



Snowbound Holiday
Eden Cole

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Chapter One

Evie couldn't believe she was going home, back to the place she swore she'd never visit again. Not after her grandfather disowned her and her mother. That had been just fine with the old, angry man with his nose so high in the air. No one was good enough. Now, he was gone, and his lawyer had informed Evie that her grandfather had mentioned her in his will. She needed to come for the reading, and if she liked, she could arrive in time for the funeral to say her last good-byes.

"If I like?" she muttered, bitterness and sorrow over the past mingling together. No, she didn't *like*, but she had come anyway. The single black dress she owned was good enough, a little too tight and way too short. He didn't deserve her going out to spend her hard-earned money on something new.

Besides, Evie thought, as she bent to claim her luggage, the will was likely to state that under no circumstances was Evie to touch a dime of his money. Thinking of it, she rolled her eyes and headed out of the terminal into the brisk afternoon air. Evie had fought hard for the small bit of success she enjoyed in life. She had a nice nest egg growing for when she retired someday, and her yearly paycheck was nothing to sneeze at. The old man could take his ranch and his money to the grave for all she cared.

Evie shivered and pulled the thin jacket she'd worn in light of the time of year. Christmas was just days away, making her even more resentful of her grandfather. Of course, he couldn't help when he died, but she refused to let him off easy.

In the distance, the Laramie Mountains lay steeped in fog, and the street and ground was covered with a recent snow. Evie glanced down at

her boots. They were all show. She should have known better than that, being born in this area where the rustic ranch life dominated.

Screeching tires caught her attention, and she looked up toward the street. An SUV coated with splashes of dried mud and salt water came tearing along at breakneck speed. Her heart thundered in her chest when it stopped on a dime in front of her and the door opened. A big, six-foot-something man with broad shoulders, wrinkled clothing, and a handsome, if scruffy, face strolled up to her.

“Evie?” he questioned.

She nodded, mesmerized in an instant by the dark eyes and the black hair tumbling onto his forehead. Resisting an impulse to play in the locks, she said, “Yes, who are you?”

A wide grin spread over his face, displaying even white teeth and a single dimple in his left cheek. “You don’t recognize me? It’s Joel.”

He whipped her up into a bear hug that threatened to crush her ribs. As if she were something special, he cupped the back of her head while her feet dangled above the ground.

“Gosh, it’s good to see you, honey. It’s been a long time.” He set her down and stepped back to study her from top to bottom. Still in shock, Evie didn’t at first say a word when he directed his hot gaze at her breasts and whistled. “You *have* grown up! Not the scrawny little thing me and the guys protected all those years ago.”

“You and the guys?” She yanked her jacket closed to hide the fact that her nipples had gone hard and were clearly outlined through her thin blouse. Refusing to believe this wild man with no manners had caused it, she blamed the biting wind. But as she gazed into those amazing eyes, she remembered, not knowing how she could ever forget. Joel, Evan and Dane had been her playmates when they were kids. She narrowed her eyes at Joel. The man’s body had been hard as steel when he crushed her to him. She wasn’t the only one who had changed. “I don’t remember any protection going on. I do recall y’all forever teasing me and leaving me behind when you headed up into the mountains.”

He grinned. “That was part of the protection. Come on. You look cold. I’ll be giving you a ride out to your place.”

She followed him over to the SUV and waited while he opened the door for her. When they were settled inside and Joel veered out into traffic like a madman, Evie hung onto the strap over her head. “How did you know I was coming?”

“Mr. Stanley,” he said, and then slammed on the breaks for a red light. The vehicle skidded several feet. Joel winked. “That’s fun every time.”

She rolled her eyes. “How old are you?” she asked with disdain.

“Ah, come on, Evie. You used to squeal like a baby pig when I pulled one of my stunts. You loved every minute of it.”

“I have never in my life squealed like a pig. And I was twelve, thank you very much. Now I’m twenty-eight.” She crossed her arms over her chest. “You said my grandfather’s lawyer told you?”

“Yeah, nothing’s secret around here.” He smirked. “Well, almost nothing. Anyway, he said you would be here for your grandfather’s funeral and the reading afterward. I harassed him to tell me all the details and offered to go get you. Just so you know, when Dale and Evan heard about my luck, they were jealous as hell. He laid a hand alongside her cheek. “But you gotta get up pretty early in the morning to beat Joel at a good time.”

Evie wondered what he meant by almost nothing being secret. Did he have something to hide? She looked into his open, friendly face. No, Joel had always been the fun-loving one, like he said. He took risks with his life just for a laugh. She recalled his one goal when they were kids was to be old enough to hang out at the bar his father frequented, to drink and pick up women. With age, she hoped he’d raised his standards. That last statement made her wonder though.

“How is picking me up from the airport fun?” she asked.

“Have you seen your breasts? *Picking you up* are the operative words.”

Evie scowled. “You were always a jerk.”

Fifty miles later, they pulled off the paved highway and onto a familiar dirt road that hadn’t been improved since last she’d been here. The house, when it came into view, wasn’t too different either—just a big, square log cabin with a small porch and shaded overhanging. The land she knew stretched for nearly two thousand acres and had been used to raise cattle.

Just over the ridge was the beginning slope of the Laramie Mountains. Not a hundred yards was a creek, which lent the ranch its name.

“Here we are,” Joel announced, and threw the SUV into park. “Pebble Creek Ranch.”

