



GENETIC ATTRACTION  
TARA LAIN

Loose Id

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## **Genetic Attraction**

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## Dedication

*Getting my first novel published has taken the support of so many wonderful people. I'd like to thank my editor, Heather Hollis, and all the people at Loose Id for believing in me and giving this newbie so much time and attention. And I'd like to say thank you to Sloan Parker and Rosalie Stanton for all their help; to my longtime friend, the great novelist, Suzanne Forster, for seeing so clearly; and to Lindsay Tongo for having my back—always.*

## Chapter One

“Em?”

Yikes! Damn, he got her again. The lab staff teased her for getting so absorbed in her work an ax murderer could sneak up on her.

She looked up from her computer at her favorite tall, blond ax murderer, a.k.a. research associate. The blue, blue eyes behind the Clark Kent wire rims sparkled with humor.

He chuckled. “Sorry, I tried to make a lot of noise opening your door.”

She sighed and pushed away from the big wooden desk that crowded her small office. Oh yeah, now she felt the exhaustion. “I was somewhere else, as usual.”

“Just wanted to know if you’d finished the gene sequencing?”

She looked up into that sculpted face and squinted at the pain between her eyebrows. “I got a lot done, but I’m seeing double.” Headache or not, she could see him just fine.

“C’mon, it’s after nine. Let’s give up before we have a thirty-two-gene sequence instead of sixteen.”

Ouch. Fourteen hours at a computer. She closed her eyes and stretched her neck to the side.

Strong, warm hands pressed down on her shoulders. His fingers pushed her head forward, and powerful thumbs dug into her neck. She jumped and then shivered.

“That’s where it hurts, right?” He dug in a little deeper.

Increased heart rate. Spiked respiration. She thought of it as the “Jake reaction.” The touch of those strong, young hands that he seemed to put on her body way too often and the warm smell of him always powered a reaction. Some tiny part of her rational scientist’s mind could watch while her body went wacko, tingling, shivering and yearning. She might be a thirty-six-year-old geneticist with a huge reputation to protect, but she wanted Jake Martin with a lust she couldn’t reason away. It was a crappy idea, the very worst for her sanity and her career, but those were the facts. Like the direct pathway of alcohol to the liver, nothing got in the way of her desire, not his youth, his position as her assistant researcher, or the fact that he lived with his girlfriend.

She pulled away from his hands. “We should go.”

His slight pause made her think she’d hurt him with her abruptness, but when she glanced up he smiled, flashing patentable dimples. “Let’s get something to eat.”

God, the cheekbones. The floppy gold hair. Half science geek, half demigod. He’d already stripped out of his lab coat, and the well-worn jeans hugged long, lean thighs. Resistance was futile. “Penne with sun-dried tomatoes?”

“You got it, sweetheart.” He pulled her out of the chair, a move that almost backed him up to her side wall. Space wasn’t a luxury afforded in this lab.

“Show proper respect there, boy child. That’s Doctor Sweetheart.”

“Then I’ll have to demand Doctor Boy Child.”

“Boy Child PhD?”

“Top of my résumé.” Jake leaned her against his chest—yeah, that would be rock-hard chest—and slipped the lab coat she wore on clinic days off her shoulders and threw it on her desk.

He just held her, his hands caressing her back as his breath rasped against her hair.

Damn, why did he do this? He touched her a lot, and she didn't know if he simply didn't realize how sexual his attentions seemed or if he was being sadistic. Wasn't he getting enough at home?

She pulled back and practiced her motherly smile. "I must be tired."

Gently turning her around, he pushed her toward the door, switching off the lights as they went. "Mama Sophia's?"

Outside in the open lab, she shrugged on the green wool jacket he held for her. Computers still glowed on two desks where colleagues would return after dinner to continue work. She had a dedicated team, and she hated to leave, but eventually food and sleep even outweighed cancer research. She usually got here before seven, and food breaks were scarce. The thought of pasta made her mouth water as she watched Jake switch off the lights. "C'mon, Dr. Boy Child. Garlic is my drug of choice."

\* \* \*

"Okay, God is Italian." The subtle flavor of tomatoes, garlic, and olive oil floated over her tongue.

"Yeah, just ask an Italian. He'll tell you God gave them Sophia Loren and seventy-five-year-old prime ministers that still get it up for their twenty-five-year-old mistresses. Clearly, divine dispensation." He sucked in a bite.

Mmm. Warm, oregano-spiced air, and the cinnamony smell of Jake beside her. Her favorites. "I thought that was all about the little blue pill?"

"Also a gift from the gods."

They sat in their favorite red, faux-leather booth at the back of the homey restaurant complete with Chianti-bottle candles and red-checked tablecloths. Jake had taken off his leather jacket, leaving him in a soft, gray, tissue-thin sweater that hugged his beautiful lean torso. He'd pushed the sleeves up, and she tried not to stare at those corded golden forearms. The soft material of the sweater was almost as beautiful as his skin.

How did the man afford to dress that way on what she paid him? Never flashy, but even she could see the clothes had quality. He didn't come from money, but he had just bought a house in what she'd heard was a very elegant neighborhood in Connecticut. Did his girlfriend have money? Damn, the girlfriend certainly had him.

"Am I finally going to meet your girlfriend on Friday?"

He made a quick grab for his water glass and took a sip, splashing a few drops on his glasses. "My girlfriend?"

Why was he being coy? "Yes, the girlfriend you moved in with, right? She must be curious about where you spend so many late nights. I assume you're going to bring her Friday."

He pulled his glasses off and wiped them on his napkin, looking tense. What was up? She reached out and flipped his shaggy hair from in front of those blue eyes. The man always needed a haircut. Another part of his charm.

"I, uh, wasn't really planning on coming Friday night."

Oh, hell no. "You are truly kidding me, Jake. You've got to know what that award means to us, to our research, if *someone*...you know, *someone* on our team...were to win it." She didn't want to spoil the surprise, but she'd hocked a lot of political capital lobbying for him to win the Belden Award. The prize for outstanding young scientist was a big deal to the university too, since all the major research schools from across the country were invited to submit candidates. Jeez, it'd never occurred to her that he'd just bow out of the ceremony. "Really, Jake, it's important."

He glanced at her, and then his pasta got interesting again.

"Okay, I'll come."

"Jesus, could you be more enthusiastic? You need to come, Jake. And you'll bring your girlfriend, right? I want to meet her, and it will show the faculty council what a lovely, settled, family person you are. At least one of us isn't a confirmed bachelor."



He clenched his jaw and forced words out between his teeth. “Em, I’ll come to the banquet, but I haven’t got a girlfriend. And I sure as fuck can’t show the faculty council my happy family life.”

The girlfriend was gone? “What happened? You told me you just moved in with her.” Damn, she really didn’t want to screw with his life. “Jesus, Jake, is it because I’m working you to death? I’ll talk to her. Give you more time off.”

He held a hand to her lips. “Easy, sweetheart. I’m sorry. I haven’t told you the truth, but I just...crap, I don’t know. I should have told you a long time ago. I just wasn’t sure it would work, it was such a long shot.”

What in hell was he talking about?

She got the first direct stare since they sat down. “Em, I can’t bring my girlfriend to the award dinner...because she’s my boyfriend. The person I moved in with is a man.” He sat back, still gazing at her steadily, challengingly.

Every nerve ending went hot. Then cold. *What the fuck?*

“And for the record, I never said I moved in with my girlfriend. I said I moved in with my lover, and you did the rest. I’m sorry.”

She knew her mouth was hanging open. Jake, gay? Her fantasy lover? She didn’t know how to feel. As a kid in the commune, she and her mom had practically collected gay friends. How could she have missed it?

Jesus, she was shaking. She didn’t want him to think she was horrified. She wasn’t. Just shocked and...what? Disappointed? Now there was no chance for her.

“Jesus, Jake, I know I can be self-absorbed, but I didn’t know I was blind.” Okay, she had to get a grip. People were looking their way. She lowered her voice. “How could it never have crossed my mind that you’re gay? How could I have missed it so completely in almost two years of working together?”

“Em, I’m really sorry.”

He was sorry. Shit! “You didn’t think you could tell me? Did you imagine it would matter to me?”

He grabbed her hands and squeezed them. “No! Of course I didn’t think you’d care. I didn’t tell you I’m gay because, well, I’m not. Or wasn’t. I’ve mostly been with women. You know; you’ve seen me with enough of them. I’d only been with one other man in my life when I met Roan. We met less than a year ago at the genetics conference I attended with you.”

“That’s why you were acting so strangely at the conference?” She remembered how edgy and distracted he’d been.

“Yeah. I was face-to-face with my sexuality and with the best thing I’d ever seen.”

That put a little rip in her heart.

Releasing her hands, he gripped his own together. “But it was such an unlikely match, and the chances we’d stay together were so small, I didn’t want to tell you and then split up with him.” He sighed and shrugged at the same time. “But the truth is, I fell in love with the guy, and even though it amazes me every day, he loves me back. So I’m gay.” Grin. “At least operationally.”

*Trying to get a grip here.* “Roan?”

“Yeah, that’s his name. And I really do want you to meet him; planned on it in fact.” He touched her hand, gently stroking his fingers over her palm, and she just couldn’t pull away. “You both mean so much to me. I want you to love each other too.”

Maybe it would be easier to like a man Jake loved more than it would a woman. Maybe she could beat back the jealousy, knowing he was more interested in men. Fuck, she’d have to.

He sat back. “But I don’t think the faculty award dinner is the place. I don’t want to hide my relationship exactly. My family knows, and they’re great about it, but hell, you know the faculty council and the administration, especially Kovak.”

“Our own private Inquisitor?”

“Yeah. The faculty council will never say they’re firing me because I’m gay. They’ll make up another reason. I just don’t want to rub their faces in it. If they find out some other way, fine.”

She took another deep breath, just trying to cope. “You know, there are several gay men on the faculty. Professor Montag makes jelly beans look colorless, and some others probably cross-dress in their spare time.”

“Yeah, but they stay in the closet. Don’t ask; don’t tell. Plus, they were here before Kovak, so he kind of ignores them.”

“So just bring your, uh...Roan and let them guess. Maybe he’s just a friend or something.”

“He’s a little too noticeable.”

“What? A drag queen?”

He grinned. “No, you’ll see when you meet him.”

One thing was clear. “You have to come to the banquet. Do you get that? And if this man is the one you love, I think he should be there too. Am I making myself clear?”

He laughed. “Yes, Mother.”

“Hey, why don’t you and Roan escort me to the bloody banquet? Then no one will know who’s with whom. We can say he’s a friend of both of ours. You’ll both be my dates. I get to meet him, and he gets to be there for you.”

“I thought you were coming with Henry.”

“Not nearly often enough.” He snorted Chianti. Okay, bad joke, but then Henry was a pretty bad lover. “Anyway, as chance would have it, I haven’t invited him yet, so I’m free to be your diversion.”

“You’re a diversion only in the best possible way.” His face lit up with enthusiasm. “But actually it’s perfect. You’ll come home with us after the banquet and spend the weekend. I’ve been planning to invite you out for weeks, but we’ve been so busy at the lab. So come this weekend. Then you can get to know Roan and

see the new house at the same time. You get me where you want me, and”—he chuckled—“I get you where I want you.”

She gazed at the beautiful face. He'd taken off his glasses so nothing distracted from those crystal blue eyes. How often had she fantasized about spending time with him? Sadly, those fantasies had never involved a gay lover. But bottom line, he had to come to the banquet, and a weekend in Connecticut sounded like fun even in the company of two gay men. Of course, the faculty council sure as hell wouldn't agree with her. They would puke if they knew Doctor Emmaline Silvay, lead researcher and hope for all great international genetics prizes, was consorting with her twenty-six-year-old assistant. Gay assistant. She felt her mom's rebel blood rise in her veins.

“What time will you pick me up, and what kind of clothes should I pack?”

\* \* \*

Tree shadows crowded the road. He loved the drive home. Narrow, winding roads with turns he could feel in his gut, and every curve brought him closer to Roan's beautiful ass. His baby. Now it was up to him.

Finally Em was coming to their house. Should he be thrilled or scared shitless? He'd wanted her to visit much sooner but he'd always chickened out. Of course, chickening was still an option. They could play the charming hosts, wine and dine her, and nothing else. A lot depended on Roan's reaction and Jake's own courage. Even more depended on Em. He hit the speed dial on his cell phone.

The sleepy, silky voice he loved answered. “Are you hurrying home to me, love? 'Cause man have I got a big thing waiting for you.”

Shit, big was no joke. Blood rushed to Jake's groin, and he was instantly hard. The man was sex on a stick. He still couldn't believe he'd walked into that hotel bar just when Roan had been hiding out from his hounds. “Hi, darling. Don't let that big thing go to sleep before I get there. I'm about twenty minutes away.”

He heard a lascivious chuckle. “No chance of sleep. I'm keeping it warm for you.”

Jake moaned on purpose while Roan laughed.

“Before I have to pull over and jerk off, let me tell you what just happened.”

“What? Something sexy, I hope.”

“One-track mind. Yes, potentially sexy. Emmaline is taking you and me to the Belden Award dinner on Friday and...wait for it...she’s coming home to spend the weekend with us.”

“No shit! Does she know who ‘us’ is?”

“Well, she knows you’re a man, if that’s what you mean.”

“Jesus, finally. How did this all happen?”

“I’ll tell you all the details when I get home.”

“No, baby, you’re not going to be doing any talking when you get home, ’cause your mouth will be full. So tell me now.”

Jake laughed. “Yeah, you’re right. Well, short version, she started insisting that I had to come to the awards dinner and bring my girlfriend.”

“Just call me Angelina.”

“So I figured, what the hell? I might as well tell her.”

“About time, love.”

“I know.” It had been a huge deal between him and Roan, but he just hadn’t been able to get up the nerve to introduce his lover to his boss. For him it had been the final statement. Tell her, and he’d have to admit he was gay. It was easy to do with everyone else. His parents had said they’d already known he was bisexual, and women hadn’t really done it for him for a couple of years when he met Roan. It had been easy giving up women. All women but one.

Roan’s purr broke into his reverie. “Awfully quiet, love.”

“Sorry. Just thinking. Is it my wishful imagination that she might want more than a professional partnership with me?”

“Can’t say for sure, love. But when I meet her I should get some insight.”

“You know it’s up to you, right, baby? Just because I think you’ll love her doesn’t mean it’s true. I know not many women do it for you.”

“Well, it’s some up to me and more up to her.”

“I can’t tell you what it means to me that you’re open to this. I was pretty shitty about Alexandra.”

Roan chuckled, and the sound shivered right up Jake’s spine. “I loved that my fucking Alex made you green, baby, but I didn’t love her. I want you to have what you love.”

“But I feel the same way about you. Nothing gets in the way of us no matter what.”

Roan was quiet.

“Baby?”

Jake heard the tightness in his lover’s voice. “That means everything to me, Jake.” There was a sigh. “But she still turns you on, right?”

Jake laughed. “Like a raging horndog.”

“Then the chances are damned good I’ll feel the same way. Now, get home here, baby, and let me show you where you can put that horn.”

Oh Jesus, his cock was pressing out of his jeans as his foot slammed the accelerator.

## Chapter Two

Jeez, she was not good with mascara. All thumbs. She wiped a little from her eyelid and considered the effect in the bathroom mirror. Okay, worth it. Her eyes looked huge. Pretty nice cleavage on the new dress too. She laughed, and it sounded suspiciously like a giggle. There were a few colleagues who might be surprised she had breasts, and she kind of hoped Jake was a little surprised too. She took a deep, cleansing breath. Had to quit thinking like that. Gay was gay.

She turned off the bathroom light, grabbed up her weekend bag, and headed downstairs carrying her daring-for-her three-inch heels.

Halfway down, the phone rang, and she rushed the last few steps to glance at the display. With a laugh, she grabbed the cordless. “Hi, Mom.”

Her mother’s husky voice rumbled in her ear. “Jeez, I never get used to that caller ID thing you have. Makes you seem clairvoyant.”

“How are you? What’s up?”

“Called to ask you that. You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m okay.”

“How’s the saving-the-world thing going this week?”

“The research is great. We completed some additional steps in the gene sequencing. And our use of the tests on patients in the clinic is coming out accurately. I think this will save lives.”

“I don’t doubt it for a minute, honey. You said ‘we’? You and that adorable boy toy of yours?”

“His name is Jake.” But she still laughed. Funny, she’d never told her mom how she felt about Jake. Too embarrassed. But Shakti was a good guesser.

“His name is sexy. I looked him up on the university’s Web site. Yum.”

“C’mon. I’m supposed to be a mature, responsible professor and researcher with no lustful thoughts.”

Her mother made a rude noise. “That’ll be the day.”

“Let’s pretend.”

“Honey, you know nobody on the planet is more proud of you than I am.” Here came the lecture. Her mother, the hippie, loved all living things vociferously. God knows, Em had marched on Washington with her. But Shakti Silvay had other priorities, and Em always got to hear about them. She settled into her phone chair and fiddled with the fringe hanging from the old lampshade as her mom warmed to her subject.

“When I was your age, you were almost twenty, baby. Now, I’m not suggesting you should stop researching and have kids, but I do want you to find a good man, have great sex, and be happy.”

Were they really going to have this conversation now? Again? “I have sex.”

“Oh yeah? Last I heard you were hanging out with some tight-assed professor that doesn’t know his dick from a laser pointer.”

Had her there. “Henry’s okay. Besides, you never settled with one man.”

“I’m me, baby. I like a lot of variety. You need more structure and steadiness. I’m sure some psycho-shrink would say it’s in reaction to your crazy old mom.”

“I love my crazy mom, my life is great, and I’m happy. The research fills me up; you know that.”

There was a pause. Her mom was scarily perceptive. “Really, baby? Are you happy? Is all that work really enough?”

She sighed. “Yes, Mommy, and when it’s not I’ll change it. I’ll look for more.”

“Don’t wait too long, baby. Shit happens, and some choices go away.”



Em felt that one right in her heart. Jake. Yeah, that one was gone. “I know.”

“Okay, well I sure as hell didn’t call to lecture you.”

Em switched the lamp on and off. “Now you tell me.”

“What’s up this weekend? More work?”

“No, in fact I’m spending this weekend in Connecticut with Jake and his, uh, lover.”

“His lover?”

“Remember I told you he lived with someone?” She was glad she’d never told her mom about her feelings for Jake, so now she didn’t have to endure the sympathy. “Anyway, I expect them any minute. I’m all dressed up for a faculty party. You should see me. Positively Diane Lane.”

“Always said you look like her if she had red hair, honey.”

“So I gotta go.”

“Okay, baby. Just wanted to hear your voice. Try to have way too much fun this weekend.”

“You’re bad.”

“Always.”

“Call you soon. Love you, Mom.”

“Me too.”

Em stared at the phone as she strapped on her heels. Her mom never let her get away with much, but she was an equal opportunity confronter. No one escaped. Like the time Shakti had driven from the ashram in her old minivan up to Stanford and informed Em’s PhD advisor that her daughter was brilliant but “no pansy-assed intellectual.” Em, she’d said, was going to make a difference in the world, and no one who really counted ever followed the rules. God, Em loved her, but it was hard not to feel like a disappointment.

Okay, enough. She balanced on her heels. Yeah, this would work. Carefully, she walked to the closet and grabbed her coat, then sat on her couch in the comfy,

mismatched living room. She inhaled one deep breath in through the nose, out through the mouth. Then a second deep breath. The doorbell sounded. Goose bumps erupted. This was it. She hadn't even had time to think of what to say to the boyfriend of the man of her dreams.

Fighting a giggle, she hopped up, wobbled a little, crossed the entry, and yanked open the door.

Jesus. Was this what people meant when they said "your heart stops?" She stared.

The man standing under her porch light almost didn't seem real. She looked up into clear green eyes so heavily fringed with lashes, they looked like they were lined with kohl. And that mouth? Looking at it had to be a mortal sin in at least three major religions. Like female beauty somehow architecturally carved into a male masterpiece.

He extended his long, slim hand and said simply, "Roan."

His hand was so warm. "I know."

He smiled. *Did the sun just come out?* Dimples. And one of those shining white teeth was crooked. Maybe nature could only endure so much perfection and had to fight back with a tiny cosmic joke.

Yikes. She flew off her feet, and breath whooshed from her lungs as he crushed her against the silky fabric of his tux and the hard, slim body beneath. She managed to get her toes back on the ground and looked up at that exquisite face framed by silky black hair.

He beamed. "Hello, darling." He dropped his head and kissed her, full on the mouth.

Far from a "howdy" kind of peck, the kiss was soft and lingering, with the slightest hint of a warm tongue against her lips. She fought not to whimper.

Gradually, and it felt reluctantly, he pulled back. "I think I'm your date for tonight."

Only one thing came to mind. “Holy shit.”

From a few steps behind Roan, Jake started to laugh.

\* \* \*

Hours later, after rubbery chicken and droning speeches, Roan looked down at the shining auburn hair of the woman he held in his arms. He subtly moved his hips to adjust his growing erection. Fortunately, he could move to the music, so he hoped no one was the wiser.

Man, he understood what Jake saw in her: this unconscious sexiness that informed every move she made, plus the amazing brains. She looked at him, and he felt transparent, like there was no secret he could hide, no thought he could guard. Not many women did it for him, but this one was something special. He saw how the staid professors lining the ballroom dance floor looked at her when they thought no one was watching, with covetousness they would never admit even to themselves. He smiled. Of course, a few of them were looking at *him* that way.

He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Likely it was Tick Tock, and his assistant never gave up until he found Roan.

He murmured into Em’s ear. “Sorry, need to take this call. Just keep dancing.” She grinned up at him and rested her head on his chest. Nice.

“Hey, Tick Tock, I’m dancing with a lovely lady. This better be good.”

“Lady? We are branching out.” Even over the music, Roan could hear the high, slightly nasal voice of his ultraefficient friend and employee.

“Yeah. Look, I’m fine. Some people here know who I am, but nobody seems to care much. These are scientists and college professors, man; they’ve got better things to do with their time than take pictures of me. So don’t worry. No bodyguard necessary.”

“Are you sure?”

“The press haven’t really figured out the whole Connecticut thing yet, and they’d never expect to find me at a banquet for researchers on Long Island, so I’m good.”

“It just makes me nervous, Roan. I don’t like you going out without Jimmy, at least.”

“You gotta give me a chance at a life, kid.”

“I know, beauty. I’m sorry.”

“I’ll call you when we leave.”

“kay. Promise?”

“Promise. Talk later.”

He slipped the phone back into his pocket and looked down into chocolate eyes. She smiled lazily. “Everything okay?”

“My assistant. He freaks when I sneak off for my ‘other’ life with Jake.”

Her expression was compassionate and, he thought, a little horrified. “It must be hard keeping your two lives separate.”

“You have no idea. But the only way I get to have Jake is if I can keep our relationship discreet in what is otherwise a totally public life. He doesn’t want the world to know about us, and I can’t say I blame him. It would be like Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller. Tough to take seriously.”

“That’s so not true. Dear God, who wouldn’t want you?”

“Thank you, love, but I wasn’t fishing for compliments.”

“And I wasn’t giving them. I imagine all these good professors are wondering how in the hell Jake and I got to meet you, since the worlds of science and high fashion clearly don’t collide most of the time.”

If they only knew. “But I think they believe what we said about us being in the same hotel in Los Angeles last year. After all, it’s true.”

“Yes. Everyone knows both Jake and I went to that genetics conference, so we all could have met in the bar like we said.”

He leaned down and whispered in her ear. “But where were you, darling, when I was sucking Jake’s cock in his hotel room?”

She gave a surprised laugh.

“Sorry, was that too much information?” He winked at her and watched a touch of pink rise up her neck.

“It’s okay. I’ve sucked a cock or two in my time.” She looked at him appraisingly. “But I’ve never seen two men do it, even in pornos. I’ll bet that’s something to see.”

“Any time.”

She snorted, but he saw the pink rise higher, which made him grin.

She reached a hand up and touched his crooked front tooth. “Tell me about this. In your business, I’ll bet you got a lot of pressure to get it fixed.”

“Yeah. When I was first breaking into modeling, a lot of people suggested I fix it. But then the clients started requesting ‘the boy with the crooked tooth.’ It became a trademark. Now it’s insured for a bunch of money.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope. Actually, between teeth, face, body, etcetera, I’m worth way more dead than alive.”

