. She hated that you existed. However, she refused to divorce him. It was her way of punishing him. And since our family money was from her side, my father didn’t have the guts to leave.”

Maris put her hand to her temple, the dull ache getting worse. “But your red nails?” The radio squawked in her pocket and jolted them. Robin stood tall at the intrusion as Maris continued to hit the call button. From behind, she heard a noise, and was relieved that someone had come, until she glanced behind her and saw her half brother, Nelson, standing behind her, a glassy look to his eyes.

“Inside,” he said and motioned with his right hand, a hand that held a small revolver.

“What, you’re both in on this?” Maris backed into the living room, not taking her eyes off the gun. She stumbled on an overturned chair and finally righted her balance.

“Nelson, I...”

“I don’t care, bitch. Before we heard of you, our life was normal. As soon as mother found out about you and your witch of a mother, our lives changed. There was nothing but hate around us.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know, but I’m not responsible.”

“You’re the only one left. Once you’re dead, Robin will go back to the sanitarium for a few years, and I’ll be free.”

“No, you’ll be in prison.” Maris knew it wasn’t a smart idea to taunt the man with the gun, but the words slipped out.

“No, they’ll find your body, and Robin will cover for me. Won’t you, sis? You always did before. Once she’s gone we’ll start over.”

“Nelson, I covered for you once and lost four years of my life. I won’t do it again. Don’t hurt her, do you understand me, I won’t do it again.”

“Yes, you will, I know you, you don’t have the courage to stand up to me. Besides, who will believe you? You’ve already confessed to

pushing her into the Falls. They'll believe me when I say I found you here. That you shot Maris and we struggled with the gun." A strange, self-satisfied smile crossed his lips. "Since you won't cover for me, I suppose it will have to have gone off!" His glare turned menacing and Maris was truly afraid for herself and for the half sister who'd protected her brother.

"Nelson, we can—"

The back door was pushed inward and slammed against the jamb with a loud thud. Maris caught a glimpse of Nathan as Shin ran past, nipping at Nelson's ankles. He kicked the dog away, and she went skidding on the tile floor into the cabinet. Maris used the diversion to take the few steps back into the kitchen. She dropped to her knees and crawled to the animal, holding her tight so she didn't attack again.

"That's enough, Nelson. The police are on the way. Put down the gun, and we won't hurt you." Nathan's glare was hard and adamant.

Maris realized Blake was behind him, pushing his way in. She prayed they could talk him out of shooting anyone. At that second, all her memories came flooding back—her childhood, their life as a family, her time with her men. It seemed to be a fast-paced movie fluttering before her eyes, one she couldn't stop or block out.

The three men were arguing but she was frozen with images, good bad, and mundane. Glancing up, she saw Nelson raise his right hand and aim at Blake. Nathan took a step forward to block Blake and reached for the gun. It went off, and Nathan went down to the floor. Blake tackled Nelson, and they scrambled, a second shot reverberating through the house.

The front door was slammed inward, and Maris heard another shot, much louder this time. From her position, she couldn't see who entered, only that Aminta's voice was calling to her.

"Look out, Nelson has a gun. He shot Nat and Blake."

"Shut up, bitch." Nelson turned and pointed the gun directly at her. Maris decided she wouldn't die cowering on the kitchen floor. She stood on shaky legs, using the counter to help her up.

“You’ve already shot the two men I care about most. There is no way you’ll get out of here, Nelson. Not this time. There are too many witnesses.” In the background, they could hear the drone of sirens getting closer. Aminta moved to the kitchen and held the huge shotgun directly to Nelson’s heart.

“I will kill you, make no mistake.” For whatever reason, Nelson lowered his hand, but didn’t drop the gun. Robin came forward and slipped it from his lax fingers.

Maris watched his expression change to that of a child. “Now your prints are on it, shoot him and her and we’ll both be free.”

“No, Nelson, no more killing. I never should have let you get away with poisoning mother. That was my mistake, too. But I won’t do this again. I deserve a life.”

Maris held back a gasp at the new information but decided her men needed help now. Later she could reflect. Grabbing the towel from the counter, she slowly moved to Nathan. His shoulder was bleeding, but he seemed alert. He took the cloth from her and pressed it to his shoulder.