“Not to Jake.”

A soft warmth suffused his chest. “Thanks, Em.”

“A lot of the people here tonight know who you are.” She ducked her head a little. “Even if I didn’t. Sorry.”

“No reason why you should.”

“World’s greatest supermodel. Please, I live under a rock. That’s my only excuse.”

“You must have been listening to my agent. And I’m only arguably the world’s top *male* supermodel. There’re lots of famous females.”

“Which makes you all the more unique.”

“Not all that damned special.”

She touched his cheek. “Did you always want to be a model?”

“Hell, no. I was just looking to survive.”

“Sounds like that’s a story.”

“Let’s just say I wasn’t really at home in a small town in Iowa.” He adopted a little drag-queen swish. “I look so bad in plaid.”

She chuckled.

“Maybe I’ll tell you the rest some other time. Anyway, you and Jake are the special ones. He says you may get nominated for the Nobel Prize.”

She shook her head. “Not likely. Wrong sex, for one thing. And I’m not the best at playing the political games. I just like to do my research and keep a low profile.” Her dark brown eyes filled with warmth. “But Jake is something, isn’t he?”

It was clear she really cared for her young assistant, and Roan sensed her feelings were not particularly platonic. Once he would have been floored by his jealousy. He still felt a twinge. But Jake loved him. It was real. And this woman could be the icing on the cake.

The music stopped, and the bandleader announced a short break. Roan glanced over and saw Jake’s golden head in the midst of what appeared to be an admiring group of congratulators. “Maybe we should go check on our boy.”

“Actually, I think we can make our good-byes. We’ve endured the evening and done our penance just so we could see him win.”

His cock gave a little leap. *Time to go home? Oh, yeah.* “Fine by me.”

## Chapter Three

Over the heads of the professors crowded around him, Jake could see the faces he loved coming toward him from the dance floor. Cute. They were holding hands. Good for the masquerade and good for him. They looked comfortable together. More than comfortable—downright sexy. Shit, that was so good.

“Doctor Martin, are you planning something exciting for your prize money?” He looked at his questioner. Maybe the fiftyish blonde professor, who also happened to be on the Faculty Council, wanted him to spend it on her?

“I’m afraid the money will make a short, one-way trip to my college loans, Doctor Shrinsky.”

She giggled. “Yes, I forget you’re so recently out of graduate school. And so accomplished already.”

He looked up as Em and Roan emerged through the crowd. “Hi, you two. Enjoying dancing?”

Roan grinned. “You have no idea how much.” He gave Jake a little wink. “But we’re thinking we should hit the road.”

“Great, let’s get the coats...”

Professor Shrinsky grabbed his arm. “You’re not going so soon, Jake. Why don’t the four of us have a drink?” She ran a finger across his tux sleeve. Okay, so it worked. This woman thought Em and Roan were a couple and that Jake was available. Man, did she make a mistake.

“Thanks, professor, but Roan’s got a long trip home, and we, uh, carpooled, so we better take off. Appreciate the invitation.”

He shook hands all around and fell in behind Em's swaying hips. That dress was incredible. Maybe the first time he'd ever seen her try to look sexy. It worked, and he had the half-hard cock to prove it.

They retrieved their coats and got into line at the valet stand. Early fall on Long Island could get chilly, and he watched as Roan cuddled Em in his arms to warm her. That did the rest of the job on his cock. Seeing those two embrace gave him a raging hard-on, and he pulled his trench closed to cover it. Roan's dark head bowed over Em's auburn hair, and he gently kissed her temple. Her eyes flicked up in surprise, but she didn't look like she objected. Funny. She was, what, twelve or thirteen years older than his beautiful boy? But they could easily be a couple. If you could forget for a minute that he was called the most beautiful man in the world and she was a science superstar, they could just be a young couple on their way home to relieve the babysitter. Big "if."

They moved up to the curb. Their turn.

"Dr. Martin?"

Shit. Not home free yet.

He turned, knowing exactly who was behind him. The tall, thin, gray-haired man looked like an ad for higher education. His tuxedo should have had patches on the elbows.

"Dr. Kovak. I missed you inside." He didn't say it had required planning.

"I wanted to add my congratulations to your accolades." Kovak reminded him of their dessert tonight: Baked Alaska. Pretty on the outside, freezing center. The "inquisitor" extended his hand, and Jake took it.

"Thank you, sir. I'm honored."

Kovak turned his head toward Roan and Em, who Jake noticed had moved apart at the professor's arrival.

The professor smiled. "Ah, Dr. Silvay, please introduce me to your friend." When had friend become a four-letter word?



His beautiful boy flashed the smile that launched a thousand magazine covers. “I’m Roan Black.”

“Doctor Covington Kovak. And are you also a scientist, Mr. Black?”

Em stepped protectively toward Roan and put her hand on his arm. “Actually, Roan has mastered the science of making people adore him. He’s one of the world’s leading models.”

Kovak’s eyes widened. “Of course, I knew I’d seen you. But I could hardly believe such a celebrity would be at our little gathering.”

Okay, apparently celebrity also had four letters.

“I was honored to be invited, sir.”

Jake saw with relief that their Lexus hybrid had arrived at the curb. And another car crowded behind it.

There was a sudden pop, and he was seeing white. *What the fuck?*

“Hey, Roan, over here. Look over here.”

The photographer pushed through the group waiting for their cars. Jake moved to protect his lover, to get between him and the press, but Roan was clearly the pro here.

The model smiled at the photographer as if the guy didn’t look like he’d slept in his clothes. “Why don’t you take a picture of our group? Dr. Kovak is a famous educator, and Dr. Silway and Dr. Martin are renowned scientists. Actually, Dr. Martin just won a prestigious award. I’ll be happy to give you details if you’d like.”

Jake hid his smile. Roan was turning this paparazzo into a science reporter.

The photographer looked deflated. “No, that’s okay. Just give me some shots.”

Roan arranged the group with himself beside Kovak, and Jake noticed the good doctor looked a bit smug. Maybe celebrity wasn’t such a bad word after all.

The valet was practically dancing with suppressed irritation at the delay.

Jake peered at the group. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but that’s our car, and they seem to be wanting us to get out of the way.”

Kovak slowly turned his head to Jake. “Pity, I would so love to hear the story of your...friendship. The three of you, you know.”

Shit, they so didn’t want to get into that here in front of a reporter.

Em smiled. “Covington, let’s do lunch, and I’ll tell you about all our adventures at the genetics conference. Riveting. Great seeing you.”

Jake gently nudged Em toward the backseat of the car that the valet held. “Thank you for taking the time to seek me out, professor. I appreciate your good wishes.”

The photographer tried to ask Roan some questions, but the beauty just smiled, waved his hand royally, and slid in beside Em in the backseat, making the statement that they were “the best of friends.” Shit, that might not be any better than Roan sitting beside Jake. There was no politically correct way to arrange the three of them.

He held out his hand again to Kovak, who took it coolly. “Have a good night.”

*Okay, try not to look like you’re running.* Feeling Kovak’s eyes boring into his back, he pushed five dollars into the valet’s hand, slid into the driver’s seat, buckled up, and pulled out at what he hoped was a discreet pace. When they’d cleared the hotel driveway, he let his head fall back against the seat. “Sheee-it.”

“Double sheee-it,” Em echoed.

Jake glanced in the mirror and saw Roan slip a comforting arm around Em. “Don’t worry about the paparazzi. They pretty much make a game out of seeing who can track me down to the most obscure locations, and that guy wasn’t one of my regular hounds. Probably a stringer for some local paper. He may not even use the picture, since it’s so *Town & Country* looking. That doesn’t sell his kind of paper.”

Em looked relieved. “Good. I’m not really anxious to be in the tabloids.”

“No worries. But that professor is a scary individual. I gather we don’t like Dr. Kovak?”

“Hell, no.” Jake pulled emphatically into the next lane and automatically glanced in the rearview mirror to be sure they weren’t being followed. So far they’d managed to keep Connecticut private, and he wanted to keep it that way.

Em snorted. “Kovak’s an asshole, but he’s got a lot of power. He’s one of the main reasons Jake didn’t want to bring you alone to the event. Prejudiced and mean is a bad combination.”

Jake stared at the road. “Fortunately, Em is very important to the university. That keeps Kovak off our backs...some.”

She snorted again. “He may have kept his distance a bit, but the man’s a fucking misogynist and would love to bring me down.”

Jake saw Roan looking at him in the rearview mirror. “I’m sorry you guys have to put up with the asshole. Sounds as bad as the fashion industry. Of course, in my business nobody cares if you’re gay.”

“How have you guys managed to keep your relationship out of the papers if the paparazzi follow you around like that?” Em sounded concerned.

Jake glanced at them again. “We keep a low profile and don’t go to big events together.”

Roan smiled, though Jake thought it wasn’t the happiest expression. It was a pain hiding all the time. “We’re homebodies and, so far, the press haven’t identified the house.”

“But how would that guy have known to come to a science dinner?”

“Probably somebody called him or his paper when they recognized me.”

“Jesus. The price of fame is high.”

“Yeah. But at least I don’t have to deal with Dr. Kovak.”

“Forget Kovak.” Em sat back. “He doesn’t get a piece of our weekend. He’ll still be there on Monday.”

Jake tried to smile. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

He relaxed a little behind the wheel as the bright lights and expressways of the city gave way to winding roads and green trees. Em and Roan murmured idly in the backseat, and he let his mind wander. He had more immediate issues to think about than Kovak. He and Roan had never really decided what to do about Em...exactly. He was excited and scared. Yes, she was a really good friend, but she was still his boss and one of the great scientists of the world in his opinion. God, she was special. And so was his lover, and he didn't want to screw that up. But they seemed to have hit it off. More than.

He glanced in the mirror. At the moment she was settling quite nicely against Roan's shoulder, looking like a kitten snuggling in for a nap. Roan smiled down at her, his beautiful face soft. Yeah, but Jake could see that another part of his lover's anatomy wasn't in the least soft. Did Em realize her snuggle bunny was sporting a hard-on the size of Delaware? Jake chuckled softly, and Roan looked up. The green eyes twinkled with the best kind of mischief. He got the slow Roan wink. The man seemed ready for the weekend no matter what. *Bring it on.*

## Chapter Four

*Hmm. Warm, comfy. Hmm. Better than comfy. More like hot.*

Em realized slowly that her body was tingling in all the right places. *Jesus.* Maybe it had something to do with the soft, wet tongue rimming her ear. *Tongue?* Oh, yes, and lips. Maybe if she pretended she was still asleep, this would just go on and on.

“Em, we’re home.”

Was that sultry whisper inside her head? She let her eyes flutter open and found herself nose-to-nose with the world’s most beautiful face. Oh yeah, she remembered now. Beautiful *gay* face. But why was gay beauty kissing her ear? Was she still dreaming? She started to sit up, and he slipped an arm around her in support.

“Take it easy there, cowgirl; you were pretty sound asleep.”

She shook the fog from her head. “Was I snoring?”

“Only a few little whimpers.” He kissed her forehead, which made her want to whimper again. What the hell was going on?

As she sat forward, she realized that light was coming into the car from the outside, and Jake was holding the car door open. They seemed to be in a garage.

Roan pulled her toward the door. Jake reached in, slipped his arms around her back and under her legs, and snatched her from the seat in one move, holding her like she weighed five pounds. She squeaked, not knowing whether to be thrilled or embarrassed.

She looked up into those baby blues framed in wire rims. “Hi.”

“Hi. Welcome home.”

“I could walk.”

“Yeah, you could.” He continued to carry her through the big garage that contained at least two other cars to a side door that she guessed must lead into their house. Roan was already holding the door and her bag when they got there. He kissed her forehead again as Jake carried her over the threshold.

Talk about your significant moments.

They passed through a darkened room—a mud room? Lights flashed on. Holy merde. This was a kitchen to make HGTV proud. Huge, with shining chrome, professional-looking appliances, beautiful birch cabinets, and a large, polished granite island.

“Wow.”

Jake chuckled. “This is Roan’s domain. He’s a closet chef.”

She looked at the gorgeous brunet standing beside them. “Jesus, and he cooks too?”

Both men laughed. She wriggled like an anxious puppy, and Jake put her down to explore. Gleaming surfaces everywhere. The enormous, six-burner gas cooktop with griddle and rotisserie baffled her. “I wouldn’t even know how to turn this on.”

Jake came up behind her and slicked his strong hands down her arms. “Don’t worry about turning *that* on. C’mon, let’s get you up to your suite so you can get some sleep.”

“I think that would be *more* sleep.”

He took her hand and led the way into a wide, open room that, even with the spillover of light from the kitchen, was so dark that she couldn’t quite make out the details. The ceilings seemed high, and huge tree shadows swayed outside what appeared to be a wall of glass.

He smiled over his shoulder as he led her to a wide staircase. "We'll give you the tour tomorrow."

The landing at the top of the short, wide staircase formed a beautiful sitting area with two modern but comfy chairs and an intricate Persian rug in front of a window that just framed black sky beyond. Several doors opened onto this area and, with Roan's hands on her shoulders, they guided her into the one at the left.

If the kitchen amazed her, this was a showstopper. Exquisite, like someone had peered into her head and picked out a room she would love if she ever took the time and money to actually decorate something. A big platform bed glowed in a soft, golden spread that looked like silk. The linens gleamed white against Asian-style furnishings mixed with ultramodern pieces. Sliding shoji-style rice paper panels covered a wall. "This is so beautiful."

Roan beamed. "You really like it?"

"I can't say how much."

Jake had moved over to the screen wall and pulled a panel to reveal a wide, hinged door that he pushed open. "Come see."

She walked to him, Roan still following, and stepped out onto a polished wood deck that overlooked a koi pond about half a story below. She could make out the sinuous bodies of the fish forming patterns in the black water as they slipped in and out of the reflected moonlight. Water splashed from an unseen fountain.

"I just can't believe this. I'm so happy you get to have such a wonderful place to live."

Jake pulled her into his arms and hugged her ferociously. "This is for you too."

"I don't understand."

"I just mean when we designed the house, we kept you in our minds. We tried to incorporate things we thought you would like, especially in this suite."

"But why? Roan hadn't even met me. You barely told me about the house when you were building it." Yeah, that still stung.

Roan stepped in behind her, so she was sandwiched in yumminess. “I knew how important you were to Jake, and everything important to Jake is important to me. Besides, it was a forgone conclusion I was going to love you. We wanted you to be comfortable here.”

“Comfortable! This is the stuff of dreams, you guys.”

Jake kissed her cheek. “C’mon, sweetheart, time for bed.”

They led her inside.

After hanging her few clothes in a closet as big as her bedroom at home and washing up in a sybaritic spa called a bathroom, she snuggled between four-million-thread-count sheets, feeling very underdressed in her tank top and bikinis. At home she slept in the nude, but since the boys said they were coming to “tuck her in,” she figured clothing was not optional.

The Asian-style lamp beside her bed had been set to its lowest level, casting a warm, soft glow over the room. If she’d been at home, she’d probably still be working. Some cleansing breaths might help her sleep. She smiled. *A couple orgasms would be better.* Her work schedule and less-than-stellar relationship with Henry left her wanting, and she’d always loved sex. A shame she didn’t pack the vibrator.

She closed her eyes and took the first deep breath. A soft whisper made her look up.

Both men stood in her doorway, wearing drawstring pajama bottoms and nothing else. Riveting. They walked toward her, but she couldn’t quite drag her eyes to their faces. Jake, the taller by maybe an inch, was also the more heavily muscled, his defined chest lightly covered with a smattering of golden hair. Roan was as smooth as marble. Even the line of hair she would have expected to grow on the belly of a brunet was missing, making her think he must have it removed. He was lean, but each muscle stood out in bas-relief under taut alabaster skin. She could understand why men and women flocked to buy anything associated with this glorious face and body.



She finally looked up, her breath uneven. “Isn’t it against the law to be so beautiful?”

Jake smiled and took Roan’s hand. “He is a masterpiece, isn’t he?”

“Not just Roan, darling. You both make my heart stop.”

He sat on the edge of her bed looking down at her, and Roan sat beside him, leaning back against her hip so he could see her face. Jesus, gay or not, this could be more pure masculinity than her poor underexercised heart could stand. Of course, the primary area of response right now was lower than the heart.

Jake curved over her and whispered, “Am I really beautiful to you, sweetheart?”

He was so close. Had to tell the truth. “Infinitely. You always have been.”

His gaze was intense, but she saw uncertainty. His eyes flicked over his shoulder toward Roan and then back to her.

“Em, would you mind if I kissed you?”

Her heart leaped. She’d been dreaming of kissing Jake for the better part of two years. But what the fuck? “Jake, you told me you’re gay. You’re sitting beside the man you love, who also happens to be the most gorgeous human on the planet. What the fuck do you want to kiss me for?”

“I’ve always wanted to. Since I met you.”

Shit. The man had to make up his mind. She pulled her head to the side but couldn’t move far because Roan was leaning on her covers. “Jake, quit. Every day in the damned lab you torture me. Hugs, back rubs, caresses. Sweetheart this and honey that. And all the time you’re in love, and with a man. I just don’t get it...”

He grabbed her face in his palms, his blue eyes shooting sparks. “You call that torture?”

“Hell, yes!”

“Why?”

She gritted her teeth. “You fucking know why. I want you, dammit, and you know it.” She tried to pull her head from his hands, but though his grip was gentle, he wouldn’t let go.

“Then it’s time to stop the fucking torture.” And his mouth captured hers, his palms pressing just hard enough to separate her lips, and his tongue took charge, deep, hot, and wet.

For a moment she was frozen. But his mouth was the instrument of her dreams. Well, one of them. Heat flashed through her so fast she felt light-headed. Her mouth opened wider. Did she do that? Her tongue caressed his, and someone moaned. Did it come from her throat? Jesus, she was kissing Jake. Finally, after all that longing. The idea of it almost made her come.

Oh God, more. Her pussy clenched in an agony of longing. She pressed her chest, still trapped under the soft sheet, up against him and let her tongue explore the soft recesses tasting of peppermint toothpaste and sexy Jake.

He pulled back, ripping their lips apart, still holding her head. “I hope you don’t hate me for this, but if you’re gonna, hate me later.”

He glanced over his shoulder, and the sheet vanished, pulled down to her feet in one smooth move. Her whole body shivered. Oh yeah, there were two men here. Jesus, what did Roan think about this? In answer to her question, she felt soft hands on her thighs. Silky fingers caressed dangerously close to the part of her that most ached. Holy shit, she was lying on a bed with two men. Two young, gay men. She wished she could ask Shakti for advice, because ménage was much more up her mom’s alley, but at this moment that alley was looking damned attractive.

Jake pulled the straps of her tank top down over her breasts. *Yes!* He stroked. Her back arched, pressing her hard nipple into his hand. He groaned deep in his throat and pulled her full nipple into his mouth, sucking voraciously, his hand pumping her breast.

The pleasure was almost too much to bear. “Jake, oh God, Jake.”

So many hands—and mouths. Her bikini panties slid off, and her legs were spread.

Jake's mouth devoured her nipple, every pull shooting straight to her womb. Then she felt it. The first kiss was gentle, on her inner thigh. Oh God, a silken tongue licked from the juncture of her thigh onto her shaved pussy, gently lapping the lips. No breathing. She didn't want to do anything to make him stop. Either of them. Two fingers pulled her labia apart, and that hot tongue licked her from anus to clit. Shiiiiit. Nothing could feel this good. "Yes."

She bucked. Closer. More. Jake pulled back from her breast and tried to hold her so Roan could get that luscious tongue deep in her folds. He lapped around her labia and then circled her clit, teasing and torturing.

Jake whispered in her ear, "Tell him what you want, sweetheart. We'll give you anything."

"Please, more, please."

Roan chuckled without ever taking his lips from her clit. He started a steady, hard, sucking pull. Two fingers slid into her vagina and started pumping.

Oh God, it felt so good. It felt—too much. She held her breath, trying to keep from exploding, but it was just too late. Her body needed it so much. It was so good. Heat flashed from her tailbone to her head, her womb convulsed, and she screamed with the first really fantastic orgasm she'd had in—well, forever. And she trembled and shuddered like it would never stop.

Roan kept gently licking as she tried to figure out how to breathe. Then he pulled back his mouth and pushed two hooked fingers into her vagina, pressed down on her pubic bone with the other hand and started a relentless massage inside.

She wriggled. "What are you doing?"

Jake whispered into her ear, "Does it feel good?"

“It feels strange; I don’t know.” A deep throbbing began in her womb. “Oh, yes, I think it does feel good.”

Roan just kept tickling that spot inside relentlessly as she writhed.

Jake murmured, “Her G-spot?”

“Yeah, she’s really sensitive.”

By now, her hips were in total buck, and she was thrashing her head. “Oh, stop, I don’t think I can come this way, not again, I, oh shit, Roan...” And she came in a whole new way. A deep, exquisite explosion almost subtle compared to the clit, but oh, God, it was satisfying.

Roan slowly removed his fingers and put them in his mouth while Jake smoothed her now sweaty forehead. She tried to focus her eyes. “Are you sure you’re gay?”

And with the hand soothing her brow and the sound of soft laughter, she fell sound asleep.

\* \* \*

Outside Em’s bedroom, Jake grabbed his lover and pulled him tight to his chest. “Are you sure you’re gay?” He closed his mouth over those beautiful full lips and sucked that sweet tongue deep. Roan was a vocal lover, and his whimpers and moans drove Jake crazy in the best way.

He pulled back and looked into the green eyes. “Jesus, I’m so horny you may not be able to sit for a week.”

Roan was gasping into Jake’s ear. “I’ll love standing; just get your cock in me.”

“First tell me that woman in there isn’t going to wake up and freak. She could, you know. And then I’d be out of a friend and out of a job.”

“There are no guarantees, baby. You knew that going in. But she sure seemed into it, and I know she really cares about you. Shit, she tasted like heaven and came like a starving woman.”

“Yeah, she did.”

“And, baby, I need to follow her, so get your gorgeous cock into that bedroom. I don’t want to sleep tonight.”

## Chapter Five

Em took a deep breath. The soft scent of sandalwood, maybe? Where was she exactly? Stretching, she felt a lovely little twinge. Oh yeah, that clit had been sucked into oblivion by somebody who knew how.

That's where she was.

She opened her eyes. Morning. Soft light through the shoji screens, the clicking music of the bamboo fountain in the garden. Heavenly.

She sat up slowly, perched cross-legged, and looked around. Seeing her bikini pants and tank top folded on a gold silk armchair reminded her she was naked. What exactly had happened last night? Was that passionate scene planned or just some kind of spontaneous human combustion? Her combustion. Man, she had come hard. She couldn't remember the last time she'd responded like that. Maybe because she never had. And now she felt so good, it was hard to regret a moment.

God, she'd kissed Jake. He'd sucked her breasts like in a thousand daydreams. And Roan. The tongue that ate Manhattan. No one had ever come close to giving her oral sex that wonderful.

But dammit, they were gay! Even if Jake said "just operationally," Roan was a died-in-the-wool, no-holds-barred, pick-your-favorite-cliché homosexual. Surely ardent pussy-eating didn't qualify as initiation into the gay boys' fan club. Em was seriously confused.

Even more confusing was the fact that she wasn't too horrified at having been made love to by two men. Yes, sports fans, they called that a ménage à trois, and she didn't feel nearly weird enough about it. Of course, she'd had some serious role-modeling in her youth. In the commune they'd lived in, there were a couple of three-

partner relationships, and everyone had accepted them as normal. She didn't know if in those partnerships the men had also been lovers. She wondered. But this wasn't a partnership, just a fling, so maybe the rules were different. She chuckled. She'd have to consult the ménage handbook. Google the rules.

When confused, she needed coffee. Actually, when not confused, she needed coffee. Jake loved coffee too, so maybe they had a coffeemaker in the kitchen that started automatically.

She slid off the platform bed and padded to that closet. Good Lord, if they ever needed money, they could rent it as a two-bedroom apartment. After rummaging in her bag, she pulled out a pair of shorts and a sweatshirt. No underwear required. Find coffeemaker. Grab bean juice. Come back to bed and wake no one. That was the plan.

She opened her bedroom door and listened. No sound. Slipping out into the hall, she headed for the stairs. The beautiful big window on the far wall streamed with early morning sunlight. That must be a gorgeous view.

Quietly, she padded over to the window, loving the textures of hardwood and thick rugs under her bare feet. Wow. The sun was just rising, and she could see for miles. The house was on a hill, very isolated, with the nearest neighbor barely visible across the oriental gardens and open fields of what looked like lavender. She loved fall. The green was just surrendering to the brilliant colors that consumed the dense trees. It was going to be a beautiful day, and she got to be in Connecticut with two beautiful men. Hmm. Men whose intentions were very unclear.

Back to plan A. Coffee.

She turned from the window. She heard a noise. Was that a moan? She looked over her shoulder and found from this angle that she was looking directly into the partially open door of the master bedroom. The masters were very much in residence.

Roan was on hands and knees in the middle of a wide bed, naked, with his beautiful face pressed down onto a pillow and his beautiful ass up in the air. Behind

him, Jake, her Jake, also naked, was pumping a long, rock-hard cock into that gorgeous asshole. Both men, eyes squeezed shut, panted and moaned. Her heart raced. If she'd wondered how she would feel about gay sex, she now had her answer. Instant desire. Drawn, she took two steps closer and could make out the men whispering obscenities about how great this felt and how they wanted to do it forever. She hoped they kept that promise, because she wanted to watch it forever.

She'd only seen two men together behind plants in soft porn movies. Her mom had lots of gay friends, but she'd never seen them kiss, much less fuck. This was the real thing. That big, hard cock, glistening with lube, slammed in and out of Roan's anus while the beautiful dark lover pushed back again and again to take as much as he could get.

Her gaze shifted. *Holy shit*. She was staring at the most enormous penis she had ever seen, except maybe in an occasional movie. Sticking out below Roan, this phallus was mesmerizing, thick and long, and out of proportion to the slender man it graced. That's what she'd felt on the dance floor. Oh God, she wanted to wrap her lips around that enormous rod and suck the precum dripping from it.

"Do you like what you see, sweetheart?"

Caught. Embarrassed and wildly turned on, she looked up to find both men still fucking and staring straight at her.

Jake smiled, and she could hear his ragged breath. "Have you ever seen two men fuck before?"

She shook her head.

"Do you like it?"

She was light-headed with pure desire. "Oh, yes."

"But we have a problem, sweetheart. See that big cock of Roan's?"

"Oh my, yes."

"See how it's dripping and begging for attention?"

She could barely nod her head.



“Well, sweetheart, I’m a natural top.” He never stopped pumping. “I love to fuck Roan, and he hardly ever has a great place to put that fantastic cock while I’m fucking him. So don’t you think you could give him a place?”

“What?” Is that what he meant?

“Take off your clothes, grab a condom from the nightstand, and come over here. Let’s see if you can get that big thing into you where it belongs.”

Her knees almost buckled. “Oh, shit.”

Roan’s silky voice. “Hurry, darling, let me fuck you.”

Thinking was not on the menu. She moved. Like wings carried her, she dragged the sweatshirt off, pulled down her shorts, and was ripping the condom wrapper in her teeth before she could even take a breath.

Jake knelt back, taking Roan with him, still pumping his ass while Roan’s huge penis bobbed in front of him, so heavy it couldn’t quite hug his body like it wanted to.

She shook her head. “Where did that thing come from?”

Roan was gasping from the reaming he was still getting. “Freak of nature.”

“Oh, that must make me a natural scientist.” Oh God, she couldn’t wait to get it in her. Her dripping pussy left little tracks on the sheets.

It took a little work to get the condom over the huge plum of a head, even with all the natural lubrication. She slipped under him on her back, and Jake moved Roan into position over her. *Oh, man. This is it.*

Roan was gasping. “We’ll take it slow. Tell me if it hurts.”

She grabbed his head, slipping her fingers into that fall of silky black hair, so she looked straight into green eyes. “You can’t imagine how watching you two turned me on. This is so not going to hurt.”

Jake used one arm to lift one of her legs outside Roan’s hip by way of demonstration. She quickly got the idea and lifted her legs as high as she could

beside Roan's body. Returning her gaze, he grasped the huge cock and found her opening with it.

"Ready?"

"Oh yeah."

Jake stopped pumping so that Roan could find a rhythm. The younger man pushed into her once, and she felt a huge stretching as the big head forced its way through the inner ring of her vagina. It stretched, and she felt like electricity was shooting into her heart. He pulled out a bit, and then another big push shoved him in another two inches. Oh, but he had so many to go. Her channel burned, but not in a bad way. No, not bad at all as his pubic bone pushed against her clit—just perfectly. Then a powerful push shoved that monster cock straight back to the surface of her womb. Involuntarily, she jumped.

He stopped. "Oh, God, did I hurt you?"

"No, no, Roan, it's wonderful. Please don't stop, not for anything, please."

He moaned "Oh shit," and began pumping with a vengeance. She could tell he was trying to control the depth so he didn't pound against her cervix but was only successful about half the time. She didn't care. Her pussy burned and even hurt some, but it was incredible, wonderful, the best thing she'd ever felt, and she bucked her hips, taking as much of him as she could.

Then Jake began to pump again, allowing Roan to push forward into her and backward on Jake's cock, back and forth until the beautiful model was gasping and crying out barely discernible protests of love and obscenities of lust. She knew there was no way he could hold off much longer. How long had the boys been fucking before she even got there? She desperately wanted to come, but the unfamiliar combination of excruciating pleasure with a touch of pain took some getting used to.

Jake leaned over Roan. "Don't worry, darling," he said to his lover. "Come. I'll finish her off. I want to; you know that."

She froze. It was more than she could even hold. *Jake, oh Jake...*

Roan slammed into her and back onto his lover harder and harder, screaming, “Oh, this is better than I...oh God.” And the beautiful boy shattered, his body bucking and trembling as he came. Her mind pictured the great spurts of cum from that huge cock filling the condom, and it almost brought her—but no, there was Jake...

Roan pulled out of her, looking like he understood how desperately she and Jake needed to come. He rolled to the side. Jake already had a fresh condom in his hand and pulled it onto his slightly slimmer but almost-as-long cock. This was her first real look at it, and she practically salivated. “Hurry, Jake, please.”

“Oh yes, baby.” Watching her intently with those glistening blue eyes, he fitted the head of his penis to her opening. “Do you have any idea how long I’ve wanted to put this in you?”

“Probably not as long as I’ve wanted you to.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” He pushed inside with one long, magnificent stroke, paused for a moment with his eyes closed, controlling himself, and then began to pump. “Oh God, Em, we’re fucking. We’re finally fucking.”

There wasn’t much more to say. That cock rammed into her as they both gasped and clawed, trying for it not to be over too fast. But no, this was Jake. Just the idea of Jake’s cock inside her made every fantasy real, and her body raced toward completion. “Oh Jake, I don’t want to come, I don’t want it to be over...”

He barely got the words out. “Come, my darling. We’re going to do this all weekend.”

Oh, shit! And she flew into a thousand, million pieces of fulfillment, screaming the name that had filled her for so long, “Jake. Jake.”

“Em.” And she felt his body buck with each great pump of semen. She wished she could reach inside and rip off the condom and be filled with Jake.

## Chapter Six

They must have looked like three lifeless blobs lying side by side, arms touching but with not enough energy to entwine fingers.

She gave a small moan. “That’s what I get for trying to find coffee.”

Roan chuckled and roused himself enough to roll on his side, which was wildly distracting since it caused that huge penis, massively impressive even in repose, to lie on the bed in front of him. “Want me to go make you some, darling?”

She managed to shake her head, but that didn’t dislodge the thoughts that were suddenly flooding into her afterglow. Damn, she didn’t really want to think, but it was too late.

She pulled herself up into a cross-legged sitting position with a gorgeous man to each side. Suddenly aware of her blatant nudity in that pose, she grabbed a pillow and pushed it onto her lap. Jake, still supine on her left, turned just enough to rest his head on his hand and look up at her with a grin, likely at her sudden belated attack of modesty. Of course, now his cock was also lying relaxed on the mattress pointing directly toward Roan’s. It was hard not to grab both big dicks and just rub them together until they made fire.

Think now, visualize later. She looked down at her hands in her pillow-covered lap to keep from getting distracted. “Okay. Don’t you think we should talk about this?”

“About what?” That was Jake.

“What? Jesus, Jake, how about the fact that I’m your boss, your much older boss by the way, and kind of surrogate mom, and you’re in love, and gay for God’s sake, since I just saw you passionately fucking *a man*, and after watching your gay

lover eat my pussy into oblivion last night, this morning, you and said gay lover fucked my brains out!” He started to speak, and she held up her hand. “Not one but both of you fucked me which, unless I’m sorely mistaken, is considered more than a little kinky in polite society, and if one person from the college knew about it we would be so out on our ears, and if Roan’s fans knew it, well...Roan would probably just be more famous...” And she took a breath and burst out laughing.

Both men looked confused for a second and then joined her. Laughing until tears ran down their cheeks, the guys again collapsed onto their backs, washboard abs contracting and penises bobbing. Oh damn, distracted again.

She wiped her eyes. “Okay, trying to be serious...” And then she started laughing again. By the time she recovered, Jake was sitting cross-legged in front of her, smiling and definitely without benefit of lap pillow, but he had stopped laughing.

“Okay, sweetheart, here it is. I have never thought of you as my mom. In fact, I’ve had a major thing for you practically since the day we met.”

“Thing?” She snorted. “That’s ridiculous.”

“Okay, I’ll admit I never told you because I knew just how ridiculous you might think it was. After all, I’m just a snot-nosed kid without half your brains, talent, or genius, and I knew it was a reach for me to want you.”

She stared at him, feeling like a fish with its mouth agape. “What the fuck are you talking about? You’re the smartest and most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen, and you could have any woman”—she glanced at Roan—“and obviously any man too. What the fuck would you want with a middle-aged, old-maid scientist?”

Both men laughed. Jake slipped a finger under her chin and made sure she was looking at him. “You don’t get a vote on this. You’re the smartest woman I know except when it comes to yourself. Jesus, Em, you’re beautiful and inspiring and brilliant...”

Roan sat up. “Don’t forget sexy.”

“Yeah, sexy as hell. And brave. Really brave. You’re not afraid.”

“Okay, enough with this ode to my virtues. And like hell I’m not afraid.” She readjusted her pillow.

“Like I said, I’ve had this thing for you and thought there was no way you’d ever be interested in me, but occasionally you’d give me this sexy little look, and I’d get a flash of hope. And then I met Roan.”

Her dark lover took up the story, sitting cross-legged beside Jake. “God, I hated you when I first met Jake, because all he talked about was Em, Em, Em. I was ready to buy some ruby slippers. But finally I wore him down and got his cock in my ass, and gradually I knew he was coming to love me. But, sweetheart, he never stopped talking about you, and as I felt less threatened, I started to listen to what he was saying and realized that you were something really special.”

“You didn’t even know me.”

“But it felt like I did through Jake’s eyes.”

“Okay, but could you please address the ‘in love’ and ‘gay’ issues for me, because having a ‘thing’ for your boss doesn’t quite fit in this picture.”

Jake touched her cheek. “You know it’s possible to love more than one person, Em, particularly if the people are really different and fill different roles in your life. Society says we can’t but, for some people, our hearts say we can.”

“But you’re gay!”

Roan reclined and put a head on her knee, making her heart squeeze. God, he was so lovely. “Think about the old Kinsey continuum of sexuality. You know, the one to six, with pure heterosexuality at the one end and pure homosexuality at the other. On that scale, Jake is a three. He’s very happy with lovers of either sex. He’s equally attracted to both and could reasonably fall in love with either a man or a woman...or both.”

“Shit, doesn’t that mean you have to be jealous of everyone in the room, not just the men?”

He smiled. “Yeah, but I know he loves me. He’s chosen to be with me.”

She threw her hands up. “But he fucked me, right here, a few minutes ago. And so did you!”

“Yes, well, I’m another story. On that Kinsey scale, I’d be more of a five. I usually prefer men, but occasionally I’m attracted to a particular woman. It’s hard to even say why. I’ll be the first to admit it’s usually women with a certain masculine power. Anyway, you’re it.”

She shook her head. Roan reached up and caressed her hair as it moved by. “You felt it too, Em. The second we met, you were attracted to me just as I was to you.”

“Roan, the whole fucking world is attracted to you. I’m just one more.”

“No, the whole fucking world thinks I’m beautiful. I think you see me. I think you’ll take my hang-ups and my ego and my insecurities...and my massive cock. You want it all.”

She scoffed. “Who wouldn’t want that cock?”

“A lot of people.” He smiled a little sadly.

Jake leaned down to Roan and kissed him. “This is our way of saying, sweetheart, that you’re a part of us.”

She couldn’t have heard right. “A part of...”

“Us, sweetheart. As far as we’re concerned, us means Roan, me...and you.”

She took a deep breath and, shockingly, burst into tears. A part of them. What could that mean? The idea was so beautiful, she shook.

Both men reached for her at the same time. She ended up with her head supported by Jake’s arm and her hips sitting on Roan’s lap, his bare lap.

Jake rocked her, crooning soothingly. “Don’t cry, sweetheart. I’ve never seen you cry.”

“But that’s the nicest thing anybody ever said to me.” A new flood of tears swallowed up her words.

Long fingers wiped the wet from her cheeks. “Well I’m glad they’re happy tears, anyway.” He rocked her, which moved her against Roan’s cock. The beautiful brunet was stroking her bare belly, trying to be comforting, but the results were somewhat different as she felt his renewed erection pushing up between her bare legs.

Jake cuddled her. “What do you want, sweetheart? Tell us what you want, and we’ll give it to you. We want to make you happy.”

She leaned up and whispered, knowing Roan couldn’t hear. Jake laughed. Roan looked puzzled. “Can you guys share, please?”

Still laughing, Jake told him, “It will make her very happy if she can suck your cock.”

Roan moaned. “Oh, baby, let me make you happy.” He thrust the massive erection up even harder between her legs, right over her clit. Heaven.

They went into instant readjustment mode, moving Em so that she had access to that big penis. Face to, uh, head with it, she lost some of her confidence. It must have been ten inches long and two inches in diameter. She shook her head. “How do you model with this? Doesn’t it show?”

“Yeah.” His hips were thrusting up at her, so his silky voice sounded a bit distracted. “I usually have to wear a jockstrap so it doesn’t ruin the line of the clothes.”

Jake reached out and grabbed it and pointed the big thing toward her lips. “Of course, some of the designers like for it to show. They think it adds a certain ‘new dimension’ to their photos.”

She did one big lick from base to head. “Oh yeah, a new dimension is right.” He tasted wonderful, salty and sweet at the same time. She licked again at her luscious lollipop.

“Wait,” Roan gasped.

She pulled back a bit petulantly. “Don’t want to.”



“Just for a second. Switch around so I can eat your pussy while you suck.”

Oh, jeez, that sounded good, but she did want to concentrate on getting her lips around that huge penis.

Jake chimed in. “Yeah, you suck, and I’ll fuck her at the same time.”

Yikes! Clearly, her reservations about this threesome weren’t translating to her body. Getting fucked by Jake was way too good an idea to pass up. She moved quickly so that she was straddling Roan’s head with her butt and pussy pushed up in the air for easy access. Then she got to work on the delicacy in front of her, so she could enjoy it before she got too distracted. A big stretch was required to wrap her mouth around the red, dripping cockhead. Oh, it was a mouthful and then some. She concentrated on relaxing her jaw and throat and began to suck as much as she could handle into her mouth and even a little into her throat. She loved the musky smell and the hard feel of him against her tongue.

“Oh shit, Em, that feels so good.”

The praise spurred her on, and she sucked harder, trying to get more of that wonderful cock into her throat. It was hard not to gag, it was so huge, but she really focused and was having some success when Roan assaulted her clit with his lips, obviously way far gone in passion, so he wasn’t exercising a slow buildup. Wow, he was soooo good at it. She tried not to lose concentration on her sucking, wanting to give as good as she was getting. But then strong hands stopped her hips from moving against Roan’s mouth, and in one long stroke, she felt the exquisite sear of heat and pressure that was Jake’s cock shoved into her vagina from behind. Oh, Jesus. At this angle he felt as big as Roan. Burning, stretching pleasure.

Roan and Jake developed a rhythm. Jake pushed in and out, in and out, while Roan sucked her clit in and out of his mouth. It was beyond description. The usual problem with doggy style for her—that her clit didn’t get enough friction—was completely undone by Roan’s passionate mouth. It was like having the best of two worlds. She lost it.

Still trying to suck on Roan while crying out and thrashing at the same time, she finally gave up and simply screamed while she shoved back on Jake's wonderful rod and down on Roan's tongue and lips, until she had no existence beyond the searing joy radiating from her vagina—and her heart. She was a part of them. She exploded, crying and whimpering while she felt every cell light up and shatter. "Oh God, oh." And she felt Jake come again and again, shuddering over her back while her orgasm stretched on and on.

But poor Roan, there wasn't a particle of energy left in her for sucking. Some tiny part of her brain that was still coherent felt bad for leaving Roan hard and wanting.

Jake whispered to her, "Let me finish him, sweetheart."

She rolled to the side and turned her head toward the two lovers as Jake crawled down Roan's body and wrapped his mouth around that massive cock like it was an all-day sucker. Just the sight made her wish she could come again, because this was beautiful.

Jake began to suck in earnest, pulling away a little to lick Roan's big, heavy balls and then returning to the crimson head. Roan was going nuts. His hips thrust up into his lover's mouth, and his head rolled from side to side. "Jake, yes, darling, yes. God, don't stop, don't ever stop." And Jake didn't, sucking and licking the tiny slit until Roan cried out and thrust so hard, she would have thought he reached Jake's tonsils. And then Roan began to buck as Jake swallowed, some of the rich cream seeping from the corner of his mouth.

When they finished, she was panting as hard as they were. Even though she didn't think she could move, she sat up, grabbed Jake's head, and pulled his mouth to hers, thrusting her tongue inside to lick some of the semen of *their* lover. Then she fell back on the bed with a man on each side, just the way they had started.

## Chapter Seven

She sat cross-legged in the middle of her own bed—well, sort of her own. Showered, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, she was prepared to take stock, but absolutely delicious smells were luring her downstairs—coffee, bacon, some kind of sweet and fruity thing. Starving.

In accommodation of all their hunger, the three of them had decided to shower separately. There was no chance she would be dressed and dry now if she had gotten to see her two men wet! Ah yes, *her* two men—her *two* men. That’s what she needed to think about.

Had this morning even been real? Jake said the three of them were “us,” but what did that mean? How did that work? The two men lived together, slept in the same bed, and probably had sex together every night Roan wasn’t traveling. Well, every night Jake got home before midnight, which wasn’t many on the schedule she kept him on.

She, on the other hand, had her own townhouse near the university, worked twelve or more hours a day at the lab, and often into the early morning at home. That didn’t exactly leave a lot of time to traipse off to Connecticut for *ménage à trois* sessions.

She shook her head, gazing down at the beautiful silk coverlet. Jake and Roan thought of her as part of them. What could be sweeter? But after this idyllic weekend, what could they do to be together, and how the hell would she explain it to the university—not to mention the world—if they were together? She couldn’t. Oh God, that ripping sound was her heart, but she couldn’t. And surely they didn’t mean it that way, no matter what they said. It was nice—no, wonderful—to be a

part of “us” with a man she cared for so much and another one that she was coming to care for rapidly, but that was all they intended, just for her to feel included; she was sure of that.

She took a deep, cleansing breath. Okay, enough thinking now. It was only Saturday. She had the rest of this wonderful fantasy weekend to live, and she intended to make the most of it. Coffee was calling, and she couldn’t wait to see her men. At least for today, that’s the way she’d think of them.

Her trip downstairs brought her into the great room she had missed the night before. The same modern-plus-Asian decor dominated, and the huge, two-story windows flooded the room with light and gave the feeling that the trees and sky were all a part of the room. Following her nose, she rounded the corner to the big island that separated the kitchen from the great room, and perched on a stool.

Back turned, Roan was cooking at the big six-burner cooktop earphones plugged into his ears. She loved his getup—those infernal pajama bottoms and an apron that tied at the waist and left a smooth expanse of muscled back free. Jeez, tough to believe but, despite all their shenanigans this morning and last night, she must never have gotten a really good look at his back. She’d been aware he had a tattoo on his right shoulder, but now she could see what it was. *I never saw a wild thing sorry for itself*, it said, from the D.H. Lawrence poem. A whole life in those simple words, a life she wouldn’t mind getting to know.

A quick glance found him looking at her over the decorated shoulder. He pulled out the earphones. “Hello, darling.”

She gestured to his shoulder. “Another trademark?”

“It was my declaration of independence, actually. But, yes, it’s become a trademark.”

“Independence from whom?”

“My father mostly, but also from me. I knew I was way too fortunate to ever feel sorry for myself.”

“Will you tell me about it?”

He continued stirring an egg mixture at the counter. "Sometime, when we're in the mood for drama, but right now I want to feed you and laugh some more."

"It's a deal, sweet wild thing."

He turned and crossed to the island, the green eyes gazing at her steadily. Then he smiled. "Hungry?"

"Horses are in fear for their lives, but I will do anything for some of that coffee."

He waggled the arched brows. "Anything?"

"Try me."

With a grin, he handed her a cup of coffee and put cream and sugar in front of her on the island. "If you'll do 'anything' for a cup of coffee, what might you do for one of these, my pretty?" And with a flourish he produced a plate with a still-steaming scone, dripping with icing.

"What is this, you evil tempter?"

"What does it smell like?"

She sniffed. And sighed. "Oh God, lemon. It's a lemon scone. Don't tell me you made this yourself, or I may have to suck your cock for twenty-four hours solid."

"On your knees, woman. Made this morning with these lily-white hands."

She stuck her finger in the icing and licked it meaningfully. "Well, now I'm confused, since I don't know which one I want to eat first, this scone or your cock."

He leaned over the island, having to jump up on it to do so because of its width, and kissed her lightly. "The scones are hot."

"So are you."

"Thank you, Em."

This man was way more than a pretty face. And what had he said about insecurities? Hard to believe.

She took one melting, orgasmic taste of the scone, not his cock—lemon, flaky, altogether her idea of a good time. Of course, so was his cock. Her eyes closed, and she gave a little moan.

“You like?”

“Divine.”

“I’ll have scrambled eggs and turkey bacon to go with it in a second when Jake gets here.”

“Where is our fearless lover, I mean leader?” She bit again.

He grinned. “Checking e-mail, where else? He has this really tough boss.”

She looked up into the shining green eyes. “Roan, I am so sorry about how hard I work him. With your travel schedule and his being late every night, it must be tough to see each other.”

He added seasoning to his egg mixture. “Don’t even think it. He’s the one driving himself. He loves his work, and he loves working with you. He just wakes me up when he gets home so we can snuggle.”

They were both quiet for a minute, absorbed in scones and thoughts.

“Can I ask you a funny question?” She licked a little scone from her lips.

“Shoot.”

“Since you’re a five”—she gave him a sideways grin—“how did you get so good at oral sex?”

“Why thank you, ma’am, high praise. Actually, it was back in high school; that’s how I kept from having to fuck girls without coming out. I lived in that small town I told you about, and I realized if everyone knew I was gay, my parents would have no end of grief, even if they’d been able to handle it themselves. So I dated a lot of girls, but once they got a look at my cock, most of them got scared of having sex with me.” He laughed. “That’s how I came to love eating pussy.”

“You’re kidding. That has to be the most ungay thing a man can do. I mean, fucking a woman is probably a little like fucking a man, and a woman sucking your dick has to be somewhat similar too. But guys don’t have pussies.”

“I know. Crazy, isn’t it? I’ve always loved it. So, anyway, I’d eat the high school girls out, and then they didn’t want to fuck. A few wanted to suck my cock, I guess just to see if they could, but that wasn’t so bad, like you said. So I got a reputation as a real stud in my hometown, while I sneaked off to the city to go to gay bars and get fucked by men.”

“You like being the bottom?”

“Yeah, quite a bit. And when you look like me...”

“No one looks like you.”

He shrugged. “Anyway, gay men like to fuck me. That’s why I enjoy topping you so much. It feeds my need to be the fucker with someone who really likes being the fuckee.”

“Who’s a fuckee?” Jake’s voice came from behind her.

“Ah, we eat!” Roan slid his egg mixture into the hot pan and began pouring what looked like fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice.