“Take my belt and snug it above the wound on Blake’s thigh, or he’ll bleed out.” Maris glanced to Blake, where a large puddle of blood was collecting under his leg. She tugged Nat’s belt from his pants and wound it around Blake’s upper thigh.

“Hold on, Blake, help’s here, just hang on.” She cradled his head to her chest and reached to Nathan. He tried to reach to her, but the compress fell, and she scooted beside him, dragging Blake with her to put pressure back his wound.

“Aminta, don’t take your eyes off him.”

“Of course not, Miss.” The siren’s blare was just outside, and in the blink of an eye, more men were in the small kitchen than she imagined would fit. One police officer sized up the situation and immediately went to put cuffs on Nelson. Another went to Blake and started barking out orders to a second man. Aminta finally lowered his shotgun and stood it in a corner. He moved to Nathan, helping him

to first stand and then sit at the table. One of the medics came to access Nathan, tearing his shirt out of the way. Another went to aid Blake.

“Through and through, sir. You’ll be okay, but it will hurt like a bitch for a while.” The medic continued to put compresses to Nat’s back and chest. “Let’s get you to hospital and cleaned up.”

“What about Blake?” Maris was going to ask but didn’t get the words out quickly enough.

“He’ll need surgery to remove the bullet from his thigh,” the second medic answered, “but we’ll see. Let’s go now.” One man wrapped his arm under Nathan’s good arm and helped him out of the room.

“You go with them, Maris. I’ll take care of things here, and the police can talk to you later.”

“Thank you, Aminta.” She reached up to give his cheek a kiss and paused to look at Robin. “I don’t know what to think or say,”

“Go with the men, I’ll talk to the police.”

Maris decided not to worry about her siblings now. Both her men were injured because of her, because of Nelson’s jealousy. She accepted the medic’s help into the back of the ambulance and moved beside Nathan. She sat watching while his shoulder was dressed. Blake lay on a gurney, strapped in, his leg immobilized as an intravenous was started in his arm.

“Guess we can’t go shopping today.” Blake attempted to tease, but the needle going in his hand made him wince.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Maris didn't know how long she waited, but it seemed like a lifetime before she was allowed to see Nathan. Against the pale white hospital sheets, his face was drawn.

"Oh, God, Nathan, I was so scared."

He reached to pull her to his side, wincing when he moved too far. She went to him and wrapped her body around him, her fingers threading through his beard.

"I'm all right, Maris. What about Blake?"

"He's in surgery. Nobody has told me anything else."

"He's a strong bastard. He won't die just to piss me off."

"Nathan, don't talk like that. You took the bullet meant for him." She watched his cheeks flush pale, then pink.

"Stupid man, he was reaching forward, if he'd been shot in the hand or shoulder, we never would have heard the end of it. He wouldn't paint again."

"So you protected him, as you protected me."

"Maris, this is all embarrassing."

"In many ways. Especially my ignorance about my family situation. They don't matter anymore, neither of them. Only you and Blake matter." She paused and sniffed back a few stray tears. "But when you two are well, we're going to start living every day instead of waiting in limbo."

Aminta entered, his tie missing, his hair mussed. His jacket hung just off-kilter.

"What's happened?" Nathan asked.

“The police have Nelson, his sister went with him. They seem to believe her version of the events today.”

“They won’t let him go until we’ve talked with them, will they?”

“No, they said they’d come talk to you tonight, here.”

“Thank you, Aminta.” Maris left Nathan’s side to go and hug him. He hugged her tight for just for a moment before he released her, shook himself, and stood tall, straightening his jacket, his cheeks heated red with embarrassment over his display of affection. A stranger in green scrubs entered, gaining their attention. His male voice clearing his throat got their attention.

“Blake?” Nathan asked, trying to control the emotion in his voice.

“Will be fine. He’ll be off that leg for a while and probably need some physical therapy, but if he follows orders, he should be fine.”

“Can we see him?” Maris asked anxiously.

“I’ll let you visit him, but only for a few minutes. You should rest, you can visit tomorrow.”

“Can’t I go home tonight? There’s nothing really wrong with me.” Nat looked anxious.

“Tomorrow will be soon enough.”