“I’m a fuckee.” She smiled as Jake put his arm around her.

Nuzzling her neck, he whispered, “And a very fine fuckee indeed.”

She gazed at him. God, he was beautiful, even with such stiff competition. “I can barely believe that after over a year of hopeless fantasies and endless masturbation that...”

He finished her thought. “I finally got my cock in you, my little fuckee? Did you really masturbate over me?”

“Oh, you have no idea.”

“Yeah, I do. Until Roan, I was wearing the skin off my right hand trying not to attack you while you were leaning over a microscope.”

Roan looked up from finishing the eggs. “Even after me, I suspect there was a bit of skin loss.”

Jake laughed. “If we keep up this conversation, we’re never going to make it out antiquing.” He pulled her hand against his half-mast cock that was starting to tent his pajama bottoms.

“Ooh, is that what we’re doing next?”

“What? Fucking or antiquing?”

“Well, let’s just say I haven’t been antiquing twice this morning.”

Jake did the nuzzling thing again that just drove her crazy. “You’re not complaining?”

She nuzzled back. *Who needs antiques anyway?* “Not even a little bit.”

“Quit it you two; brunch is served!”



## Chapter Eight

Antique hunting won, but she wasn't sure at the moment how happy she was about it. The Asian antiques were beautiful, but the boys kept taunting and teasing her with touches and kisses until she wanted to lay one of them down on that jade-inlaid table and fuck his brains out—both of them would be even better.

*Concentrate, Emmaline.*

“Em, come see this.”

She looked over the crowded little shop to see Roan admiring a carved figure mounted on an ebony stand. Skirting several large ginger jars, she came to stand beside him. “Wow. Beautiful.” The little figure was carved entirely from different shades of jade: white for the perfect skin, a dark almost-black for the hair, translucent green jade for the eyes, and a deep blue-green for the robes. Somehow feminine, yet also masculine, the beautiful little figure glowed like it was lit from within. “Who is that, Roan?”

“I think it's Avalokiteshvara. They say he's kind of the male counterpart of the Chinese goddess of compassion, Kwan Yin. Great, isn't it?”

D.H. Lawrence and Indian theology all in one beautiful package. He was something.

She felt a touch on her shoulder. Jake's voice was almost reverential. “Roan, it looks like you.”

She looked up and smiled into his blue gaze, “You see it too? I noticed it right away.”

Jake reached out and picked up the little statue gently. “I have to have it.”

She put her hand over his. “Let me buy it for both of you, to thank you for this most perfect weekend.

“No, Em...”

“Please.” Both men beamed at her as she plucked the deity from Jake’s hand and moved toward the counter where an elderly gentleman stood by the cash register, obviously quite intrigued by the dynamic of the three of them.

As she pulled out her credit card and waited for the little statue to be packaged, she looked back at the two men. Lost. Blue eyes gazed into green. Their fingertips barely touched. No PDA. Jesus. This was love—their love, those two. She ached for that kind of love. But no matter what they said, at best she’d never be more than the proverbial third wheel. At worst she might compromise their relationship in some way, and she couldn’t do that. She shivered. Oh God, she did love them.

“Dr. Silvay?”

What? She looked around. Had someone called?

“Emmaline?”

She turned around and looked up at a thin, white-haired man, one of her favorite members of the faculty council. *Smile, Em.* She was fond of Dr. Winton, but what was he doing here, and how did this whole thing look?

“Dr. Winton.”

“Howard, please, my dear.”

“Yes, of course.” She really did smile. “I was daydreaming, I guess; forgive my abstraction.”

“Solving amazing new genetic mysteries, I expect.”

“Something like that. Do you live in the area, Howard?”

“No, actually I live nearer to you by the university, but I love Asian antiques, and I wanted to show my nephew around the area since he’s going to be a resident. Oh, you must meet him.” He looked around and began waving to a nice-looking,

sandy-haired man she estimated at about thirty-five. The man waved back, showing dimples, and came over to them.

Howard beamed. “Emmaline, may I introduce my nephew, Dr. Isaac Webster, who we have lured away from Princeton’s faculty. He will be joining me in the history department starting next week.”

“Dr. Webster.”

He extended his hand and further tested the dimples. “Just Isaac.”

“Hi, just Isaac.” Warm, smooth hand.

“Em?”

She looked around. Damn, for one brief second she’d actually forgotten her men. *Her men?* Okay, give them both swords, and they’d look like avenging guardian angels protecting her from the nasty history professor.

She smiled as if her being in Connecticut with two gorgeous men was just a regular day. “Jake, you know Dr. Winton, I’m sure. And this is his nephew, Isaac Webster. Dr. Webster is joining the history department. Isaac, this is my research associate and dear friend, Jake Martin, and my *friend*, Roan Black.” Did they get that bit of emphasis? Would it make them think Roan was her lover, not Jake’s? Of course, he was.

Roan stepped up beside her and circled her waist with his left arm. Well, if her emphasis hadn’t, Roan’s gesture certainly spoke volumes of possession. He extended his hand. “How do you do?”

Howard and Isaac were clearly trying not to stare at Roan’s astonishing beauty, but that was not possible. She thought of the little statue resting on the counter behind her. Yeah, only gods and Roan looked like that.

She slipped her arm through Jake’s, so as not to carry the possession thing too far. “We took the first weekend off in ages to celebrate Jake’s winning the Belden Award. So we all came out for a day of sun and antiquing.”

“Of course, remiss of me, Martin. I heard about the award. Congratulations, my boy.”

Howard extended his hand, and Jake took it. “Thank you, sir. Of course, I’m thrilled.” Then his smile dimmed a little, and he looked at Isaac. “So, did I hear you’re going to be coming to the university?”

Isaac matched his cool. “Yes, starting next week.” He turned to her with another dimple flash. “I’m delighted to know a few more people before I hit the campus. Perhaps I can ask for pointers.”

Well, he was casting down a gauntlet. She felt Jake’s arm tense, and she tightened her arm in his. “Actually, Jake and I are genetic researchers. We tend to stay cloistered in our lab and hardly ever know what’s going on. So in a few days, you’ll be able to give us pointers on politics, I’m sure.”

“Perhaps we can make a date for me to do that?”

Wow, it took serious chutzpah to make such a pointed proposal while she was sandwiched between Jake and Roan. But he wasn’t being obnoxious, only a bit pushy, and pushy wasn’t all bad.

Before Jake could take exception, she pretended to ignore the comment. “Howard, I’m sure you’re going to be happy having Isaac in your department. Forgive us. We have to get going. It was great to see you and to meet you, Isaac.” She extended her hand, and he took it, still warm and soft, and held hers just one beat too long. Jake’s biceps tightened again. Isaac was pushing his luck with so many samurai swords around. “I’m sure we’ll see you both around campus.”

She let go of Roan’s arm for a moment, picked up her package, and then slipped her arm through his again and headed for the door. “Bye now,” she called back to Howard and Isaac.

\* \* \*

“Man, that guy has balls!” Jake pulled his arm from Em’s grip and took a deep breath of the October air. Maybe he was being stupid, but he really wanted to go back in and tell that Isaac character where he could put his dimples.

Roan laughed. “You are so cute when you go all alpha.”

“Well he’s got shit for nerve. What were you and I, Roan, window dressing? I should have told him to back off.”

Em gave him a worried look. “Jake, that wouldn’t have been appropriate, and you know it. He was just being friendly.”

“Yeah, friendly as Hugh Hefner.”

They walked slowly to the car.

Roan circled his neck with an arm and gave Jake a rub on the head as they walked. That was one of their codes for an embrace when they were in public. Jesus, he was getting tired of all the dissembling and sneaking around, even though he’d brought it on himself. He had insisted they hide their relationship from the university. Now he wasn’t so sure.

Still teasing him, Roan chucked him under the chin. “I haven’t seen you this jealous since the night I walked into the ballroom with Alexandra Shields on my arm.”

*Oh yeah.* “I went a little ballistic.”

“Who’s Alexandra Shields?” Em looked interested, and Jake wasn’t sure how much he wanted to tell her, but Roan rushed in.

“She’s a friend of mine who lives in Paris.” Roan leaned on the Lexus. “We were engaged at one time. Actually, she was the first woman I ever liked to fuck. I brought her to an event last year that Jake was also attending with his *little girlfriend...*”

“She wasn’t my girlfriend!”

“Uh-huh. Anyway, Alex is pretty spectacular, and Jake had been pretending to himself that he and I were just fuck buddies, but when he saw Alex he got six

shades of green. I guess you could say Alex started a cascade that led to us committing to each other.”

“I never quite thought of it that way.” Jake shook his head. “But I guess you have a point.”

Roan looked at Em. “I’m sure you’ll get to meet Alex one day.”

“I hope that’s not one day soon.” Jake had to admit that while he essentially liked Alexandra, and Lord knew he’d enjoyed their one three-way, he was still a bit jealous of Roan’s affection for her. Yeah, yeah, he knew that was a crock in light of Roan’s willingness to include Em, but there it was.

Em smiled at Roan. “Well, I’d love to meet her. And as for Dr. Winton’s nephew, I don’t quite get the reaction, Jake. I’ve come to the lab with Henry a few times, and you’ve never—what did you call it?—gone ‘alpha’ on me.”

“Yeah, well, we weren’t lovers at the time, and I was never worried about Henry.”

Again, she laughed and hugged Jake’s arm closer, but he noticed Roan had stopped laughing. Em hadn’t denied that Isaac was worth worrying about.

## Chapter Nine

They decided on a late lunch/early dinner at a little French-style bistro tucked away in the trees. After fresh wild salmon salads and a crisp Beaujolais to drink, they were sharing a lemon tart.

She savored a bite. “Almost but not quite as good as your scones this morning, Roan.”

“High praise.”

She looked around at the charming, country-style room, almost empty at this odd eating hour. They sat at a table in a bay window so they were surrounded by trees and the flowers still hanging on into fall. Roan licked lemon from his fork ecstatically. “I wonder if they’ll give me the recipe?”

She reached out to pick a speck of flaky crust from his lip, and he grabbed her hand and slowly inserted her finger into the wet warmth of his mouth. Heat shot through her. Oh God, that tongue. As if she needed any reminders. Roan continued to suck her finger in and out of his mouth, green eyes gazing at her languidly. Catching the mood, Jake scooted his chair a little closer and slipped his hand onto her thigh, smoothing his fingers over the worn denim and the hot-and-bothered flesh beneath.

She felt her breath hot in her throat. “I gather lunch is over.”

Jake leaned in and nuzzled her ear while his hand slipped between her thighs and pressed on her clit. Shit. How was it possible to be so horny after this morning? It proved what they said about how having sex made you want more, and, man, did she want more.

“Let’s get out of here,” Jake whispered.

Roan grabbed the check and hurried to the counter to pay while Jake propelled her from her chair and out the front door, setting land speed records. Roan came out and met them at the Lexus. He nodded to Jake. "Your turn in the backseat."

He opened the door and guided her inside, following after. She reached for Jake before he was even settled and was vaguely aware of the car starting to move as Jake grabbed her and pulled her into a bruising kiss, his tongue doing that wonderful possession thing she loved. Her back hit the seat. Jeans went down. He managed to get the Levi's around one ankle along with her thong. Damn, she couldn't get his fly open. He leaned back, unsnapped and unzipped himself, and pulled out that long, rock-hard cock, dripping precum. "Shit, Roan, condom."

She heard the glove box open, and Roan's hand appeared over the seat with two extra-large condoms, which made her giggle.

"You boy scouts are sure prepared."

Jake barely smiled, he was so intent on ripping the package and sliding on the rubber. His gaze was intense. "You ready, baby?" Questing fingers slipped into her before she could answer, and she forgot how to answer. "Oh yeah, you are so wet."

He parted her labia with his fingers and guided that raging hard-on straight into her channel. Oh God, it felt so good. He started pumping relentlessly, chanting, "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit." The friction set every nerve on fire. The car flooded with the smell of musky sex.

Suddenly the car swerved, nearly knocking them off the seat. Roan cried out from the front seat, "Jesus, you two, this is way too much!"

Jake kept pumping as the car bumped and rocked and came to a stop. Then Roan was climbing over the seat, ripping at his own fly. He pulled out that supercock and knelt on the floor of the backseat. "Em, baby, please."

*Oh yes, yes.* Roan in her mouth. She turned her head, grabbed the cock, and wrapped her lips around the great head. "Oh, baby," he moaned. "Yes, that's it, just like that."



She licked and sucked. Jake's pummeling fuck pushed her head against the back door of the car, and Roan wrapped his forearm around her to protect her. Fire speared through her abdomen and spread through her limbs as she sucked Roan's silky shaft in and out of her mouth. Some vague part of her mind hoped they weren't parked in the middle of the expressway.

Jake's steady thrusts began to degrade, and his chanting got louder. He was going to come, but she knew there was more where that came from, so she was in no hurry. "Oh shit!!" he cried and kept thrusting, head thrown back, eyes closed as he shuddered through his climax. When the thrusts began to slow, he leaned over and kissed Roan wildly. "Make her come, darling."

Roan slipped his hands under her arms and pulled her up while he moved onto the seat, his giant erection sticking up toward the roof. She helped him slip on a condom, and he settled her on his lap, cock sticking up between her ass cheeks. *Gotta get him in. Gotta come.*

She pushed up and positioned the cock at her vagina. Looking into his eyes, she pushed down and pulled up—one, two, three times—to get the huge staff inserted all the way to her cervix. And she began to ride, trying to take a little more of him into herself with each exquisite descent.

Being on top suited her mood, and she gazed at the beautiful man. "Do you like me riding you, Roan? Do you mind me being the top?"

His head rested against the seat, moving back and forth as she rode him relentlessly. "I love it, baby; I love it so much."

Pushing forward so his cock rubbed hard against her clit with each pump of her hips, she growled, "Then come for me, beautiful." And he did.

And so did she.

\* \* \*

The woman did like to snuggle. Roan petted Em's hair and held her close in the backseat while Jake took charge of the Lexus and maneuvered them out of the

grove of trees he had plunged them into. Em was making soft cooing sounds in the aftermath of their frantic lovemaking, and lovemaking it truly was. She was snuggling her way into his heart as well as his arms, and he realized he'd soon have as much invested in this relationship as Jake did. Amazing, considering how possessive he was of Jake, but here she was.

He kissed her forehead. "Just rest, sweetheart; we'll have you home in no time."

"Home," she murmured, and her breathing slowed.

He chuckled. Auntie Em again. No place like home.

His mind drifted back to the antique shop. Shit, that young professor was a piece of work. Jake had been ready to punch the guy, and Roan had teased him to try and calm him, but truthfully he was just as jealous. The professor was attractive, eligible, and—more concerning—Em's age and professional peer. Of course, Jake was no slouch as a professional either, but did the two of them seem like boys to Em? She didn't treat them that way, and she did say she'd harbored a lot of lust and affection for Jake for a long time. But when she was longing for Jake, she certainly hadn't been thinking that he had a gay lover that she was going to have to accept as well.

*Damn, a love relationship between three people isn't exactly accepted in our society, especially not for a respected scientist like Em.*

"Is she asleep?" Jake whispered from the front seat.

"Yeah, out like a light."

"She's probably not used to this much sex."

"There are porn stars that aren't used to this much sex."

"But great, huh?"

"Oh yeah."

Roan looked down at the sleeping woman and brushed her auburn hair away from her eyes. Surely they could make it work—he just didn't know how.

## Chapter Ten

Her last idyllic evening. She had to get home Sunday so she could read all her e-mails and get ready to go back to work. Actually, she planned a quick trip to the lab, but she wasn't going to tell Jake that, since he'd insist on coming too, and she really wanted him to have a whole evening just with Roan.

The three of them lounged in pj's on the big sectional in the great room, watching old movies on TV and eating Roan's idea of junk food—homemade goat cheese pizza with Greek olives. Amazing they could eat anything after their late lunch, but young men were always hungry, especially after sex. Yeah, active word *young*.

She was stretched out with her head in Jake's lap while Roan rubbed her feet. Was there anything the man didn't do well? "Oh God, this is almost as good as sex."

Jake perked up. "Aha, the key to her heart. One of us fucks her while the other rubs her feet. Then we switch."

Stretching languorously, she murmured, "Too late. You already have my heart."

A slight tension in his body made her look up into serious blue eyes. "Do we, Em? Do we have your heart?"

*Oh no, we aren't going to do that discussion right now.* She gave him a soft punch on his arm. "Of course, silly, I told you that." She glanced at Rock Hudson on the TV screen, then back up at Jake. "Jake, how are your folks? I haven't seen them in so long."

He frowned a little at her shift of topic. "They're good."

“You said you told them about you and Roan, and they were great about it, right?”

“Yeah, they’re amazing.” He warmed. “Actually, Mom kind of got us together in the end. I was trying to be all hush-hush, but she just assumed Roan and I were lovers. Put us in the same bed and everything. That shocked me, but she told me she always knew I was bisexual. Funny, ’cause I didn’t. Anyway, Mom said Roan was more beautiful than any girl I’d ever dated. She adores him, actually. I became purely incidental in her affections after she fell in love with Roan.”

Roan grinned. “Not bloody likely. That woman worships at the shrine of Jake and has no gods before him.”

She smiled up at Jake. “Man, I know that. What about Burt? Did your dad take it well?”

He nodded. “Yeah, he was good. Much to my surprise, Roan is a basketball fanatic, so he and Dad have a lot in common. But he took me aside and told me he’d always kind of secretly thought I’d end up with you.”

“Me?”

“I think my dad has a hidden crush on you and wants to live it out vicariously through me.”

Roan tickled her foot, she wriggled, and he laughed. “He couldn’t have been nicer to me, but I think he only likes to fuck girls.”

“Actually, I think Dad confines his fucking to my mom, but they are a horny pair. They go at it like rabbits to this day.”

She gave him a light smack on his arm. “Respect your elders, sonny. We senior citizens enjoy a good roll in the hay from time to time.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” Like they had radar, both men attacked her with tickles at the same time, and she screamed and thrashed, trying to escape. “No fair. No tickling.”

Fighting back, she managed to get a hand on Roan's ribs, which sent him into instant retreat. *Aha, a weakness identified.* She hurled herself at him, both hands aiming at his muscled rib cage while he flailed, and Jake grabbed her from behind, tickling her belly.

She threw up her hands. "No fair, two against one."

"All's fair in love and tickling." Jake held her down on the floor while Roan pulled up her tank top and blew a razzberry on her belly.

"Okay, I give. Surrender!"

"Oh really?" Jake leered. "Surrender?"

Roan was still poised over her belly and, in one smooth move, pulled down her loose lounge pants and began blowing razzberries—but this time on her clit. Oh, Jesus, who knew that would feel so good?

Jake moved down beside Roan, and they took turns, starting with razzberries, then gradually progressing to lips and delicious tongues. One then the other licked her clit and down between her lips. She pushed up on her elbows to watch, and wow was it something to see. The boys would lick her and then kiss each other, sucking her juice from each other's mouths. *Oh yum.*

"No fair," she gasped, her hips bucking, "I'm getting all the goodies."

Roan licked his lips. "I wouldn't say that."

"Well, if you want to keep me quiet, give me something to suck."

"Oh yeah." Jake scooted his lower body toward her head, pushing the coffee table aside and his pajama bottoms down in the process.

There it was, staring her in the face—Jake cock. She grabbed and licked up one side and down the other, tracing the veins of that hard red dick. She concentrated for a moment on the little slit, seeing how much of her tongue she could push into it. Jake whimpered. Hmm, that worked. She licked again and inserted that juicy cock into her watering mouth for serious sucking. Meanwhile,

the boys readjusted. Roan took total charge of her pussy, and Jake manhandled Roan's great rod into his mouth. Wow, a circle of oral.

Since they were all too busy to talk, the only sounds filling the great room were moans, wet slurps, pops of cocks going in and out of mouths, and Doris Day expressing her dismay at Rock Hudson's shortcomings. *Oh, Doris, if you could see this, would you run screaming or lie down and join the circle?*

The moans got louder. Her hips pulsing against Roan's salacious mouth, she knew she wouldn't last much longer. That tongue was just too phenomenal as it pressed against her clit with just the right pressure to send her into orbit. Oh God, more, more. Her hips pressed up, shoving her wet pussy lips even harder against his mouth. As she got closer to coming, she sucked Jake's big cock harder and harder.

"Shit, Em, that's so good." And he went right back to swallowing Roan's sex deep into his throat. Oh, she wished she could get that much of Roan in her mouth.

*Climax coming. Not going alone.*

Frenzy seemed to fill all of them, and they wildly sucked and licked one another until she finally surrendered truly to the orgasm ripping through her. But instead of screaming, she sucked as much of Jake down her throat as she could get. He let out a shout, and hot, salty cum filled her mouth. Jake cum. Oh God, her body quivered and shook as she swallowed. In the background she heard Roan cry out Jake's name as he exploded.

*Okay, that was fun.* They all lay in a heap for a few minutes, giggling softly. Finally, Jake pulled up his pajama bottoms, flicked off the TV, and sat up. "C'mon, my sweethearts, it's time for bed."

They all staggered to their feet and headed up the stairs with their arms linked around one another's waists. Jake reached out and turned off the lights. They let her peel off to her bedroom as the men headed to the master.

She went straight for the shower and let the warm water run off her from the three showerheads. Today had been, straight up, the best day of her life. That was a

serious bitch, since it was being compared to the day she discovered the gene sequencing pattern, the day she got the grant to study other uses for the technique, and the day she won the international research prize—in other words, the red-letter days of her life. Damn. She loved her work. Was a day having sex with two beautiful men more important, really? But she felt loved, included.

Her mom's words came back. "*Shit happens, and some choices go away.*" Her choice hadn't been for two men, but here she was. Sadly, this was a choice she couldn't make.

She stepped out of the shower and began to dry off. It was more than sex; she knew that. But having a relationship with two men was not a viable option in her world—hell, in *the* world. She wasn't her mother. She didn't live in a counterculture where that kind of behavior was accepted.

Oh God, to never have them again. Not be with them like this weekend. The idea made her sick. But hiding their relationship from the university—and failing and being caught and disgraced—that was no better.

Maybe she could still have sex with them sometimes. An occasional weekend. But things were going to change. Now that she knew Roan, she just couldn't work Jake as hard as she had. She had to give him time to spend with his lover. She wanted him to come home more. And she'd have to work more to make up the difference. That would be a good tonic. It would keep her really busy and take her mind off...them.

Still drying her back, she walked into the bedroom.

"Now there's a picture." Jake lounged in the doorway.

She almost pulled the towel in front of her until she realized how incredibly stupid that was. Okay, she wasn't going to spoil their last night together. "Didn't get enough yet, big boy?"

Jake smiled, walked slowly to her, and caressed her face. "Actually, I'll never get enough of you, sweetheart. But I have been sent to issue an invitation for you to come sleep with us...emphasis on the sleep, at least for the immediate future."

“Really? All three of us?”

“Yes. It’s a big bed.”

She gazed into the blue eyes. No glasses this time. Could she really get that close to them and leave them tomorrow? She might be a little sad, but not crazy. “I’d love to.”



## Chapter Eleven

Had she called yesterday's morning waking heaven just because of some measly fountain splashing and birds chirping and brilliant sunshine? Heaven was redefined.

She moved her front a little closer to the warm, hard, silky back—Roan. Her wiggling caused the body curled around her back to snuggle closer also. Mmm, hard in different ways—Jake. She had never really liked sleeping with one man before, but sleeping with two, at least these two, was divine.

“Hey, wiggle worm.” Jake's whisper tickled her ear.

Not wanting to wake Roan, she whispered back, “It's still early. Go back to sleep.”

“No, I want to talk to you, and I want to fuck you. I'm not sure which one's going to win.”

She laughed softly. “Well, I'm betting on that iron rod sticking into my back.”

“Hold that thought.” He moved away, and she heard crinkling. Condom? Then he moved back against her, wrapped his arm around her, and began to stroke her already moist pussy.

“Mmm, yes.”

“Feel good?”

“Divine.”

“You get wet so fast; I love it.”

Her hips pressed against his rigid cock, seeking something bigger than fingers. “I’m strange for a woman, I guess. I’ve always loved fucking more than foreplay. I warm up just with the idea.”

He lifted her top leg back onto his hip and guided that long cock into her.

“Let’s do both—talk and fuck.”

A moan escaped. “You really think that’s possible?”

“Sweetheart, you and I both love to fuck so much we better learn to multitask, or we may have to give up eating and working.” He slowly pushed in and out of her.

“Okay, you have a point—talk.” She moaned a little again.

“Roan and I want you to stay with us.”

“What?” Oops. Better not try to turn around while being fucked. She pushed back on his cock, making him moan. “What do you mean, sweetie?”

“Stay with us.” He gasped. Despite his assurance, he was clearly having some trouble double-tasking.

She tried to whisper, but, man, that was hard at the moment. “Like go home tomorrow instead? I can’t. I have things to do at home. Plus, you know I can’t have you or Roan drop me off at the lab Monday morning.” She pushed back and felt her voice rising. “It’d cause a fucking scandal. Seeing Winton was bad enough.”

“Shhh. I didn’t know you were so worried about scandal.” He sounded disappointed in her. She hated that.

She hissed over her shoulder, “Jake, be fair. You were the one worried about the faculty committee finding out that you’re...that you have a male lover. Imagine what they’d do if they knew about the three of us!”

“Yeah, I was worried, but that was before I had you in my house and my bed. Now, I don’t give a shit what they think. I just want you, and so does Roan.” He thrust so hard, he rammed against her womb.

Oh. She shut her eyes and then opened them to find herself face-to-face with beautiful Roan. How long had he been awake? Leaning forward, he kissed her

gently, then slid his hand down and began massaging her clit, which wasn't getting any attention from Jake's rear entry. Much better.

Roan kissed her again, deeper this time. "We want you to stay with us all the time."

That stopped her dead in her thrusts. She stilled, though both men kept up their efforts. "What are you talking about?"

Jake pushed in so hard, she had to push back, and it felt so good with Roan's fingers doing their magic dance. "Em, we want you to move in with us, live here. You can keep your place if you want to, but we want you here. We'll be discreet. You'll drive yourself, whatever it takes."

By now the thrusting cock and massaging fingers were getting to her even more than the absurd, if sweet suggestion. She was whimpering and thrashing her head, chanting, "I can't, I can't, I can't." And then, of course, she decreased her credibility as she screamed and came, pushing hard against Roan's fingers, the orgasm scattering her all over the room.

Both men hovered over her, kissing and petting. She didn't think Jake had come, and she knew Roan hadn't, but obviously they were focused on other goals.

Roan whispered in his most bedroom voice, "How can you live without this?"

She whimpered again. "Can't I still have it sometimes?"

His voice dropped another octave. "Every night?"

"Oh, you guys." She struggled to sit up, forcing them both back to sitting positions. "I wish I could tell you how much I love that you want me, that you would even think of such a thing. But you've got to see that it can't work. My God, it would take Kovak about fifteen minutes to hear about it, and you and I would lose our jobs, Jake."

Roan kissed her nose. "I can support all of us, darling. I'm disgustingly rich."

She looked at him, trying to show him all the love she felt. "Thank you, dear, but no. My work is more to me than a job and money, and I can't do it without the

support of a big institution. Even if we left the university, any other research center will be nearly as bad. Three people just don't have sexual relationships in our world and get away with it"—she grinned sadly—"except occasionally in Utah."

"You've thought about this, haven't you?" Jake looked even sadder.

"I'd be lying if I said no." She didn't tell him about her "third wheel" thoughts. "I don't think there's a way in hell it will work for me."

"Em, no." He looked really distressed, and her heart wrenched. "Please don't say that. We can make it work."

"How, Jake? You know they'll find out sooner or later."

"Shit. Just think about it."

She looked up into that beautiful and very unhappy face she loved so much, then at the clear green eyes of his lover—her lover. "I can't imagine how I'll think about much else."

## Chapter Twelve

Monday morning was a bitch.

After she'd gotten home last night, her efforts to wear herself out at her desk so she'd be tired enough to sleep had been a dismal failure. All she could think of was the boys and what the three of them would be doing in their big bed if only she was there with them. A message on her home phone from Henry announced that he knew she'd gone to the Belden Awards without him and hoped she'd just had a grand time—only a little sarcasm there.

Their ride to Long Island from Connecticut had been dismal. Roan forced small talk, and Jake acted like she'd killed his puppy.

Worst of all, when she'd gotten to work this morning, Jake had looked up from his computer when she wandered into the lab with coffee but had given her a tight smile and gone back to his keyboard with no further acknowledgment. Damn, that certainly didn't portend well for occasional hot weekends in Connecticut.

She stared at her computer and opened an e-mail from a man named Ehrlich asking about a meeting to discuss some kind of business issue. Yeah, she needed another harebrained scheme right now. Delete. Here she sat on the other side of a mountain of e-mails that she should have been answering on the weekend, *when she was kidding herself in Connecticut!* The analysis was done too. But Jake? Just a dark cloud of anger. Damn him. She'd never seen him like this. He was balanced, capable, reasonable—not this petulant adolescent. She had to be flattered he cared so much, but he was completely overreacting.

She threw herself backward in the chair, and it banged against the wall, sending a jolt up her spine. Ouch. Propelled forward, she stalked from her office into

the lab, where Superman was hanging out in his cone of silence. Who the hell was the boss here anyway?

“Jake, talk to me.” She got the blue eyes for a second, then he went back to the printouts he was reviewing.

“Jake, dammit.” *Okay, not alone here.* Heads turned. She seldom raised her voice and never at Jake.

She tried to sound modulated. “Jake, come out in the hall and talk to me...please.”

He took off his wire rims and stood up. Not saying a word, he walked to the door of the lab and out into the hall. God, it was so not like him to be petulant. She followed him and then took the lead to an empty lecture room a few doors down. She waved him in, then closed the door behind them. He stood with his back to her, arms crossed tightly.

“Jake, why are you treating me this way? I thought you understood what I said. It’s not that I don’t want to be with you and Roan...”

He turned on her, eyes flashing. “You never fail at anything, Em. If you wanted to be with us, you’d find a way.”

“I said I’d think about it, but I’ve hardly had time since last night.”

He paced away and then back to her. “Well, I *have* thought about it, and I realize that it’s not a question of your finding a way to be with us. As long as you feel about it as you do now, you’re always going to see it as impossible. Being with us just isn’t important enough to you.”

“Jake, that’s not fair.”

“Really? Not fair? I’ve waited for you so long with no hope, and then this weekend I got hope; you gave it to me.” He stepped up and put his hands on her arms, staring down into her eyes. “You were so wonderful, so loving and accepting, and exciting. I really thought you loved me...uh, us.”

“I do love you. You and Roan. You must know that.”

“No, I don’t know that. Prove it. Move in this weekend.”

“Shit!” She couldn’t cope with this emotional Jake! She pulled her arms from his hands with a twist. “Don’t be melodramatic, and don’t give me ultimatums. I can’t change my whole life. We never even kissed before this weekend.”

“Yeah,” he growled. “And maybe that was better.” He turned, opened the door, and was gone.

Right, this Monday was a bitch.

She couldn’t bear to go back in the lab. Wow, that was a first. The lab was her home, her womb, but Jake was there. This was the first time she could remember not wanting to see him.

Some fresh air would be good. She wandered out the door of the building onto the campus. It was late afternoon, and the October weather had moved beyond crisp to cold. That was appropriate. Her lab coat blocked the air a little. Hands in pockets, she began to wander down the path between the trees.

Why was he being this way? When they’d separated yesterday she’d had no idea that his plea for her to come live with them was an ultimatum. Actually, he probably hadn’t known it either. But obviously her choosing her work over him and Roan was something he just couldn’t accept.

Jesus. She wiped at the moisture creeping out of her eyes. Her cool palms felt good against her burning eyeballs. It was so unfair. Damn the man! He loved her because of her devotion to her work, and now he was holding it against her. It didn’t take a geneticist to know *that* attitude came with a Y chromosome. Shit. Shit!

“Emmaline?”

What? Was she really standing in the middle of the campus with her face in her hands? She looked up. Howard Winton was standing there, looking at her quizzically. He smiled when she met his eyes, as if such eccentric behavior was totally to be expected.

“Hello, Howard.”

“Working on a problem?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I’m so glad I ran into you.”

This was a bit suspicious, since the history department was on the other end of the campus, but who was she to object?

He smiled more broadly. “I’m giving a reception Thursday night at my house, to welcome Isaac and introduce him to the faculty. Would you please come?”

Isaac. Oh yes, another man. Not her favorite gender at the moment, but, what the hell, she didn’t want to disappoint Howard.

“Certainly, I’ll come. What time?”

“We’ll start at six. Come any time before eight.” He looked a little uncomfortable. “Feel free to bring Dr. Martin or, uh, your friend. You know, the handsome young man with the unusual name.”

“Thank you, Howard, but I doubt I’ll have a chance to invite them.”

“Oh really?” He looked pretty happy about that. “I see. Well, I know *Isaac* will be delighted to see you.”

Tears pushed at her eyes. Time to get out of here. “I’ll see you Thursday, then. Thanks for the invitation.”

She headed back toward the lab. She’d been abrupt to Howard twice now, and he really was one of her favorite people. She’d try to make it up to him on Thursday.

It was dusk outside, which was the middle of the day for her.

When she got to the steps, she stopped. How in hell was she going to work with Jake if he maintained this attitude? She needed him. The research needed him. And she stood in danger of losing him thanks to her idiotic fantasies! Who did she think she was, her mother? Throwing caution to the wind was for other people. How could she have been this stupid? She wanted to sit down on the steps and cry. Okay, deep breath. She walked into the lab.



He was gone. She asked Mary, her research assistant, and the girl told Em with amazement that Jake had left to go home. Em couldn't remember the last time he'd left at five, much less a few minutes early. Tears flashed into her eyes again, and she turned toward the windows to try and get herself together. At least she could work all night with no interruption for emotional baggage. *Yeah, right.*

## Chapter Thirteen

By Thursday night, she was a sleep-deprived wreck, having worked into oblivion every night. Jake was in the lab on time each morning and left by five each evening, although there was always a pile of documents on her desk the next morning that he had completed in his home office. Yeah, the home office down the hall from the bedroom he shared with Roan, where she would be right now if she wasn't such an idiot.

Her anger had been chewed, spit out, and ground to dust. So how did she feel? Lonely. Shit, she never felt lonely, but those were the facts. And that loneliness sprang from a big empty hole in her heart. God, she cared for them so much. She missed them desperately. But no matter how she turned the puzzle, she couldn't make the three of them fit together. If it was just her and Jake, maybe. Hell, she was nonconformist enough to tell the faculty council to screw themselves if they didn't like her being with her younger research associate. But two men who were gay lovers as well? She tried to picture herself defending that to Kovak. No way.

So, now she was walking up to the door of Howard Winton's townhouse, even though she'd nearly turned back five times. Bright lights and a gaggle of cars parked at the curb announced that the party was here. Just call her party animal. *Yeah, right.*

A short knock brought an instant response, and Howard was pulling her into the foyer of his townhouse crowded with people going and coming.

"My, you do look lovely, Emmaline."

She knew if he looked closely that evaluation wouldn't hold up. Dark circles and grayish skin weren't going to make the cover of *Vogue*, but she had made an

effort with her pink silk skirt and sweater. “Thanks, Howard. Looks like your reception is a big success. I’m sure Isaac is seeing everyone he needs to know.”

“Well, *now* I’m seeing everyone I need to know.” Isaac stepped up beside his uncle, took her hand from the older man’s, and proceeded to plant a brief kiss on the back of it.

He was sweet. “Hello, Isaac.”

“Uncle, may I assume responsibility for our newest guest?” He tucked the recently kissed hand into the crook of his arm.

Howard beamed his approval. “And what a charming responsibility it is. By all means, my boy.”

Isaac led her into the living room where a bright fire was burning in the fireplace and all the academics were gathered on comfortable chairs and footstools, vying for who would educate whom.

“What can I get you to drink?”

“A glass of white wine is fine. I’m a little short on sleep, and I’m afraid anything stronger may knock me on my butt.”

He smiled. “Sounds promising.”

She gave him an exaggerated frown. He shouldn’t push his luck with her tonight.

Hands held up in surrender, he laughed. “Okay, white wine it is.” He took her arm from his and held her hand as he led her to the bar.

She glanced around the room while he poured her wine. A true academics’ paradise, books lined the walls and stood in piles beside some of the chairs. A wineglass appeared in front of her face as Isaac pressed against her back and wrapped an arm around her. She took it and moved away a little. Taking the hint, he stepped in front of her and clinked her glass with his. The twinkle in his big brown eyes made her smile back.

“Good evening, Dr. Silvay.”

Oh shit, she so didn't need this. She took a gulp of chardonnay and turned with her best smile. "Dr. Kovak. How are you this evening?" The patches on the elbows of his tweed jacket, the unlit pipe in the teeth—talk about your clichés.

"I'm well, my dear, and so impressed that each time I see you these days, it seems to be in the company of handsome young men."

And why exactly did he notice? Praying for patience, she gestured to Isaac. "Have you already met Dr. Webster?"

"Ah yes, Dr. Winton introduced me to his nephew, but I had no idea you two were such good friends already."

Isaac smiled, but she could tell he was confused by Kovak's heavy-handed innuendo. "Oh, just recent friends actually. My uncle and I met her entirely by chance at an Asian antique store in Connecticut. Em, uh, Dr. Silvay was buying a gift for her friends."

"Her friends? Oh yes, of course." He smirked. "Dr. Silvay, I hope you'll have time to meet with me soon. I'm very anxious to catch up on your research and all your new findings and interests."

She hoped her cringe wasn't visible. "Of course, Dr. Kovak, I'm always happy to talk about my research."

"Good, my dear. Very soon then." He smiled (was it childish of her to think of it as snaky?) and moved off into the crowd.

Isaac shook his head. "What was that about?"

"I don't know exactly, but Dr. Kovak seems to have developed an unusual interest in my social life."

"I gather he's met the two men you were with in Connecticut?"

"Yes, at the award dinner last Friday. Jake, my research associate Dr. Martin, won the Outstanding New Scientist Award."

"Was Roan Black there too?"

He sure seemed to know about Roan. “Yes, Roan is a friend of both mine and Jake’s.”

He gave a small smile. “Not one likely to go unnoticed, however.”

“I suppose not. I hadn’t m—I mean I hadn’t thought about how ostentatious Roan was likely to be.” She sat on a stool near the wall. “Jesus, Kovak even knew some of the fashion magazines Roan had appeared in. How can you explain that?”

Isaac chuckled. “Actually, for anyone who watches entertainment news or reads a gossip magazine, he’s a pretty famous boy.”

She sighed. “I know. I live under a rock.”

“Maybe a small seashell, but I actually know more than the average person, since my admin at Princeton was the head of his local fan club. I got blow-by-blows of his complicated childhood, his meteoric rise to the top of the modeling world, his engagement...”

“Oh yes, to Alexandra something-or-other.”

“Right. See, you’re not so hopeless. She’s an indie actress...”

“Indie?”

“Okay, I’m going back to the rock idea. Indie is independent films. He had some hot and heavy affair with her, but I think they broke it off. The whole thing was a bit surprising since most people think he’s gay, but of course, my admin was enthralled.”

“Really.”

“But since you’re friends, I guess you know all about that.”

She suppressed a cough. “We don’t see each other too often, so you probably know more than I do.”

“Well, little rock dweller, can I get you another glass of wine?”

“Maybe in a minute; right now I need a rest room.”

“Actually, I noticed a pretty long line outside the one in the hall.” He made a discreet point skyward. “But we VIPs happen to know there’s a little-known bathroom up in Howard’s bedroom.”

“Oh great.” She hopped off the stool, only feeling a little hit from the glass of chardonnay, and turned toward the stairs.

He gestured to the upper floor. “Want a guide?”

“No need. This house has a similar floor plan to mine. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Up the carpeted stairs lined with old historical photos, the noise died down and the lights were dim. She sagged against the wall for a minute to catch her breath. Jesus, Kovak; just what she needed. And then there was Isaac. He was an attractive man, very attractive actually, and single, and her age, and appropriate. Under ordinary circumstances, she’d be interested.

“Daydreaming about the new boyfriend?”

Guilt made her face heat. *Shit. Jake.*

“What are you doing here?” She turned and looked into his angry but still oh-so-beautiful face.

“This is a faculty party. Last time I checked, I was a member of the faculty.”

“You know what I mean. You haven’t been anywhere near this campus after five o’clock all week. Why the sudden social bent?”

Six-foot-two of upset man loomed over her. “Not happy to see me, Em? Afraid I’ll cramp your style with Dr. Loverboy down there?”

Okay, too much. Tears started running down her face. *Shit*, she was crying. “Stop it, Jake. There’s never anyone I want to see more than you.”

He stared at her, torn it seemed between anger and some other softer emotion. His hand shot out, grabbed her behind the head, and pulled her into his arms. And there was that ravenous mouth. Consuming. For a moment, words like Kovak and Isaac and Dr. Winton flashed in her mind. Oh, but this was Jake. She opened her mouth and accepted all of that questing tongue. The frustration, anger, hurt, and

longing of the whole week flashed into passion, heat. Her body pressed against his, writhing on the huge erection that pressed into her abdomen. Oh God, somehow she had to get that where it belonged. She tried to climb him, thrusting her hips against his body, but the height difference was just too much. He pushed her back against the wall behind her, bent his knees, and came up with that rock-hard bulge pushing against her clit. *Oh, shit, yes.*

Still thrusting, he pulled his mouth from hers and gasped, “We can’t stay here. Where can we go?”

She grabbed his hand, slid herself out from under him on the wall, and led him into Howard’s bedroom two doors down the hall. There were some coats and purses on the bed, so guests might come in. She located the bathroom and pulled him into it. It was a smallish room—nothing like he was used to in Connecticut—just a shower stall, sink, and toilet with a cabinet above. Right now it looked like the Taj Mahal to her.

He pulled her into a heated kiss again, thrusting that tongue deep like she loved. She sucked on his tongue, her hands pawing at his fly, trying to open it. Never breaking the kiss, he took over the effort. He opened his belt, unbuttoned his pants, and pulled down his fly. She slipped her hand in and wrapped her fingers around that beautiful cock. She started to kneel, but he pulled her back.

“No,” he panted. “May not have much time. Want to fuck you.”

He looked around at the sink, but seemed to decide against it. He pulled his trousers down around his knees and sat down on the toilet seat with his big, wet cock pointing up at the ceiling.

*Oh, wow.* Mindless. The only goal in her universe was to mount and ride that big dick. Stripping off her thong, she straddled him and lowered herself to the one place on earth she wanted to be. *Oh, sweet, sweet—*

His head fell back. Eyes tightly shut, he moaned, “Em, oh, Em, please.”

She began to ride. Her hands planted on the wall behind the toilet, she pressed forward and rode up and down and up and down, her body shaking with pure lust.

How had she lived a week without this? Vaguely, she heard some voices in the bedroom outside, but she simply didn't care. This was too wonderful.

Both of them were shaking and panting—neither could last long. She planted her lips beside his ear and whispered every obscenely loving thing she could think of while he gasped and moaned. Harder and harder she rode, pushing her clit against his pubic bone until she was light-headed, her body like liquid fire. And then the fire exploded. “Jake, oh God!” Her body bucked and bucked on top of this dearest of men as she came—as hard as she could ever remember.

He moaned, his eyes flashing open but still sightless, and he came, trembling, pushing his cock as far into her as her body would allow. The heat filling her clearly announced what she hadn't considered. Her vagina was now awash with his sperm. Jake—unprotected. A moment's chill was overcome by pure ecstasy. Oh yes, she was full, full of Jake.

Still panting a little, she looked down into that boyish face. He didn't just *look* boyish, he *was* scarcely more than a boy. So young, so inappropriate—why couldn't she walk away from him like she should?

But it wasn't love or bliss shining from those pure, blue eyes. It was confusion. Hurt. *Shit!* She watched him shake his head and wipe a hand over his face.

“So, did you get what you wanted?”

Her heart contracted. “What do you mean?”

“Sex. Seems like I was right about you never getting enough.”

The little shit! She pulled herself off his softening cock and backed away from the viper. “Dammit, Jake, I didn't come to this fucking party looking for *you*. I didn't accost *you* in the hall.”

“No, you came here looking for him, Mr. History Department. Maybe he should be in this bathroom with you instead of me.”

The bastard! She grabbed a handful of toilet paper, wiped the semen running down her thighs, and threw the paper in his face. His eyes widened in shock. Good.



She grabbed her panties, opened the door, and rushed out of the bathroom. In the quiet bedroom, she stopped, panting. She could have run straight into Kovak. She shivered at the thought. Oh God, she so wished she didn't give a damn.

## Chapter Fourteen

Curled in a little ball, she lay on her bed with early morning light seeping around her window shades. It had been a long night, starting at that fucking party. Kovak hadn't been outside the door when she'd run out, but he had been downstairs. She walked back into the party trying to smile and look like she hadn't been fucked over by her best friend—literally. Kovak gave her a snarky smile, but Isaac rescued her and took her aside.

“Are you all right? I was just about to come looking for you.”

“No problems. Just a few other people found the VIP bathroom, so I had to wait.”

“Yes, I thought it might be something like that.” He'd given her a little smile that made her wonder if maybe he *had* come looking for her. But Isaac was so the least of her worries. She couldn't escape fast enough. After a “thank you” to Howard and a promise to Isaac to join him for coffee sometime soon, she'd practically run out of the townhouse and walked home, freezing by the time she got there.

Now she was alone with her misery, and misery it was. She had tried to sleep, but every cell was full of Jake. Could she live without him? Damn, now she sounded like Jake. But, oh God, she wasn't sure if she could. Yeah, the bathroom scene had been steamy and maybe even sordid, but they still had that connection. They mated as if a single being, a single soul.

This thing was way beyond sex. But could she give up everything she'd worked for and built her life around to have him? And Roan, of course—they were a package. How could she? It wasn't even right of him to ask. Of course, he was risking his career too, and she knew his work meant a lot to him. But, dammit, he

was a man, and the world forgave men a lot more than it was likely to forgive a woman. A Nobel Prize wasn't completely out of the question. But who would give prizes to a woman who slept in the same bed as her much younger research associate and his gay lover—she smiled a little—and enjoyed the hell out of it?

She dragged herself out of bed. Okay, how professional could she look on forty-five minutes of sleep? A shower, ponytail, and swipe of lipstick seemed harder than mountain climbing, so that was the best she could do. She licked the last bit of yogurt from its container, pointed her Prius down the expressway, stopped for coffee, and then headed toward the lab. Outside the office door, she took a deep breath. What could she say to Jake? She had no fucking idea. Automatically, she grabbed the door handle and walked inside.

Mary looked up from her desk, a crease of concern between her pretty brows. “Em, Jake called in sick.”

They just stared at each other. In two years, he'd never had a sick day.

Em tried to smile. “Well, I guess he's entitled to one.”

Mary shook her head, her flaxen braid bouncing down her back. “We both know something's wrong with Jake. He's been like a different person for more than a week now. I don't get it. He gets passionate on subjects, but I've never seen him moody. What's up?”

Good question. She knew Mary felt the tension between her and Jake and was asking for an explanation, but she wasn't going there. She shrugged. “I hope he's okay.” She headed back to her office feeling like someone had punched her in the stomach—or the heart. She closed her office door and leaned against it. Shit, shit, shit, as Jake would say. Her cell phone buzzed with a text message. She grabbed it.

*Em darling—I'm working in the city this weekend. Please, please come and see me. We need to talk. Saturday afternoon. We'll have dinner. I love you—Roan*

Below the message was listed an address on the upper West Side, a photographer's studio.

An intelligent, sensible woman would have a moment's hesitation. She would consider the consequences of deeper involvement when she knew what they wanted was impossible. Her fingers flew over the keys.

*I'll be there. I love you too—Em*

\* \* \*

“So, you're going to see her tomorrow?”

“Yes. She texted me right back.” He smiled. “She said she loved me.”

He watched Jake pace to the door of their bedroom and then turned back to his packing, his garment bag laid out on the big bed. He was headed for a hotel in the city while his New York apartment was being painted. And it was probably a good thing he was going away, since he got pissed looking at his lover.

Jake looked miserable, which he should. “I'll bet she doesn't love me after the way I treated her last night.”

“Maybe she doesn't, and it would serve you right.”