Maris kissed Nathan and promised to be right back.

Blake was in recovery, high as a kite, when she got to see him. He babbled incessantly for a few minutes, then fell into a drugged sleep. She left him to sleep and went back to Nathan and crawled beside him again. He reached his good arm behind her to draw her close, dropping a kiss on the top of her head.

“Sleep, Maris, we’ll all need some rest.” Nathan dozed beside her while Maris held tight, her mind going over the memories that flooded her earlier. Through the night, she smiled at some memories, and shed tears for others. Mostly she was just relieved to know her history. Her version of her history, not one planned out to make a good impression.

* * * *

Nathan came home the next day, his arm in a sling to aid his recovery and restrict the use of his arm and shoulder. It was a few days longer before Blake was released, using crutches.

Maris entered the solar with a bottle of wine and saw her men split apart from their conversation.

Blake was stretched out on the lounge before the glass wall, his injured leg propped with pillows. Nathan sat across from Blake, accepting the glass she offered with his uninjured arm.

“To personal freedom,” Maris offered. The men lifted their glasses, accepting her toast.

“So, what was the final verdict with the police today?” Blake sipped from his glass. “I could have gone with you, I’m not an invalid.”

“You’re supposed to be resting until Monday when you start therapy.”

“I’m fine, really.”

“Blake, shut up. Just accept your recovery and we’ll all be better for it in the end. If you don’t follow the doctor’s orders, you’ll limp around here for the rest of our days, complaining.” It was only a few seconds before Nathan started to laugh at his words. “It was a zoo at the police station.”

“But things seem to be settling down.” Maris took her glass and sat at the foot of the lounge, beside Blake’s legs. “First, Nelson is in a mental health facility being evaluated. That will take a while. They’re going to exhume his mother’s body to find out if she was poisoned and with what. Robin has gone back to Montreal until Nelson’s hearing. The police there will keep an eye on her. ”

“And her story about covering for her brother?”

“She’s convincing. She claims she took the blame for Nelson, knowing he was claustrophobic all his life. Her story is, she didn’t know about his poisoning their mother until a few years later, when their father brought home Margo. She claims that was when Nelson

really started to go insane.” Nathan shrugged his good shoulder and winced at the movement. “She claims after she’d been arrested, Nelson visited her and begged her not to tell anyone about what he’d done to their mother. That was when she finally accepted he’d been the one who pushed Maris. She said she took the blame because she felt bad she hadn’t sheltered him more when they were kids. Said he told her he used fake fingernails and a wig to throw suspicion off him.”

“But to go away for years for something you didn’t do to protect your brother. I wouldn’t have had the courage.” Maris mused and Blake shook his head at the concept.

“The courts will have to decide if they believe her story. For now, they accept Nelson has been the one stalking Maris these last months. Robin claims when she was released from the sanitarium, she realized he’d gone over the edge, completely.” Nathan paused and sipped from his glass. “The police in Montreal have gone through Nelson’s home and found evidence. They’re still sorting through it. But there were photos and other items found in a basement storage room. They said it looked like a shrine to their mother, and Maris was the target of his anger.”

Maris’s whole body shook at his words.

“Enough for now. Both of them are out of here and being watched. Whatever happens, Nelson will do time for his actions here. Whether they charge him with the initial incident remains to be seen.” Nathan put his glass aside and stood, walking to the back door and letting Shin into the room. She trotted to the fireplace and sprawled before its flames.

“I think we all just need to relax for a few days and find what’s normal for us now.” Maris broke out in tears, sobbing, unable to stem the outbreak. “I’m sorry, I don’t know why I’m crying now.” Blake reached a hand to her, and Nathan sat behind her, careful not to nudge Blake’s leg.

“Maybe you’re just exhausted and relieved.” Nathan offered her his handkerchief.

“I suppose so, it all seems so overwhelming.”

“You’ve been through a lot in the last months.”

“We all have in our own ways,” Blake added.

“I’m so sorry for all of this. Your time lost, your being injured. You’ve put your lives on hold for me for five years.”

Blake sat forward. “Maris, what are you saying? That now you know everything you don’t want to be here?” His voice cracked when he spoke.