Jake looked up at Roan, startled, because they were seldom harsh with each other. “I was bad, huh?”

“Shit yeah, you were. You had no business going to that party to begin with.”

“But I wanted to see her.”

“Dammit, Jake, you see her every day at work. You wanted to spy on her.”

“But you should have seen her simpering over that fucking history professor...”

“Jake! We may hate that guy, but he's her age, and he's eligible, and he doesn't happen to have any extra baggage like a *gay lover*. If she wants to be with him, she will. And you treating her the way you did, fucking her, and then yelling at her and accusing her... Shit, I may not know much about women, but I sure as hell know that's not the way to win her.”

His lover looked defeated and crumpled onto the bed. “I know, baby. Jesus, I'm so sorry. I know I blew it, but I'm just not altogether rational about that woman.”

He sat beside Jake and pulled him against his shoulder. “Tell me something I don’t know. Your feelings are all tied up with your love for her and your work and your admiration of her accomplishment. But you gotta quit, baby. You can’t make having her a source of validation. Em’s gotta be about love, and you know how to tell if something you love belongs to you?”

The man sighed. “Yeah, yeah, let it go.”

“Right.” Okay, he had to ask. “Jake, if she doesn’t choose us...”

“You think she will, don’t you?” He sounded desperate.

“Yeah. I think we’ll work it out somehow. But what if we don’t—I mean, if she doesn’t come around...” *Just spit it out.* “Will it be okay? I mean, will I be enough? Can it be just you and me again?”

Jake stared at him and he felt his heart dropping into his stomach.

Then he was falling against the mattress as the big blond tackled him, covering his face with kisses. “Baby, baby, what the fuck are you talking about? You and me, we’re a given. That’s decided; that’s life, baby. Yes, I want Em. But if you don’t, we walk away now. Just tell me.”

Okay, that felt better. “No, I want her too, Jake. I guess I was just feeling kind of...”

“Left out by your idiot, selfish lover?”

He grinned. “Yeah. Exactly.”

“I’m so sorry, baby. I get obsessive. You know that. But you’re telling the truth? You really do want her?”

“Yeah. I really do.”

Jake looked at him suspiciously. “Why? Bottom line, you like guys.”

“Bottom line, I love you, baby.”

Jake got up restlessly. “I don’t want you doing this for me.” He turned, and Roan saw the depth of emotion in the blue eyes. “I love you, Roan. I never knew love could be this way. Don’t let me screw it up.”

“Oh, baby.” Roan leaped off the bed and grabbed his golden boy in a huge kiss. He pulled back.

“I’m really not doing this just for you, Jake.” As he said it, he knew it was true. “I love how smart and funny and earthy she is. She makes me think about things in new ways, including myself. She’s a little like a guy, but with some fun new parts I enjoy playing with. I could never be with just a woman; I found that out with Alexandra. But having you both really appeals to me. I think she can make us even better. She fits.”

Jake looked at him mischievously. “And you’re gonna fuck the hell out of her tomorrow, right?”

“Oh yeah. If she’ll let me.”

“You think she won’t?”

Roan laughed. “No, I think she will.” He grabbed Jake around the waist and pushed him onto the bed, flipping him onto his stomach and landing on top. “But I’m going to fuck you first, baby. Wouldn’t want you forgetting about me while I’m buried inside Em.”

Jake reached up and licked his lips. “You’re going to stick that monster cock in my ass and push it in and out real slow?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan.”

“And you’re gonna pump my dick until I scream?”

“Yeah, baby.”

“And you’re gonna make me come so hard I can’t remember my name?”

“For sure.”

“Oh baby, I’ll never forget you.”

## Chapter Fifteen

She searched for the street address, dodging vendors and the usual swarm of New York pedestrians. The last twenty-four hours had been interminable, and no amount of gene sequencing could make it speed up. Far from focused and absorbed, yesterday she'd been a clock-watcher, noting each eternal minute. Even the train into the city had seemed slower than usual today. Finally she was here. Going to see Roan. She took a deep breath.

He'd said "I love you," so she didn't think he would greet her with hurt and anger like Jake. But this was a test. She loved Jake pretty damned unbearably, but what he'd done wasn't okay with her. If Roan defended Jake or in any way repeated the performance from that bathroom, she'd decided she'd walk away from both of them. She needed Jake in the lab, but she didn't care. If they couldn't work together amicably, what was the point? Of course the fact that her stomach fluttered and her nipples hardened at the idea of just seeing Roan made a little applesauce of her resolve.

The address was on a midrise glass building, and she opened the door right on the street and entered a small, cool reception room, dark compared to the bright light outside. Big fashion photos, black-and-white and color, decorated the walls. There was a smallish reception desk that at the moment was unoccupied. Not sure what to do—there was no bell to ring—she just began looking at the photos. They were fantastic. Inventive, artistic, but they still managed to show the high-fashion clothing to good advantage.

She turned as the click of high heels on the polished concrete floor announced the missing receptionist. Inky, spiked, black hair nestled against black-framed glasses that barely gave room to see her eyes.

In a slight Brooklyn twang, she asked politely, "Can I help you?"

Em smiled. "I'd like to see Roan Black."

An explosive giggle set Em back a step. "You and the whole world, lady."

"Let me rephrase that." Em tried to not sound annoyed. "I'm Emmaline Silvay. Roan asked me to meet him here today."

"Oh shit!" The girl slapped a hand over her mouth. "Sorry."

"No problem. One of my personal favorite expressions."

"I mean, come with me, please. They're shooting right now, but I'm sure he'd want you to come in."

Em was pretty sure the "he" in question was Roan, not the photographer. Obviously, Roan got what he wanted here.

She followed the girl into a huge, cavernous studio. A number of people stood around, all focused on a central area surrounded by a big curved backdrop that was lit to look like the solar system. In the middle of that stagelike cove, brilliantly lit with color spotlights, were four amazing beings that were hard to identify as human. Three were women, tall, impossibly thin, swathed in acres of silk, tulle, beading, and gemstones, all clearly of the latest fashion in evening wear. This finery was in dramatic contrast to the models' faces, which were painted in black, white, and gray. The three women reclined on large round orbs of varying heights while busy assistants in jeans and bare feet scurried to adjust their skirts for the proper drape and add the tiniest bit more fluff to their white-powdered hair.

But none of the onlookers were watching the women, because suspended from a sort of trapeze structure in the middle of the huge cove was Roan, wearing a G-string and body paint. The metallic silver that coated him was only a tiny bit more radiant than his own skin. Even his trademark tattoo was covered. His lean,



dramatically muscled body arched across the trapeze, and he held on to a guide rope that she suspected would be pulled away when they started shooting. Chiseled cheekbones, carved pecs, cobbled abs, and long, muscular legs—he was a work of art.

Em's companion was as mesmerized as she was. The girl sort of shook herself and then gestured to Em. "Come on up here. I'll get you a chair and introduce you to the photographer."

"I don't want to be in the way."

"Oh, don't worry. Roan doesn't ask for much around here. You'd never believe that walking dream would be sweet and kind and not-temperamental would you?"

"Actually, I would."

The girl gave her a glance. "Oh yeah, I guess you would. But it's sure more than I can say for some people." She glanced pointedly toward the female models. "Anyway, Roan asked us to make you comfortable, and that's what we're going to do."

Em followed her loquacious hostess up to a chair set beside one of several cameras. A midheight, stocky, bearded man of about fifty gave directions to assistants who were still adjusting lights.

"Hey, Bill. This is Roan's friend, Miss Silvay. This is Bill Davolo."

The bearlike man turned to her and flashed big white teeth. "Actually, Sylvia, I think this is *Doctor* Silvay, am I right?"

Em extended her hand. "Just a PhD, not a physician."

"Yeah, *just* the person who's going to find a cure for cancer, as I hear it." His big paw swallowed her hand.

"Roan is more than a little biased in his opinion."

The dark eyes narrowed. "He sure thinks highly of you, Doctor."

"Em! Em!"

She looked up to see Roan pulling himself up on his trapeze and waving.

She waved back. Davolo gestured with his chin. “Take off your shoes so you don’t rip the seamless, and go say hi to him, otherwise I’ll never get his attention.” The last was said affectionately.

She padded over to Roan barefoot, dodging cables and wires that lay on the ground. She looked up, up into the green eyes that were circled with shining green makeup. He beamed. “Hi, beautiful.” Her heart swelled.

“Back at’cha. What are you up there, dear, an alien?”

“Yeah, somebody’s dream of outer space I’m told.”

“Wet dream, I’d say.”

He leaned down, bringing his face closer to her, and that sultry voice lowered. “You would, would you?”

Her breath stuck in her throat. “Oh yeah.”

“This is our last shot. I can’t wait to be with you.”

Oh, God, she hoped he meant what she had in mind. Jesus, she wanted him as badly as she wanted Jake, little pervert that she was.

As she carefully made her way back to the chair, her body was covered with goose bumps—and it had nothing to do with the temperature.

Davolo shouted for attention, and the assistants all left the big cove as the female models began to adjust themselves on the orbs. Roan arched back, his face toward the camera—and Em. His eyes still glistened with the promise of things to come.

Davolo murmured under his breath. “Shit.” She looked up at him, and he leaned toward her and winked. “You certainly perked our boy up, Doctor, but maybe a little too much. When that kid gets a hard-on, the planets have to realign.”

She looked up and sure enough, the tiny G-string was barely containing Roan’s erection—and it was only at half-mast. She blushed. “Sorry.”

He chuckled. “No worries. Funny, I always assumed the kid was gay. Anything that beautiful, y’know?”

Feeling a need to rise to the defense of his bisexuality she answered, “I can personally testify to his excellent use of that planet-realigning cock.”

Davolo exploded a laugh. “Well, good for him. The kid’s got good taste.”

Shifting his attention back to Roan, whose condition was now slightly less obvious, Davolo yelled, “Bend your left leg a bit more, Roan. Good, baby, perfect.”

The offending appendage hidden, Davolo began to shoot.

An hour later, Davolo had all the shots he needed, Roan was in showering off the body paint, and Em was wishing she was with him. Wow, watching him move that exquisite body around like some kind of otherworldly serpent had left her breathless and wildly horny. That might be inappropriate considering her situation with Roan and Jake, but it was still a fact.

Two people whom Davolo had earlier described to her as “the clients”—she guessed meaning the fashion magazine in which the photos would appear—were now consulting with the photographer about the shots he’d captured and delivery dates on the final product. Apparently, there would still be some digital manipulation of the images. That was gilding the lily as far as she was concerned.

She looked up as the “lily” in question emerged from the dressing room wearing a slim-cut navy suit that she was sure represented the cost of many a first mortgage. This haute couture was complemented by a white T-shirt with some kind of rock group splashed across it, two glistening gold earrings, and a nose ring. Clearly, her pretty boy had been downplaying his image for the benefit of Connecticut locals. The almost-black hair was idly tousled and spiked around his face.

He winked at her and went straight to the clients to shake hands and make his good-byes. Even those clearly hardened fashionistas had to work at not gushing at the gorgeous model. With a wave to them, he crossed to Em, wrapped an arm around her waist, and leaned down for a short kiss. “God, I thought this shoot would never end.”

“I’m glad I got to see it.”

“Hungry? I know it’s early for dinner, but I haven’t had a lot of food today. With that much skin showing, I try to keep the stomach concave.”

“As if it ever isn’t. Come on, beautiful, feed me.” Although she had to admit there were other things she’d rather do, there were things they needed to work out.

Outside, Roan led her to a private car complete with black-uniformed driver.

“My, my.” She waggled her eyebrows.

“Having the car makes sure I get places on time.”

He gave the name of a restaurant to the driver, held the door for her, and then slipped in beside her. His finger tipped up her chin. That perfect mouth closed over hers. Soft, persuasive, so different from the more aggressive assault of Jake’s kiss, but both were incredibly sexy in their own way. She sighed into his mouth and sucked his tongue hard. Oh God, she’d missed him so much.

His hands came up to cup her breast, and then he pulled back with a groan. He released her mouth and chuckled a little. “I so want to do a lot of this, but must confess the noise you hear in the background is my stomach growling. I better behave if I expect to actually consume food rather than fuck you right here.”

She smiled, “Of course that would be more entertaining for our driver.” She shrugged more seriously. “And I guess we probably better talk before we go too much further.”

“Eating and talking?” He made it sound like the whine of an eight-year-old. Then he laughed and smoothed his hand down the big bulge in his slim trousers. “Down boy.”

## Chapter Sixteen

The restaurant was surprisingly low-key, a real family place specializing in “gourmet down-home favorites.” She looked up at this chicer-than-chic man and tried to picture him as a meatloaf and mac-and-cheese guy.

“Now, why would I never have picked this as your kind of place?”

“Actually the food is fantastic. Plus, it’s such a neighborhood place, it throws off the paparazzi. They expect to find me somewhere more upscale, I guess.” He dipped his head a little shyly as if it was embarrassing and silly that he had to worry about photographers following him. God, he was a charmer. It was easy to see why Jake loved him. Hell, it was easy to see why she loved him.

The owner greeted him enthusiastically by name and led them to a back booth. Roan barely looked at the menu; obviously he came here often, and then, in fact, ordered mac and cheese. Of course, this down-home favorite featured imported blue cheese and truffles. *That* was Roan. What the heck. She followed suit and also joined him in his choice of a brut champagne.

When they sat with their glasses of bubbly, he reached for her hand. “God, I’ve missed you.”

She stared down for a moment and tightened her fingers around his. “Me too.”

“Oh, sweetheart, don’t be so upset. We’ll make this all work out somehow.”

She looked up into the green gaze. “Have you talked to Jake?”

“Yeah, I think he’s told me pretty much everything.”

“Where is he? Why isn’t he here in New York with you?”

Roan looked a little sheepish. “He’s spending the weekend with his brother.”

“Caleb?”

“Yeah. He’s always good support for Jake. Our boy’s just a little out of his head, I’d say.”

She dropped her forehead to her hands then looked back up. “But why, Roan? You don’t seem to be angry and disappointed with me because I won’t throw away my whole life to move in with you guys!”

“I know.” He stroked her hand. “But I also haven’t spent every day of the last two years dreaming about you. I just met you.” He gave her a little leer. “I figure I’ve got time to convince you that you can’t live without me. Jake feels like he can’t live another day without you.”

“Shit.” The unshed tears of several days backed up and burned her throat. “He sure as hell had me in the bathroom at my fellow professor’s house with Kovak just down the stairs! And then he turned on me and accused me of horrible things.”

The waiter arrived then with their exotic mac and cheese, and romaine salads. She blew her nose. When the man left, Roan leaned forward and stroked her hand.

“I know what he said. I reamed him a new one for saying you only wanted us for sex.”

She couldn’t keep the plea out of her voice. “You don’t believe that’s true?”

“No, sweetheart, I think we all enjoy sex with one another, and we use it as a way of showing our love. But more important is what you believe.” He took a bite while Em stared at her food.

“What I believe? I believe I’ve loved Jake impossibly for most of the last two years, and I’ve fallen in love with you, my darling. But I also know I’m not twenty-five. I don’t have a whole life ahead of me like you two do. I’ve worked hard and given my heart and soul to this work, and I think it’s important. I can’t just walk away from it.”

A finger touched her cheek. “But I’m not sure I understand why you think you have to choose.” She started to answer, and he held up a hand. “Oh, I know about

the conservatism of the university and Kovak and all the rest. But Jake says you own the patents. There could be other sources of funding, other avenues for your research that you might love even more.”

“That would mean starting all over again!”

He flashed that crooked tooth at her. “But maybe then you could have us too. That is, if you really want us.”

She gave him a little half-laugh. “Spoken like a supremely confident twenty-four-year-old.”

“Not even slightly confident, Em. But hopeful.”

He was so fucking amazing. It had to be some wild combination of gentleness, intelligence, and pure ego that allowed him to be the young god that he was.

She reached up and fingered the gold loop in his nose. “How come I’ve never seen this before?”

“I pretty much save it for the job. They expect me to be cool, not some down-home hick from Iowa.”

“Iowa’s not a happy subject.”

He shook that beautiful head. “Nothing wrong with Iowa. It’s the family life associated with it that’s not happy.”

“Tell me.”

“It’s a bit long and miserable, but in a nutshell, my father never believed I was his, and tried to beat the devil out of me most of my youth. When he found out I was gay, I knew I’d never survive the beating, so I left. I was seventeen. Fortunately, I’d met a guy at a gay bar in the city who said he could make me a model. Despite all expectations, he turned out to be on the level. I’ve never been back to Iowa.”

“School?”

“Never finished. I’ve studied on my own my whole life. Funny I should end up with two lovers who are PhDs.”

“Your wisdom puts us both to shame, darling.”

“Thank you, Em, that’s very kind.”

She couldn’t resist. “Roan, tell me about your engagement to that woman.”

He gave an unreadable little smile. “Yeah, Alexandra Shields.”

“You told me she sort of forced Jake’s hand. Did you leave her for Jake?”

“No, we separated a while back. She was smart enough to know I was just too gay to live in a monogamous relationship with a woman. She wanted us to have other partners, but I’m pretty faithful.” He reached out and touched her cheek. “You could say I’m a one-man and one-woman guy.”

She turned her head and gave his hand a little kiss. “Did you love her, Roan?”

“I was fond of her but not love. She didn’t love me either.”

“But you slept with her?”

“Not much sleeping involved, but we had great sex. That’s what kept us together for part of a year.”

“Wow. So when you said you sometimes get a thing for a woman, you weren’t kidding. She was one of those.”

“One of the few, but you’re the first woman I’ve ever truly loved.”

Her head was shaking before she could stop it. “Roan, you just said you’re faithful. You have Jake; you don’t need me. I would just get in your way.” Just the thought ripped her heart out.

“Hey, silly.” He lifted her chin with his finger and gazed into her eyes. “Is that what you’ve been thinking? We love you, Em. I love you, and Jake loves you, no matter what happens. We’ll always love you.”

She wiped at her eyes. “I love you too.”

Despite the intensity of the conversation, he’d managed to eat a good bit of his food. She moved hers around on the plate. He reached across and dug his fork into her macaroni. Very slowly he wafted the morsel beneath her nose and then gently prodded it against her lips. She opened, and he slipped the delicious gourmet



creation into her mouth. As she chewed, he repeated the process, crafting another bite and then offering it.

*Yum.* She licked the noodles languidly, then sucked them in. He gave a little groan, and this time picked up a single piece of pasta and slipped it between her lips. His fingers lingered inside her mouth. An invitation.

She sucked those slender fingers and then began to pull them in and out, licking with her tongue. Roan closed his eyes for a moment, then pulled his fingers from her mouth and grabbed her head, dragging her to him for a hungry kiss. Already in a sucking mood, she sucked his tongue deep into her throat as her arms reached for him.

A flash went off right in front of her face.

*What the fuck?* She jumped back, gasping. Another flash lit up their booth. Roan was already half out of the seat and grabbing for the camera of the man who was hopping backward to escape.

“Dammit, Blackball, get out of my face, you asshole!”

The guy just laughed and gave a little salute. “Gotcha, pretty boy. Next time, try Brooklyn. I hear they’ve got great restaurants.” The guy turned and ran for the front door.

Roan slipped back into the booth and reached for her. She huddled against the banquette, trying to stop gasping. “I’m so sorry, sweetheart. I’m one of that guy’s special projects. He loves to try and figure out where I’m going to be and show up there.”

The restaurant owner hurried over. “I’m so sorry, Mister Black. I didn’t see his camera until it was too late.”

“No problem, John. I’m used to it, but I think he really shocked Dr. Silvay.”

“Can I get you anything?” The man hovered, clearly not wanting one of his best customers to take offense.

She tried to catch her breath. “No, it’s okay.” She patted her chest lightly. “Just a little new to me.”

The owner slipped away as Roan held her and petted her soothingly. “Blackball is really an asshole. He must have a trunkload of photos of me by now. But, man, he’s nothing compared to the paparazzi in London...” He amused her with tales of relentless photographers while she got her heart rate back to normal. When he saw she was actually listening again, he leaned in and whispered, “Let’s go, my darling. It’s been almost a week since I had my cock in you, and I’m having trouble fitting in these pants.”

Instant heat. In one sentence she was ready to lay him out on the table and ride him, paparazzi be damned.

He left actual cash money on the table and guided her out to the curb where the car was waiting. She noticed the privacy panel separated the backseat from the driver, which fit right into her mood. She was a wild woman in the city.

They made the short ride to the hotel with his hands up her skirt and hers in his pants, not saying a word, just feeling and kissing each other until they were both dripping. As they pulled up to the hotel, he stuffed himself back into his pants and tried to adjust his jacket down over his massive erection. She just pulled off her wet thong, stuffed it in her purse, and stepped out of the car commando. By the time they got to the elevator, they were both giggling and wild to fuck.

An obviously well-heeled elderly couple rode the elevator with them, and Em tried to behave, but Roan kept reaching down and licking her neck and ear. She’d slap at him but couldn’t stop giggling. When the older couple got to their floor, the lady looked back at Em, winked, and said sweetly, “Have a nice night.”

She and Roan burst out laughing as the doors closed, and then they attacked each other while the elevator continued to the penthouse. Roan picked her up, so she could wrap her legs around him and grind her bare, throbbing pussy against that enormous bulge. Oh God, after all the emotional turmoil, it felt like heaven to

just get lost in sex. She rode up and down on him, probably ruining that beautiful suit, but God it felt good.

On the top floor they staggered out of the elevator and straight into Roan's suite. She was vaguely aware that it was beautiful and overlooked the whole city. He carried her straight to the bedroom, panting in her ear.

"Oh baby, I want to fuck you so bad." He tossed her on the bed. Her full skirt wound up around her waist, baring her naked pussy. The sight seemed to enthrall him, so she spread her legs, making the very wet lips gape. She was still wearing her heels.

Roan groaned while ripping off his belt and pulling the slim trousers down, revealing tight black boxer briefs that were grossly distorted by his enormous erection. Somewhere he had toed off his loafers. He pulled off socks and shoved the briefs down and off, freeing that indescribable cock to stick out under his still-buttoned shirt.

In one move he was on the bed, and shoving that huge rod into her soaked vagina.

Oh God, she'd almost forgotten what that much cock felt like. Real, serious friction. Just this side of pain, she felt so full, so stretched—so complete.

He thrust and thrust, head thrown back, eyes shut tight. She wrapped her legs around him, letting the heels of her pumps press into his flexing ass. A little pain with his pleasure?

He screamed. "Oh, shit, yes!"

The huge pumping cock hit against her womb in one out of three strokes. He was too far gone to stop, and she was too far gone to care, strapped to him with arms and legs like a monkey, pounding her hips up onto his cock, eager to take all of him as he ground against her clit.

The pressure and the pleasure morphed into one huge cloud of feeling, surrounding and filling her until she exploded, energy shooting up her spine, through her womb, and into her head, until she thought she might black out. She

screamed Roan's name over and over, and he cried out with her and kept crying as he pumped and pumped. Suddenly semen was leaking from her channel. Oh my God, young men came so hard—so good.

Gasping, Roan rolled to the side so as not to crush her. He gave a little laugh. "I think we needed that."

"Ummm."

He turned on his side facing her. "Em, I'm so sorry. I didn't use a condom."

"I know." She turned on her side and gazed into the green eyes. "It was great."

She got that sweet smile. "Thank you. But you should know I'm clean. I've been tested, and Jake and I have been faithful for the better part of a year."

"I am too. The only man I've had sex with besides you two is Henry, and I saw his test results myself. I'm on the pill, which I guess is good, since you're the second man this week I've had unprotected sex with, the first being our soul-searching lover. Did he tell you that?"

"Yeah." He grinned. "Actually, I think we were both kind of hoping one of us would get you pregnant. You know, like women used to do to trap husbands? Maybe we could trap you."

"Yeah, we wouldn't even know which one of you was the father. I kind of like that idea."

"Me too, assuming you'd let us be the fathers." He touched her face in that gentle way that was all Roan. "Would you, Em? Would you like us to be the fathers of your child?"

And she started to cry.

He reached for her and gathered her in to his body, gently petting her back through the sweater she was still wearing.

"Oh, Roan," she whimpered. "Why can't this all be easy?"

They finally undressed and crawled into bed together. It was still early for two night owls, but she was asleep almost immediately.

Waking up with Roan the next morning was a treat she celebrated by riding him until they both collapsed in a very satisfying orgasm.

Lying on top of him, she managed to raise her head enough to look in his eyes. “So you’ve had top and bottom in the last twelve hours. Which do you like best?”

Laughing, he tickled her a little. “Actually I’m a natural bottom, but I do like to fuck. So getting to put my cock in you with you on top is really good for me. Of course, the best is having Jake in my ass and my cock in you—now that is heaven.”

She didn’t answer, because who knew if they’d ever have that again?

Showered, dressed in her same clothes, and after a “model’s” breakfast of fruit and yogurt, Em left the hotel and scampered into the waiting car with Roan. He had the driver take her to Long Island before going on to Connecticut, so they had a long ride to cuddle in the backseat. Roan also had a lot of time to infuse her with his optimism for their combined future.

By the time she was back in her own townhouse, she actually felt a little hopeful that maybe somewhere there was a happy resolution to her love/work tangle. And that tentatively happy mood carried her straight into Monday.

## Chapter Seventeen

Sex was great. Sex with Roan was better than great. Compared to last week, her mood was positively perky, and even the prospect of seeing Jake couldn't dampen her good mood. Juggling all the documents she'd finished Sunday night at home, plus coffee, a purse, and a plant she'd bought for her office from a roadside vendor on the way in, she could barely nod at Mary on the way past her desk.

"Em..."

"In a second, Mary; just let me get this stuff to my office before I drop it." She struggled toward her door.

"But Em, wait..."

She was aware that Mary seemed to be behind her as she pushed open her door with her hip. The woman grabbed her shoulder just as Em pushed into the small, cramped space and came face-to-face with Dr. Kovak, who was staring intently at her diplomas and awards displayed on the wall.

Mary sounded breathless. "Em, I just wanted to tell you that Dr. Kovak is here."

"Thank you, Mary. I can see that. Good morning, Dr. Kovak."

Kovak gave a huge, patronizing smile as he gestured to the pretty blonde assistant. "Mary, please close the door as you leave."

Ooh. Em felt a cold chill. She sorted her papers and put her purse in her lower desk drawer. Okay, she was a grown woman here, a professional with no reason to feel intimidated by this asshole. She gave him a smile. "If I'd known we had a meeting this morning, I would have brought coffee for you, Dr. Kovak."

“Ah, no problem, Emmaline, I’m a tea drinker myself. I was going to call and make an appointment to discuss your research, but events conspired to prompt the need for a more immediate meeting.”

She sat at her desk and waved Kovak toward the guest chair, noticing for the first time that he was holding a folded newspaper. The cold chill reached arctic proportions. *Oh well, into the fire.* “So what are the conspiring events, Doctor?”

“Excuse me?”

“You said events conspired to make this meeting necessary. What are they?”

“Ah, yes. Have you by chance seen today’s copy of *Whisper*?” He rushed on. “No, of course you haven’t, or I’m sure you would know the precise reason for my presence here.”

“I don’t read tabloids, Dr. Kovak, and must confess I’m surprised that you obviously do.”

“Yes, well, I feel it’s important for at least one member of the faculty council to be up to date on popular culture, although I never dreamed one of our own would become so very enmeshed in it. And I should mention that I brought this only because it was handy. The coverage on the Internet is far, far more extensive.”

*Shit!* Knowing exactly what to expect, she held out her hands and flicked her fingers impatiently. “Let me see it, then.”

With a flourish, he spread the smarmy tabloid on her desk—where in blazing, if off-register, color on the front page was a photo of her locked in a passionate kiss with Roan at the restaurant. Beside it was a more identifiable picture of her very startled face gaping at the camera. *Not very flattering, that one.* And then beside that, to her surprise, she got to see herself holding hands with Roan leaving the hotel on Sunday morning. *Shit*, so much for escaping the paparazzi.

Though she was hoping passionately that the sleazy reporter hadn’t known who she was, that prayer was quickly dispelled by the tabloid headline, DOING RESEARCH? It went on to explain that one of America’s leading genetic researchers, whose name was often associated with a possible Nobel Prize, was

apparently busy investigating the genetic makeup of “the most beautiful man in the world,” Roan Black. It reported that the two lovers were seen sharing dinner at a quiet bistro where their passions were obviously running high, and then escaping to one of New York’s most upscale hotels until *the next morning*. Both of their ages were mentioned. Well, double shit. Was that the floor dropping out from under her? Or just the feeling of her house of cards crumbling?

Looking up at Kovak’s face, she knew the precise meaning of the word “smirk.” *Oh well, might as well try to balls it out.* “I believe what I was doing Saturday night and Sunday morning falls into the category of my private life, Dr. Kovak.”

“That might be true, Emmaline, if you were *doing it* with someone, say, like Dr. Webster—a peer, a man of your own age. But this, this *male model* is notorious, and barely more than a teenager as well. He’s seen draped with the bodies of beautiful models—both female and male, I might add—and he is not someone with whom you or the university should have their names associated. I cannot imagine what he wants with you, but perhaps he’s decided to try and gain a little respect by association. Well, it simply won’t work!”

The self-righteous bastard.

He’d risen from his chair, and she stood to face him. “Dr. Kovak, any member of our faculty could do well to be as kind, gentle, thoughtful and, I might add, as intelligent as Roan Black. I don’t know what your tabloids say about him, but I know him intimately”—Kovak made a disgusted snort—“and he’s a person of character.” Yes, and a person who didn’t deserve to be treated the way this man and the whole academic world would treat him if this story got bigger.

She took a deep breath and held up her hand to forestall his comment. She would not beg or justify herself to this asshole. “With that said, I have already considered the complexity of my position.” She felt like she was being torn in half. Her chest hurt, and her lungs wouldn’t hold enough air. If murder had been an option for her, Kovak would have been in serious trouble. She loved her men. But she loved her work, and she couldn’t lose it. She couldn’t. Opening her mouth, the



words tumbled out. “I have already decided I must sever my relationship with Roan Black.”—*and his beautiful, golden-haired, most beloved lover.*

That took the wind out of his sails, but it flattened her. Had she said that? She could hardly breathe.

Kovak stared at her and struggled to regain the upper hand. “Well, if that is the case, I can be persuaded to keep this information from the eyes of the committee. As you’ve pointed out, they are not followers of popular culture and so are somewhat unlikely to see it on their own. And even if they do, you are after all, my dear, a very valuable asset to the university, so I’m sure they will be inclined to overlook this bit of scandal. The boy is very beautiful and famous, and I’m sure he simply turned your head. And, of course, it will never happen again.”

“Of course.” Her body hurt, crushed in truth.

“These tabloid things are here today and gone tomorrow, after all. If they don’t have more fuel, the fire will die of its own accord.”

She could barely hear him for the rushing in her ears.

He stepped back from her desk toward the door. “So, my dear, we will put this unfortunate incident behind us. You should mention our discussion to Dr. Martin as well, since he is also a friend of this person, though obviously not such an intimate one.” *Oh shit, Jake.*

Kovak looked out the door. “By the way, where is Dr. Martin?”

“Out sick.” *So he wasn’t here today either.*

“Ah, pity. So you’ll have to postpone your discussion with him. Well, I’m glad we had this talk, Dr. Silvay. You’ve proved yourself the thoughtful, socially-conscious person I’ve always thought you to be. I shall look forward to seeing only those stories about you that are interesting to the *New England Journal of Medicine.*” He chuckled at his own humor. “Good day.”

He left, and she collapsed into her chair. What in hell had she just done? Her head fell onto her crossed arms. She just agreed to end her relationship with Roan,

and, of course, that meant with Jake. Never to see Roan again, only to see Jake in short, strained conversations during the day, never to feel either man inside her again. Oh God, she couldn't cope, but she'd chosen it. When the chips were down, when the shit hit the fan, and every other cliché, she chose the university and her career over the two men she loved—over her two men. *Not hers anymore*. Her chest screamed with pain, and a bitter taste filled her mouth. Jake was right. She didn't love them enough. Some damned free spirit she was. Her mother would have been ashamed.

And Jake! This meant Jake had been right. He had to hide his relationship with Roan, never to bring his lover to a party or event, never to share the two halves of his life. And what if the paparazzi spied the two of *them* together? Most “popular culture” fanatics were well aware that Roan was at least bisexual. Would they make the connection with Jake? Did he care anymore?

“Em?”

She looked up at Mary standing in her doorway, pulling at her braid.

“I'm so sorry. I tried to catch you to warn you.”

Em waved her hand. “It doesn't matter, Mary.” *I'm not sure what does matter.*

\* \* \*

“Shit, shit, shit!” Jake hammered on the steering wheel as he yelled into the hands-free car phone.

Roan's soft, deep voice sounded dull and lifeless. “I know, baby. If I could bullwhip that photographer I would. Hell, I'd like to bullwhip myself for putting her in that position.”

“It's not your fault, baby. You're as much a victim of those slimeballs as Em is.”

“No, I asked for it when I decided to be famous. But she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time...with the wrong guy.” He sighed, and Jake felt his heart rip a little for the man who never wanted to hurt anyone, least of all Em. “I just

didn't think when Blackball snapped that picture what it could mean. I wanted her so bad, I just took her to the hotel and fucked her and never even thought the bastard might follow us. I never considered what the tabloid coverage would look like."

"Yeah, I guess this pretty much confirms all her worst fears."

"I'm afraid it does. And I thought I had her thinking it might work out when she got home last night. But this is a total pooch screw."

Jake felt a tear fall down his cheek, and he swiped at it angrily. "So I guess we better throw in the towel."

"Oh, Jake, I want to believe there's still a solution."

"Yeah, baby, you want to believe, but you don't."

Roan's indrawn breath sounded like a sob.

"Oh, baby, don't. I love you so much, and I'm so lucky to have you. We have the best life together. It's more than enough."

"Don't give up."

"It's more than enough." And he slapped at another rogue tear as he pulled into the campus parking lot.

## Chapter Eighteen

The gene sequences made no sense. That never happened, but here she was sitting alone in her office staring at the screen, and it might as well have been gibberish. Paralyzed. She couldn't focus. Everything was in jeopardy. All her hard work to get to the top of her profession, to get to do the kind of research she believed in—it could all be gone. Kovak said he'd overlook her "indiscretions," but he could change his mind on a dime. The rest of the faculty committee might decide to get rid of her. The idea hurt, but not quite as much as this fucking hole in her heart.

What would Shakti say if she could see her daughter rendered catatonic by the loss of a lover? Two, actually. Her mom would probably give a clear description of the part of his anatomy into which Kovak could insert his dick. She chuckled. It sounded bitter. Why didn't she have her mom's courage when she needed it?

Jesus, she had to get some work done. She opened her e-mail and noticed a confidential message from someone named Marshall Ehrlich marked high importance. Had she heard that name before? Generic e-mail address. She shrugged and hit Delete. A lot of people had weird ideas about her research.

There was a soft rap on her door jamb. She looked up expecting to see Mary, but was shocked, thrilled, crushed to see Jake. That beautiful, beloved face. She couldn't summon her anger.

"Hi, Jake. Thought you were sick, or sick of me at least."

He took a step into the room. "Em, I'm so, so sorry."

"What? What for?"

"Roan told me about the pictures this morning. And then Mary just told me about the visit from Kovak. I'm sure the two things are connected."

“Mary knows about the pictures?”

“Yeah.” He managed a slight grin. “It seems Roan is her screen saver at home, and she follows him on every social networking site there is. You are now, officially, the coolest genetic researcher on the planet.”

She sat back in her seat. “I’m sure glad somebody thinks so.”

He perched on her guest chair. “Rough, huh?”

“Oh, Kovak was just Kovak, Jake; the disappointment is me. I caved before he even got to his threats.” She put her hand to her forehead as if to hold the thoughts at bay. “You were right. I’m not capable of loving or caring the way you deserve. I’m truly sorry.”

“Stop it, Em. This isn’t your big failure, no matter what I said.” His agitation caused the shaggy golden mop to fall over the top of his glasses, and he swiped it back. “Roan finally got me to look at my silly adolescent nonsense.” He clasped his hands tightly on the edge of the desk and stared at them, reciting like he’d practiced all the way from Connecticut. “I’m a stupid kid asking one of the world’s great scientists to give up everything she’s worked for to be with me. And I’m not even promising you marriage and family. No, you have to accept my male lover too.”

“Not exactly my idea of a hardship.”

“True.” She saw the love that suffused his face at the thought of Roan. “But as you rightfully pointed out, not the stuff of polite society either. The rest of the faculty aren’t Kovak, but they still wouldn’t be thrilled with their prize scientist flaunting her *ménage à trois*.”

“Is this wisdom all from Roan?”

“No, some is me. Roan still wants to believe that there’s a way to have it all. But you and I know better, don’t we, Em?” A flash of bitterness crossed his face.

So Jake had given up. No more fighting against the tide. She shook her head. “Yeah, we know better.”

He looked at her with great resignation. Was that really better than anger?

She sighed. “What are you going to do?”

“About what?”

“The research.”

“Oh, well, it’s important to me too.”

“You could go somewhere else, Jake. With your brilliance you can head your own team. I’ve wondered for a while why you didn’t do that.”

“Do you want me to go, Em?”

“Shit, no!”

That got him to laugh.

She held up a hand. “But I have to tell you that after Kovak gave me the ultimatum about associating with *male models*, emphasis intended, he told me I should share our little talk with you, since you were also a friend of Roan’s.” He looked startled. “No, no, he doesn’t know you’re a couple. But that’s the point—if you stay here, he can’t know. You have to hide the most important relationship in your life. It’s not fair.”

The blue eyes regarded her steadily. “*One* of the most important relationships in my life.” He stood. “And I’ll cross that bridge with the faculty council when appropriate. But for now I can’t think any more about Kovak, the shithead. I’m going to work. This is my research too, Em. I can’t leave it...or you.”

God, her heart ripped. “Maybe if I really toe the line, it will take the heat off you and Roan. Kovak will assume he’s out of our lives, and you can breathe again.”

“And you and me?”

“Friends, colleagues...like always.”

He took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’ll try, Em. I’ll really try.”

When he left to go to his desk, she sat staring at her computer, trying hard to concentrate. He’d been wonderful—maybe too wonderful. There was some perverse part of her that wanted him to fight and claw and spit to have her, not give up in

resignation. But that was selfish and twisted. He had Roan. He didn't need her, though the thought destroyed her. She told him she'd toe the line. She could do that for both of them. Then things could calm down, and no one would even think about who Jake went home to.

She rubbed the back of her neck, trying not to wish Jake was there to do it for her. She felt like she'd been beaten with a stick. The last two weeks were just too much for her. She hadn't had this level of emotional turmoil since she was a kid, when she and her mom had taken every injustice of the world to heart and fought like tigers to change things. But now she was a scientist, not a drama queen. Maybe if she just got back into her work, things would return to normal. *Yeah, define normal.* Henry? No, that was so not going to happen. After Jake and Roan, Henry, bless him, was a joke. He'd already gotten wind of her lack of interest from the complete ignoring she'd been doing. She'd let it stay that way.

So what did normal look like—a virtuous life of chastity, purity, and obedience? Yeah, that would happen. Not only did she love sex as Jake had said, but for the last ten days she'd had the best there was. Not just great orgasms, but the wonderful emotional connection and fulfillment that only came with real caring. She didn't want to live without that. But without them, her men, somehow she wasn't really interested. She was going to have to interact with Jake every day, walk past him at his desk. God, she'd drooled over him before she knew what sex with him was like. How could she stop drooling now? He could go home to Roan. Who could she go home to?

As if the instrument of some giant cosmic joke, her phone rang, and she picked it up automatically. "Dr. Silvay."

"Hi, *Doctor* Silvay, this is *Doctor* Webster."

For a moment it didn't compute, then the light dawned. "Hi, Isaac."

"I know I said we'd do coffee, but what say we skip the preliminaries?"

"Excuse me?"

He chuckled, obviously having made the innuendo on purpose. “How about dinner, kiddo?”

“Oh.” Dinner? Did she want to do this? Could she? Was it leading him on? Kovak had said someone like Isaac was appropriate for her—her age, her peer. Obviously, what Kovak thought mattered to her, or she never would have caved. *Oh hell, Emmaline, it’s only dinner, not a marriage proposal.* “Sure, Isaac, when?”

“Thought for a minute you’d hung up.” He chuckled again. “How about Thursday night? That’s kind of a getting-to-know-you night rather than a date night, which I sense you’d be more comfortable with. Plus, we can’t do Saturday because of Kovak’s faculty Halloween party, which I hear no one can skip.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Not too enthused about dressing up in fancy finery for Kovak and his band of merry academics, are we?”

“Not too.”

“So, is Thursday a yes?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll pick you up at seven. Howard knows where your house is, so no directions required. Come casual.”

“Okay.”

“Hmm. Not the most voluble conversation I’ve ever had, but still satisfactory. See you Thursday.”

\* \* \*

By Thursday she’d started getting the rhythm of her new life—and she hated it. Jake worked hard, but he didn’t stay late with her alone if he could avoid it. A lot of work he did at home. She toiled in the lab, sometimes completely absorbed in the amazing mystery of gene coding and sequencing. But whenever her concentration slipped, she felt like someone had carved a hole in her chest, and the piece was missing. Her days were work, grab lunch, work some more, navigate the



expressway, work, grab dinner, work, make an attempt at sleeping and then work again. She was ready for an evening of pleasant conversation even if that hadn't been her strong suit this week.

Skinny jeans and an oversized black turtleneck sweater fit the casual request, but she pushed the envelope with a pair of moderately high stilettos just to feel like a girl for a little while. Did she want to feel like a girl?

Right at seven, she heard the doorbell. Memories of Roan standing on her porch flooded her. *Okay, stop.* She pulled it open and practiced smiling. "Hi, Isaac."

For a second she thought maybe the Halloween party was tonight, because this attractive academic was dressed in jeans with a big, shiny belt buckle, and cowboy boots to which he had added an unexpected crisp white shirt and a soft leather jacket. Maybe he was born in Texas or something? She decided to save comment for later.

He gave her an admiring once-over. "My, don't you look like a rock star tonight. Must be the company you keep."

He had to have seen the flash of pain on her face, because he was instantly apologetic. "Sorry, Em. Ready to go?"

They drove for about a half an hour until she was completely turned around and had no idea where they were. Finally, he pulled into a parking lot off a narrow road. Bright neon lights proclaimed THE COWBOY. "You are kidding me. A cowboy club? Guess I don't have to ask about your boots after all."

"Right here on Long Island, baby."

"How could you know about this place? I thought you just moved here from New Jersey."

"I did, but I've got a great nose for longnecks and two-step."

"Dr. Webster, you amaze me."

She'd never been to a western bar or club, so the noise and general level of enthusiasm took a few minutes of getting used to. Isaac found them a table well

away from the band and behind the huge U-shaped bar crowded with talkative people, but deep conversation still wasn't much of an option. She quickly discovered, however, that the greasy and delicious food, lessons in two-stepping, and even some general hilarity surrounding a mechanical bull were just what the doctor ordered for improving her mood. By the time they staggered out into the crisp night air, she was laughing and joking and really grateful to Isaac.

He helped her into the car and began the long ride home. After a few minutes of continued laughter over Isaac's fall from the bull, they both quieted.

Looking out the window at the quickly passing trees, she murmured, "I had fun at that silly place. Thank you."

"I thought you might. It's a great place to forget your troubles." When she didn't reply, he went on. "When I first met you at the antique store, I saw you as a really happy woman. Got to admit, I haven't gotten that impression since then."

She shifted uneasily. How much did she want to say? "Yeah."

"Does the change in status have anything to do with Roan Black and the stories I saw online earlier this week?"

"Partly."

"Ah, I see we've returned to one-word interaction."

He was so cute she had to chuckle a little. "Sorry. I'm just not real comfortable with the topic."

"I can understand how being on the cover of *Whisper*, not to mention every gossip site I could find, might do that to a girl."

She glanced at his profile. "You were looking, huh?"

He grinned. "Must confess, someone sent me the first link, and then I went exploring."

"I imagine a lot of the other faculty probably did the same?"

"Well, it was another professor who sent me the link. I was pretty surprised."

She gave him a straight look. “Surprised to see me leaving a hotel with quote the most beautiful man in the world close quote?”

“Well, yeah.”

Well, damn. “I know, he’s too young by far, he’s too beautiful to be interested in the likes of me, he’s world-famous and—”

“No, whoa, that’s not it! Not it at all. I can totally understand why any man would be interested in you. I was *surprised* because when I first met the three of you that afternoon I thought the two men were together...a couple. I thought they were gay.”

She looked down at her hands in her lap. Oh, what the fuck. “They are.”

“What?”

“They’re bisexual.”

“So, you were cheating on your associate researcher with his lover in that hotel? Or he was cheating or...what?” He sounded half-incredulous and half-shocked.

“No.”

“So you didn’t have sex with Roan Black?”

“Oh yes, I have had a lot of sex with Roan Black, including in that hotel.” Isaac just looked more confused, and she took a deep breath. “It’s just that in that hotel, Jake didn’t happen to be there too.”

“Too?”

“Too.”

“Holy shit!”

“I think you’re starting to get the picture.”

## Chapter Nineteen

Isaac had gotten most of the scandalous details on the rest of their ride and was now sitting in her living room sipping sauvignon blanc.

“I guess the real question, Em, is are you in love with these guys?”

She sighed and took another slug of wine. “The only answer I can give you is I can’t be. Since to be with them would pretty much ruin everything I’ve built my life around, not to mention do a number on Jake’s career, I have to wish them happiness with each other and walk away. Try to toe the line with the faculty and the university and hope they forget.”

“What the hell business is it of the faculty’s anyway?”

She appreciated that he asked the question. “Oh, Isaac, you’ve been in academia long enough to know that the faculty council’s business is anything they say it is.”

“I suppose. Look, Em, I can see you really care for these two men.” He gave a little laugh. “I don’t remember ever seeing the line ‘two men’ in a romantic story before.”

She smiled. “You don’t read the right books.”

He spit a little wine as he laughed. “Anyway, in spite of how much you care, are you determined to go through with this new-leaf turning? Giving them up?”

Was she? “I feel like the cowardly lion that decided to be brave and then said ‘somebody talk me out of it.’ But yeah, I guess so.”

“Can I help?”

“What? How?”

He leaned forward, wine propped on his knees. “Look, I like you. I’m kind of intrigued by the fact that I find your affair with two men *at the same time* to be pretty sexy.”

He saw her frown and held up his hands. “No, I’m not trying to horn in. I don’t want to push you at all. Actually, if what the rumor mills say about Roan Black’s endowment is true, I certainly don’t want to try to compete right away.” She giggled. He really was cute. “But can we just hang out? Do some things together? I’m new in town, so you can think of yourself as my tour guide. And maybe it will take some of the edge off for you. Show Kovak and the Holy Inquisition that you’ve moved on...” Again, she looked askance, and he rushed on. “In appearances only.”

Okay, it was deep breath time. He was really nice and this was not an unreasonable request. In fact it was very kind and thoughtful and—appropriate. But it made the reality of her situation too real. It made her want to scream and run and never stop running. She took another deep breath. “Okay.”

She got an arched eyebrow. “Ah, the return of the single word. Okay, I’ll do the talking. How about we start with Kovak’s Halloween costume party on Saturday? You know, the one you’re dreading? Let’s go together and make it more endurable and maybe take a little heat off the tabloid stories.”

She shook her head. “They’ll just think I’m a bigger slut than they already do, sleeping with Roan and you.”

“Maybe. Could happen.” He grinned. “Wanna go anyway?”

Her mama’s energy stiffened her backbone. Silvays didn’t run and sure as hell didn’t hide. Em might not have Shakti’s balls, but she could pretend. She looked at Isaac and nodded slowly.

“Less than a monosyllable.” She smiled. He went on as if she wasn’t cringing at his every word. “So have you got a costume hidden in a closet?”

“Strangely enough, I do. Mary made me this Grecian goddess thing last year. I could just wear it again.”

“Aphrodite?” He waggled his eyebrows, wringing another small smile from her.

“Probably more like Artemis. There’s a bow.”

“Yes, the virgin goddess. *Very* appropriate for the occasion.” This time he got a full-on laugh.

“If not very convincing.”

“Okay. I’ll come up with something for me.”

She pointed with her chin. “Those boots are a good starting place.”

“Excellent idea.”