“No.” She reached for his hand. “I’m just so stunned at all of this. That the two of you loved me enough to put up with all of this.”

“We still love you, my sweet.” Blake flashed his sex-oriented smile and relaxed back.

“Maris, the conversation you interrupted was us agreeing that we are a permanent threesome. Neither of us will walk away. Even if you wanted us to, we can’t.”

“Those are the nicest words I’ve ever heard. I never could have chosen between you. You both understand that, right?”

“We understand, and we accept our strange family unit.”

“None of us was conventional to start with. You, my dear, just made us accept it and act on it.” Nathan squeezed her shoulder.

“Are you both sure, really sure, because I don’t think I could deal with having to leave either of you.”

“Nobody’s leaving,” Nathan reinforced. “But you do have to do something about that monstrosity of a master bedroom upstairs. We’re both sick of going back to the stone house every night to sleep with you.”

“I’m stuck here for a while,” Blake said, nodding to his leg. “And I don’t want to sleep alone, even if sex isn’t a reality for a few more days.”

Maris dried her tears and squared her shoulders. “No sex, why would you think that? I’ll just have to take the top for a while.” She

moved her hand to his good thigh, letting it stroke his skin. His erection became apparent and she reached higher, clasping it. “You’ll just have to relax and let me do all the work.” She squeezed him under her palm.

“What about me? I’m injured, too,” Nathan added, his good arm reaching around her, palming her breast.

“I suppose I’ll have to nurse you both back to health.” She smiled, and Blake’s body shuddered under her hand. “This might be fun. Sponge baths, temperature taking the old fashioned way, examinations, etcetera”

“Look at the seed you’ve planted now,” Nathan said to Blake.

“I’ll take whatever my nurse can think of.” Blake smiled and settled back on the cushions.

Epilogue

Two months later

Maris scanned the newly decorated master bedroom to make sure it was perfect. She enjoyed the process, shopping for fabrics and choosing paint colors. Now that it was completed, she was very proud of the result.

She couldn't get rid of the antique bed in the room, but had it stripped and refinished to its original mahogany stain. A smoky blue covered the walls, with accents of gray and taupe. She'd used the original paisley swirl and stripe fabric she'd found for the drapes and a complimenting pattern for the bed linens. Everything else in the room was designed to coordinate.

She'd folded back the duvet and laid out her new toy collection, along with several other items. She wondered what her men would say when they realized some of the toys were for her to use on them. Maris checked her appearance in the mirror over the bureau and liked what she saw. She'd kept her new short hairstyle. Tonight, she wore a long gown in an off-white silk, the material hugging every curve of her body.

She went to the window overlooking the back gardens, now covered in layers of snow and ice. The last months had been difficult in many ways, but not how she'd imagined. Once she realized both her men accepted her choice, they had settled into a symbiotic pattern.

Nathan still ran the chateau businesses, and Blake still painted. His latest works were scheduled for a show in the spring. She was spending her time reorganizing and cataloging the library. Both her

men seemed happy with the arrangements. They always slept together at night. She chose which man, where and when she wanted to make love to them individually. The jealousy she'd thought might ruin everything never came.

She'd come to realize her acceptance of them both eased their daily life. She was thankful for so many things, it was hard to believe she'd ever forgotten about them. Often she wondered what might have been different if she hadn't been pushed over the Falls and lost her memory. It was a waste of time, for she couldn't change her history. What she could do was embrace the men who loved her and the woman she was becoming.

A light knock on the door pulled her from her thoughts. "Come in," she called and turned to watch her men's reactions to the changes in the room. This was the first time either of them had seen it finished.

"Wow, this is amazing, Maris." Blake walked in, turning several times to take in all the changes.

"I approve, too. It's very inviting." Nathan stood in the doorway, looking around.

"Wait until you see the sketches of ideas for decorating the rest of the house for the holidays." She laughed at their attempts of mock horror. "Come in and relax. I have a surprise for you both." She waited for them to settle in the chairs before the fireplace, a tray with their wine and glasses on the ottoman between them.

"Nathan, would you pour, please?" He nodded and leaned forward to fill the waiting glasses. When they each held one, Maris cleared her throat. "Thank you both for loving me the way you do and accepting our unorthodox situation." She reached forward to touch her glass to each of theirs. "I'm glad you both like the room. I think we'll spend a lot of time here this winter."

"Doing what?" Blake asked, his sexy smile apparent.

"Anything she wants," Nathan told him.

"I have some surprises for you. Are you ready?" Both her men nodded in agreement. She put her glass back on the tray and moved to

the bed. Tossing back the cover, she let them see her new collection of toys. "Some are for you to use on me." She picked up two realistic looking dildos and held them forward. "These are for you to use on me so I'll be full when I suck your cocks." Both men nodded in agreement. "These two," she held up two glass dildos with graduating rings, "are for me to use on you when I suck your cocks."

"Maris?" Nathan's cheeks turned red, and she smiled brightly. "Relax, Nat, I promise to be gentle." Her laugh told them she might be exaggerating.

"I'm game," Blake said, finishing his wine. "Where do you want to start?"

"How about with these?" Maris slid the straps of her gown from her shoulders until the top draped low, exposing her breasts. "What do you think?"

"I think I need to suck one," Blake said, reaching forward to touch the gold ring piercing her nipple. Hanging from the ring was a small gold letter. Her left breast ring boasted the letter *B*. The right boasted the letter *N*. Using her fingers, she massaged her breasts, pinching her nipples, her groan low and throaty.

"That's why you wouldn't let us near you these last days." Blake said, accepting her behavior.

"I wanted to surprise you."

"I'm surprised and delighted. When do I get to suck mine?" Nathan asked, rubbing his hands together.

"One more thing," she said, and took a step back so they could both see her full form. Maris used her fingers to lift the material of her gown until it revealed her newly shaved crotch.

"Oh, man," Blake said, licking his lips.

"Whatever you want, Maris." Nathan dropped to his knees and reached to her. Not to be left out, Blake moved behind her, his hands cupping her buttocks.

"Still want to see them pink?" she asked, turning to look at Blake.

"Oh, yeah."

“It will cost you,” she said with her own wicked grin crossing her lips. Nathan reached forward and let just the tip of his tongue touch her clit. He sat back and reached for the toys she put on the tray, handing one to Blake.

“Wait, there’s something else,” she said and let her gown fall. She moved to the fireplace mantel and handed each man a small box. They glanced toward each other and back to their gifts. “Go ahead,” she prompted.

They opened their boxes at the same time. Nathan drew a swift breath as his face heated a second time. “Maris?”

“Blake?” She turned to see his expression.

“I’m game,” he told her, his finger touching the small gold ring with a small initial charm attached. Both held a charm with an *M* dangling from it.

“Next week when I get my cycle, we can have your cocks pierced.” She laughed as she looked from one to the other. “Don’t worry, it won’t hurt too much.”

“Where?” Nathan’s voice had cracked when he asked.

“At the base of your cock, so when I swallow you I can tease it with my tongue.” She waited for him to say no but he didn’t, surprising her.

“Hell,” Nathan said, resigned to the fact he’d actually let her pierce his cock with the initial ring. “If I can stand being shot, I suppose I can stand having my cock pierced.”

“Damn, I’m hard just thinking about it,” Blake added, dropping his hand to rub his hard on.

“That’s my men,” she said, and let the straps of her gown fall all the way down her arms. The material caught on her hips, and she wiggled until it fell to her feet. She leaned forward, noting how the nipple ring charms dangled when she bent. Grabbing the two toys, she handed one to each man. “Shall we start?” she asked.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louisa became hooked on paperback romance novels as a teen. Before cable TV arrived, babysitting after school was boring. She chose a Harlequin novel and never looked back.

As an adult, she took writing seminars and classes to craft her own skills. She kept journals and notebooks filled with story ideas and bits of dialogue, along with settings and observations.

Finally retired from her full time job, she ventured to put her notes in order. The end result was *Claudia's Men*, her first romance novel with a twist.

She realized her writing stepped beyond normal boundaries and became erotica. Exploring these new directions has been enlightening in many ways. The author looks forward to researching her next ménage novel.

Also by Louisa Neil

Ménage and More: *Claudia's Men*

Ménage Amour: *The Stagers*

Available at

BOOKSTRAND.COM



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com