\* \* \*

Em picked up the phone. Man, it’d been a long time since she’d done this. What did she hope to accomplish? Maybe just to pour her heart out. She dialed and listened.

“Speak or forever hold your peace,” came the much-expected reply.

“Hi, Mom.”

There was a pause. “Emmaline?”

“You got any other females who call you mom?”

“Well, shit, sweetheart, it’s not Christmas. You can’t blame me for being surprised.”

“I know, I know.” She called her mother on holidays and birthdays but hardly any other time. Usually her mom called her.

“Hey, sweetheart, I’m not complaining. What can I do for you?”

What could she do for her? What was she doing? Em collapsed on her couch and put her head on the arm. “Sorry, Mom, I have no idea. I shouldn’t have called.”

“Okay, baby, give. What the fuck is the matter? I doubt you’re looking for advice on gene splicing.”

“Sequencing.”

“Whatever.”

Em took a deep breath. “I just have a situation.”

“Man?”

“Two.”

There was a gutsy chuckle. “Best kind of situation.”

“Yeah, well, tell that to my university.”

“They hassling you, baby?”

“Kind of. Yeah.”

“Ivory towers are notoriously bad for love, kiddo.”

Em had to smile a little.

“You telling me you love two guys, or what?”

Ouch. Right in the heart. “Yeah, I guess that’s what I’m telling you.”

“One of them that boy toy?”

“Yeah.”

“And the other one?”

“His gay lover.”

A short pause. “Shit, honey. You said gay. So how does that work? You’re in love with him too?”

“Yes.”

“And how does he feel about you?”

“I think he loves me back. No, I know he does.”

“So he’s not gay?”

“He says he likes a few women, and I’m it. Oh, Mom, he’s something special.”

“Jesus, he must be if you love him, honey.”

That struck home. She loved him. Them. Her mom had been waiting twenty years to hear her say that, and she had to break the bad news.

That gutsy voice still sounded amazed. “So, you really mean you have two guys. And you mean at the same time, don’t you, Em? *Really* at the same time.”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean. A ménage.”

The low laugh filled the phone. “Oh honey, you’re gonna one-up your old mom.”

“Not sure if that was a goal I was striving for, much as I love and admire you.”

“Hey, kiddo, these things can work. I’ve seen it. You remember Jill and Bobby and Hank. They’ve been together twenty-plus years now, happy as three peas, so to speak.”

“Yeah, I know people in your world do things like this, but in mine they don’t.”

“Only one world, hon. You either get to be happy in it or you don’t.”

“I wish it was that simple. It’s really a long story, but the university found out about one of them. There are pictures in the papers. I know my job will be lost, all my research gone if I stay with Jake and Roan.” She ran her free hand through her hair and pulled as if somehow that could straighten it all out. “God, I can’t walk away and give it all up. I can’t.”

“Emmaline, you always amaze me. From total immersion in work for fifteen years with no man on the horizon, to a relationship that rips the lid off convention. You don’t do things halfway.”

“Yeah. Like my mom.”

Shakti chuckled. “But remember, Em, everything’s simple once you make a choice.”

“I feel like all my choices were made for me.”

“Then you’re not seeing straight, Emmaline. You’re free, baby. You’ve always got a choice. That’s what I taught you. That’s what you know.”

*That’s what I know.*

*Is it?*



## Chapter Twenty

Jake held Roan's beautiful face cradled in his hands. "I love you, baby."

"You don't have to do this."

Jake smiled and felt it all the way to his heart. "Yeah, I do." He stared at those gorgeous green eyes surrounded by black liner that made them look twice as large. The soft, Angelina lips had been slightly rouged. "This to me is like your tattoo is for you. It's my declaration of independence." He moved over to their big bed and sorted through the pile of garments.

Roan, already dressed, adjusted his makeup in the wardrobe mirror. "Where in hell did you come up with this idea?"

"Remember that girl I took to the dance last year?"

"Your little girlfriend?" Roan grinned.

"*Not* my girlfriend." Jake clasped a cape around his shoulder, and Roan, ever the fashionista, came over and adjusted it. "Anyway, she was doing her doctorate on Alexander the Great. I spent a couple of weird dinners hearing about Alexander's love life at the same time I was struggling with my feelings for you."

"Well, God bless Alexander. He must have swung my way."

"That's the point." Jake looked at himself in the mirror and took a deep breath. "Let's do this?"

"You sure, my darling?"

"Completely."

The crooked tooth flashed. "Time to take on the world."

\* \* \*

*I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this.* Her new fucking mantra. She struggled into the golden waist cinch on her Grecian costume. Shit, it was shorter than she remembered. After all, Artemis was the huntress—no dragging around in long skirts for her. Last year she hadn't thought about the draping that varied from midthigh to her knee, but this year—another story.

Jesus, working all night sounded good. But she'd probably be more obvious in her absence than her presence. She strapped on the midcalf-high sandals and put a golden circlet on her forehead. Her hair curled around her shoulders. No ponytail tonight.

Her stomach lurched, and she felt bile rise in her throat. *What, dammit?* She didn't want to think about anything. She'd get through this evening, smile at Kovak, and suppress the growing fury she felt for the man. She could do it—for the work, for Jake's career. She could knuckle under, toe the line, and all the other appropriate phrases. No matter what her mother said, it just wasn't that simple. It wasn't about her being happy. Her work made her happy. Her men made her happy. Now she had to choose, and the forces of nature and the university said she had to choose her work. That's the way it was. She'd chosen.

She took a sip of water from her bathroom sink to rinse her mouth, blew her nose, touched up her lipstick, and headed downstairs.

Her voicemail light was blinking. She pushed the button, and a deep male voice said, "Dr. Silvay, this is Marshall Ehrlich. I sent you an e-mail a few days ago. I have a proposal I'd like to discuss with you..." Her doorbell sounded. She clicked off the voicemail and went to the door.

*Well step up and say howdy.* Isaac leaned against the door jamb in full cowboy regalia, in which the notorious boots were only the beginning. Chaps covered his jeans, a spangled, fringed red shirt and black vest almost outshone the big belt buckle, and his sandy hair was topped with a black Stetson. Pretty adorable, despite her mood. "Howdy, Tex."

He gave her a slow once-over. "I think I may take up goddess worship."

“Is it too much?”

“Just enough.”

She grabbed a coat to cover the bareness of her costume, and they headed out to his SUV.

Far too quickly, they were at Kovak’s townhouse complex. The party was in some kind of community building out back, since the good doctor’s house wasn’t up to the rigors of forty people in costumes that often limited their vision and mobility. Big skirts were hard on the tchotchkes.

As they walked into the party, she had to smile. The gathering seemed to be divided between those who wanted to embody their favorite historical characters and those that wanted to be superheroes. There was a dashing array of lightsabers and capes to accompany the panniered skirts, white wigs, and snuffboxes.

“Man,” Isaac whispered. “I’ve never seen a Halloween party where everyone comes in costume.”

“Kovak makes it pretty clear that people had better wear a costume if they want to stay in his good graces. He just wants the chance to strut around as Sherlock Holmes for a night, his big hero.”

Isaac chuckled. “From what you’ve told me, Machiavelli might have been a better choice.”

“Or Jack the Ripper.”

“Well, my goddess, how about a drink?”

They pushed their way through to the portable bar that, of course, was a cash proposition—how very Kovak. As they got their wine, she could feel the eyes of other faculty members on her. When she looked up, they quickly glanced away. She leaned in to Isaac. “Does this costume look really slutty?”

“Naw, it’s just that the more gossipy of the faculty have made sure the others see the story. It’ll take them a few days to get over the excitement, I expect.”

“I see.” And she did see. Something so important to her that it was ripping her heart to shreds was just a moment’s juicy gossip to them. They would get over it. Would she?

They circulated through the crowd, but her mind wouldn’t settle. She felt like she walked through a crush of people she didn’t know and cared about less. Why was she here? Her life was somewhere else.

She finally smiled a little when Dr. Winton stopped them to say hello. His friendliness warmed up a few of her more broad-minded colleagues, and they came over to speak to her as well, carefully avoiding the elephant in the room—the story. She tried to be polite but could barely think of what to say. Isaac, bless him, carried the ball. Then to make it all complete, Kovak decided to give his stamp of approval.

“Ah, Dr. Silvay, how nice to see you!” He gave Isaac the cowboy, a significant look. “And how nice to see you and Dr. Webster getting along so well.”

She gritted her teeth and felt cold anger flash through her. Could she really do this? “Hello, Dr. Kovak. Nice party.”

“Thank you, my dear. Is anything as fun as costumes? The chance to be another person for an evening?” She sincerely wished *he* were another person.

Dr. Winton smiled. “But it looks like you’ve chosen to be immortal, Emmaline. Is this Artemis?” He fingered the bow she held in her hand.

She really liked Isaac’s uncle. “Yes, no mere human for me, I...”

As if she’d heard a call or caught a scent on the wind, she looked up. At first, she thought it was just a vision, some kind of mirage in this desert of humanity. Jake stood just inside the front door of the party room, his body covered in a golden breastplate over a toga, a helmet on top of the golden hair and a shield held before him. *Oh my God—Alexander*. It had to be. Alexander the Great. Beside him, a vision so ethereal, so heart-stoppingly beautiful, it was hard to grasp. Hephaestion, the lover of Alexander—Roan.

Light-headed, she thought she might pass out. Behind her she heard a gasp and then another, and the whispers began. Jake’s tall, powerful body gleamed,

radiating energy and challenge. Beside him, Roan's beautiful, lithe physique was draped in a toga almost as white as his skin. The nearly black hair curled into ringlets, and his lushly lashed eyes glowed through the black eyeliner. A pure, blatant statement of liberty. Jake was dressed as the greatest of the Greek warriors, as famous for being bisexual as he was for being the conqueror of the known world, and Roan was the man he loved and according to legend was willing to give up the known world for. The gauntlet was thrown. *This is who I am. Don't like it? Tough.*

Would the faculty recognize the statement for what it was? It didn't matter. Just bringing Roan here, obviously as his date, was statement enough. *God, he has guts!* Clearly, he'd made his decision. Roan was more important to him than anything else.

Two of the female faculty members who obviously cared more about the breathtaking and wildly famous man in front of them than they did possible censure, had gone up to say hello to Jake and meet his companion. Other people were looking pointedly at Em as they recognized Roan as the man she had been photographed with.

Kovak was hissing behind her. "I thought I told you to talk with Dr. Martin about his *friend?*"

She turned to him with a tight smile. "I did. Obviously, friendship is more important to Jake than gossip."

"Easy, girl." Isaac took hold of her arm.

She turned back and stared at the two beloved faces. Had they seen her? What would they think of her being with Isaac? Did she care? Oh, yes, she cared so much.

She shook off Isaac's hand and took a few steps forward toward her men. Roan looked up and saw her first. That famous, crooked-tooth smile beamed at her. People saw that smile and traced it to its target, looking back and forth between her and Roan, some shocked and some delighted by the obvious connection. Kovak grabbed her shoulder and sputtered—the light had obviously dawned.

“Am I to understand that Dr. Martin has chosen to costume himself as Alexander the Great?”

She giggled, actually giggled, and quoted one of her favorite movies. “Yeah, talk about your gays in the military.”

A tractor beam pulled her toward Roan. “*You’ve always got a choice. That’s what I taught you. That’s what you know.*” Jake saw her then, frowned for a moment, and then gave her that most beautiful, self-effacing smile. He put his arm around Roan and hugged him close.

Behind her, Kovak hissed, “What exactly is going on here? Have these young men chosen to make a spectacle of themselves...at *my* party?”

And the whole universe cleared. She felt the way she did after she’d just had an orgasm in Jake and Roan’s arms—happy, certain, unshakeable and, above all, free. Kovak started to push past her toward the two men while the whole room looked on in fascination.

*No way, you bastard.* She grabbed him by the arm, hard, and looked straight into his face. “Mister, you haven’t seen spectacle yet.”

Pushing Kovak out of the way, she walked straight to Jake and Roan. Her goddess skirts swished around her legs so she gave her hips a little extra sway. *In your face, Kovak.* Roan, bless him, held out an arm to her, and she went straight to him, raising her face to his descending lips. Oh God, that mouth. There was nothing like it. He let her set the pace, so she wound both arms around his neck and pressed her tongue deep into his mouth, eating gently at those soft lips. Vaguely aware of the near riot of whispers and exclamations around them, she released Roan, took a deep breath and wrapped her free arm around Jake’s neck. The blue eyes looked a little questioning—and a little amused. *Your turn, my love.* She pulled his head down and caressed his mouth with her tongue before plunging in for a deep kiss.

The white noise level around them escalated. A few people even broke into applause while others hissed their shock. She pulled back from Jake and looked up

at the two beautiful men that she loved with all her heart. “Will you take me home?”

Jake cocked his head at her. “To Long Island?”

Roan hugged Jake tighter. “Of course not, my love. To Connecticut. She’s ours.”

## Chapter Twenty-one

*Good morning, freedom.* Splashing fountain, chirping birds, beating heart, and champagne bubbles circulating just under her skin. This was what surrender felt like. She'd given everything away—the Nobel Prize, her relationship with the university, even her career. There must be something she could do to contribute to the world besides work for the university. The fact was, she owned the patents to her genetic sequence, so she could damn well do something with it. She just wasn't sure what. Maybe she'd just march on Washington with her mom. Shakti would love that.

God, she was lucky. Roan was ready and willing to support her—and Jake too, for that matter, since he'd also trashed his position at the university. Regrets? What did the old song say? “She had a few.” She loved helping people, and her research could save lives if doctors used it to test for the correct treatments for cancer. But she had the research, and everything was possible—without giving up her life in return.

Peace filled every cell. If her weird hippie upbringing had taught her anything, it was not to live a lie, and that was what Kovak and his ilk required. Actually, she hadn't realized how much she hated the restrictions of the university life until they were gone.

They'd left the party last night after Isaac brought her coat and kissed her cheek under the watchful eyes of Jake and Roan. They'd driven back to Connecticut with her curled up on Roan's lap in the backseat. She vaguely remembered them carrying her upstairs and tucking her into the big bed between the two of them. And



now, she gazed at Roan's alabaster back while Jake's morning erection poked her in the hip. Ah, bliss. Felt like home.

She wiggled a little to test the wakefulness of her two companions and got an instant response. Roan turned to face her, and Jake wrapped an arm around her and pulled her back tight against that steel-hard cock. He snuggled his lips against her ear. "Welcome home, my darling."

"Thank you. It's good to be home."

Roan leaned in and kissed her gently, then moved farther and captured Jake's tongue in his mouth.

She wriggled some more. "Hey you two, get a room." She watched Jake's tongue slip in and out between Roan's lush lips. *Yum. Yeah.* They had a room, and she was in it.

They pulled apart and both of them nuzzled her ear this time. "How would you like us both inside you?" That was Roan's silky voice making the salacious suggestion.

She gulped. "Can we do that?"

"Yeah," Jake cooed. "With enough lube and patience. Wanna try?"

Roan winked. "Trust me, darling. There's nothing as good as a cock in your ass."

"Oh, I don't know. You haven't got a pussy."

"Got me there." He kissed her nose as Jake moved away from her back, and she heard a drawer open. She always wondered how it must feel to Roan to have Jake inside him like that. She assumed it would be Jake in her ass, since the chances of getting Roan's gigantic cock in on the first try were nil.

Roan pulled the covers off, leaving her glowingly nude in the early morning light. He moved down the bed and pulled her legs apart, then began kissing his way up from her feet. Oh yeah, that little piggy was a happy camper. Kiss by kiss, it didn't take him long to get that magic tongue working on her clit. God, he was good

at this, and obviously he loved doing it, because he moaned as loud as she did as he sucked her bud into his mouth and tongued it. Back and forth and back and forth. Holy goose bumps. Those champagne bubbles were turning to lava.

Her hips were bucking and pussy dripping by the time Roan pulled back and lay down on his back with the giant dick pointing toward the ceiling. He grabbed it with one hand and her with the other. “Get on it and ride, baby.” Oh yeah.

She mounted him and began the one, two, three up and down strokes that it took to get that cock pushed into her tight channel. Stretched to heaven. When she was well-seated and starting to ride, Jake grabbed her hips and held her still. She felt something cold and wet against her hole, and then a finger pushed inside—odd, but not bad.

“Okay?”

She nodded, having trouble talking through all the pleasure.

“Want a little more?”

Again she nodded, and that finger got a companion.

“Go ahead and move.”

She pushed forward onto Roan’s heavenly cock and then back onto those two probing fingers in her ass. As they went deeper, they felt better, maybe even good.

Gazing at Roan’s green eyes shining up at her, she managed to gasp, “Now I know how you feel.”

“Oh no, baby. It gets much better. Just wait.”

For several seconds she just rode his cock, giving her clit a deep massage on Roan’s pubic bone and getting used to the feel of Jake’s fingers. But she was getting hotter and hotter, it felt so good.

Suddenly Jake stilled her hips. She struggled a little to keep moving, rushing toward orgasm.

“Hold just a second, sweetheart.” Oh, the cold wetness was back, all around her now empty hole. Then she felt something much smoother and silkier than a finger pushing in. *Also much bigger.*

“Take a deep breath, darling,” Roan whispered. “Now, let out your breath and push out.”

She tried, pushing out with all her concentration as she felt a huge invasion of her virgin anus. Oh God, she’d thought Roan’s cock burned in her pussy. This was twice the fire. *Deep breath. Another.*

“You’re doing great, darling. I know it burns, but try to relax, and you’ll see why you want to do this.”

She nodded while trying to breath. A little giggle escaped as she thought, *force yourself to relax.* And then, wow, Jake’s cock—thank God it was slimmer than Roan’s—slipped deep inside her and—Oh shit, could it be?

Roan cried out, “Jake, I can feel you rubbing against me inside Em. It’s wonderful.”

She nodded wildly. Yes, that’s what she felt, their two cocks rubbing together inside her body. Oh God, the idea of it was so heavenly she almost came on the spot!

Jake pulled out almost to the tip of that long, long cock and then pushed slowly back in.

“Oh yeah!”

Both men began to thrust. Roan in, Jake out, Jake in, Roan out, over and over. No thought, only feeling. Fullness, pleasure. Ecstasy. Love. Too much. Just enough. Oh, yes, yes—

The fire consumed. Flash up the spine. Head coming off. *Try not to scream. Yeah, scream.* Her legs and arms trembled, consumed by fire that filled every cell.

Roan followed, groaning and crying while overflowing her channel with that huge torrent of semen. And then the newest sensation—a warm flood as Jake, her Jake, poured himself into her throbbing ass.

Oh, home. Home at last.

\* \* \*

It was almost two hours before the three of them managed to get out of the bed, take showers, and pad downstairs.

She only had her Grecian goddess outfit to cover herself, so she'd commandeered Roan's bathrobe, which was practically dragging on the floor and consuming her hands. The guys threatened to dress her as Artemis, put their own Greek outfits back on, and make a big impact at the mall. It was finally decided, however, that Roan would go buy her something to wear to tide her over until they could go to her townhouse and get her clothes and essentials. Of course she was going to have to restrain her beautiful fashion model from buying out the stores for her.

She and Jake sat at the big island and sipped fresh juice as Roan scrambled eggs.

Jake smoothed her hair. "Any regrets?"

"A few, but only about the importance of our research, not about the decision to be with you and Roan. Funny how taking that first step toward you guys made all the difference. It was like I could feel the wires that had been holding me falling away. You were so brave, it inspired me, and I have to give some credit to my mom. Suddenly nothing mattered except being free of the constrained life Kovak and the university were molding for me. For the first time, I could see that to have something new, I had to let go of the old." She held out her clenched fist and opened her hand, like freeing a captured butterfly. "Now I have no idea what will happen, but I'm excited."

Jake smiled. "Yeah, I feel the same. Of course, Roan's bank account may take a hit with all his dependents."

The dark-haired beauty turned from the cooktop. In his jeans and tank top, his tattoo was clearly visible—her wild thing.

“No problems with the bank account.” He spooned eggs onto plates and set them on the breakfast bar in front of them, and then made a plate for himself and sat beside them.

Around heavenly bites of egg and feta cheese, she asked, “I know you make a lot of money modeling, Roan, but it can’t be that much, can it?”

He smiled shyly. “Well, it’s a lot.” Then his eyes twinkled. “But I’m also pretty good at real estate.”

She shook her head at the world’s sweetest tycoon.

The phone rang.

Jake went to grab the phone in the great room so as not to disturb breakfast. She and Roan talked some more about his investments while they ate. It seemed he had started buying apartment buildings back when his modeling career was just taking off in a big way. He’d been twenty. What a little entrepreneur.

Vaguely, she was aware of Jake talking in the other room. He wandered in closer to them still holding the phone.

“Yes, I’m sure she’ll be glad to talk to you. It’s an interesting idea, and the timing is probably good.”

He listened.

Who? What? Roan had also stopped talking and was fixed on Jake.

“It’s not yet common knowledge, but Dr. Silvay and I have decided to leave the university for personal reasons.” Pause. “Yes, Dr. Silvay holds all the patents.”

Another pause.

“When would you like to get together? No, today is not possible. Yes, that works. Noon, for lunch? Yes, I know the place. We’ll see you there.”

He disconnected and stared at her with a funny smile.

What was this about? “Okay, Cheshire cat, what the hell is going on?”

“Have you gotten some messages from a guy named Marshall Ehrlich?”

“Yeah, I think so. I had a voice mail last night but I didn’t get to listen to it. He said something about a proposition, but that’s all I heard. A lot has been going on.”

“Well, this guy Ehrlich was referred to us by Mrs. Edmunsen, a contributor to my sister Jenny’s charity. Ehrlich represents a group of investors that are interested in starting a company to, what he calls ‘productize’ your gene sequencing.”

“*Our* gene sequencing.”

“They want to develop a commercial product that can be sold to doctors and hospitals worldwide to help select the correct treatments for all kinds of cancer.”

“C’mon, Jake. You know how many people have harebrained schemes about our research. The sequence is specific to every patient. You and I have talked about automating it, making it more universal, but we’ve never been able to figure out a way. It would be great, yes, but it’s pie in the sky.” She sipped her coffee. Man, it sure would be wonderful though.

Jake wrapped his arms around her from behind. “I think we should hear him out, sweetheart. He says the consortium has found an algorithm from some inventor they think is promising. He says we can work with it or use our own approach; they just want us on board. It’s up to us, but I know Mrs. Edmunsen is a really savvy lady. She wouldn’t have sent someone to us that wasn’t legitimate.”

Roan put more coffee in Jake’s cup and set one of his homemade scones beside it. “You guys have nothing to lose just talking to the guy. You don’t like it, we can all pack up and head for the Caribbean for a year.” He grinned. Clearly he knew his two scientists would never leave their research for a week, much less a year.

Jake leaned around Em and blew the beauty a kiss. “Roan’s right. We’ve got nothing to lose. But, Jesus, if it could happen...” He shook his head. “This could make the sequencing available. No ivory tower research. A real product that could help real people, just like you dreamed.”

She tried not to get her hopes up, but the idea was just too fantastic. Not only would it help people all over the world, it would give her and Jake meaningful,

fulfilling work outside a university environment. Business was business, and if they could figure out a way to make money for the company, who'd give a shit how she and Jake lived their lives? She smiled. "Yeah, it would be amazing."

Roan beamed and came over to hug them both with one arm each. "What were you saying about making room for something new?"

Jake kissed her cheek. "But we shouldn't get ahead of ourselves. We'll learn more when we meet him for lunch tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? You're joking."

"Not even. He said they want to be sure you're interested before they make any additional plans."

"But he wants both of us, right?"

"He seemed to start the conversation with the impression that we're a package deal."

Her heart tripped, and she slipped off the stool and wrapped her arms around her two men. Looking up into the beautiful blue and green eyes that she'd left everything for, she smiled. "Yes, my darlings. We are and always will be a package deal."

☪ THE END ☪

## Tara Lain

Tara never met a “beautiful boy” she didn’t love—at least on paper. Though a long-established non-fiction writer, Tara is new to the world of erotic romance fiction and loves creating beautiful boys of her own. Tara would often rather write than eat, loves to paint and collage, has practiced yoga for decades and tries to see a movie a week. Married to her soul mate, Tara loves diversity, inclusion, and new ideas. On her tombstone it will say “Yes.”