Evie sighed and climbed out. She paused by the door, almost afraid to approach the house. Old, bitter memories rose inside her as she stared at the aging wood. Images of her mother crying, gripping her hand as they hurried off the porch—her grandfather throwing the screen door wide while he shouted behind them. Her mother was no good, he’d said. She’d shamed him and his family, he claimed. How pathetic that was, since he was the only one left after they were gone. She’d never known her father, since he died before she was born.

Joel’s hand came down on her shoulder, snapping her out of the painful recollections. “Hey, you there? Are you okay?”

She nodded. “Yes, I’m fine. I appreciate you bringing me out here, Joel. Thank you.”

He leaned against his door, arms folded across a powerful chest she suddenly found an interest in feeling against her breasts. “Oh no, I’m not going anywhere,” he told her. She prepared to tell him he was not coming in, knowing what was on his mind, but he pointed his chin toward the house. “Wanna see the reaction the guys have seeing you.”

As if on cue, the door to her grandfather’s house opened, and someone pushed the screen door wide. Only now did she realize a truck was parked nearby. A man stepped out onto the porch, followed by another. Both were muscular, easily outlined behind long-sleeved shirts. One was tall and lanky, the other a little shorter, but thick and built like a bull. Dane frowned like sunlight shined in his eyes, but the day was heavily overcast, snow clouds, she guessed. Evan, her gentle friend, was the man built like a bull but had a heart of gold.

Evan bounded off the steps first and charged over to her. Like Joel, he wrapped big arms around her and lifted her off her feet. Unlike her happy-go-lucky friend, Evan had no problem taking her lips in soft but hungry kiss. She felt his cock harden against her thigh before he set her on her feet. Evie blushed, she knew, to the roots of her mousy brown hair.

“So good to see you again, Evie,” Evan murmured as he held her face between huge palms.

“We were not on kissing terms back then,” she said, breathless.

Before Evan could respond, Dane elbowed him aside. She expected him to swoop her into another embrace, but he stopped a few feet away, fists on his hips. “So, you’re back.”

“For now,” she responded. Somehow, she was disappointed Dane didn’t want to hug her. “I’ll be leaving in a few days, three at the most, after everything is settled here. I don’t expect my grandfather left me anything, so it’s just a formality.”

Dane grunted. “You’re still bitter over that? Your grandfather was an ass. It’s been sixteen years. Get over it.”

Evie walked up to him and shoved a finger into his chest. “Excuse me, Dane Forsythe; everyone is not as hard-hearted as you are. You’re still the same. You didn’t give a damn as a fifteen-year-old, and you don’t care now.”

She moved to walk around him, but he sidestepped and blocked her path again. Evie glared up at him and was surprised when he wrapped an arm around her waist. Just like his closest buddies had done, who might as well have been his brothers, Dane pulled her to him. His embrace was rough, his expression angry, but he lowered his head until his face was less than an inch from hers. Evie dipped her head farther back, then gasped when Dane ran his nose along her neck, inhaling deeply.

A shiver passed through her, aligned with his hard body like she was. One of his thighs had worked its way between her legs, and she didn’t even know when it happened, or why she had so far let these men take liberties with her body. As a child, she’d followed them at first because there were no girls around her age, but then they were like her family, and it tore her heart out to have to leave their town, Slate Ridge, without them.

“W-What are you doing?” she croaked, annoyed that her voice didn’t come out stronger than it did. She did not want Dane to know how he affected her, or the others either.

He ignored her question and brushed her lips with his. “You’re home where you belong.”

The words were nothing like the exuberant “Welcome Home” she’d gotten from Joel. They were more of a rebuke, like she’d been a fool for leaving and a bigger one for taking so long to come back. Evie wiggled to get free of Dane, but he smacked her on the ass before he gave in and let her go. Joel whooped, and Evan said nothing. Embarrassed at the reaction her body had with Dane’s mild abuse of it, she hurried around him and jogged up to her grandfather’s cabin.

Inside, just as she expected, nothing had changed over the years. A wood burning stove occupied one area, and the whole rest of the space was the kitchen, the living area, and the bedroom. There were no inside walls to divide the house except for a narrow one separating the bathroom. Living here meant no privacy when she was little, which was why she’d spent most of her time outdoors with the guys.

“Brings back memories, doesn’t it?” Evan commented behind her. He rested a hand on her shoulder, and she covered it with her own.

“Bad ones.”

Joel brought in her single suitcase. “Evie, baby, this all you got? I thought citified folks liked to change clothes every few hours.”

She snorted. “Yeah, because there’s nothing else to do there.” Joel looked like he believed her, and she laughed. Cheyenne, down the road, was a decent-sized city. There was no reason for his misconception of larger ones, but Evie didn’t dwell on that silliness. “I told you I’m not staying long. There’s a dress for the funeral in the morning, and if I have enough time to change, a pair of jeans and a top while I conduct business with the lawyer. After that, I just have something to fly home in. That’s all I need.”

Evie shivered in the chill of the late afternoon while Evan stirred the fire in the stove. She figured he must have started it not too long ago, but the cold had already become deep-set in her bones. She missed Dallas. Dane walked over to her and jerked on the two sides of the small jacket she wore. “This isn’t warm enough. Did you bring a bigger coat?”

“I wasn’t—”

“I know, you’re not staying long,” he grumbled.

Joel joined them to slap Dane on the back. “Don’t mind old grouchy here. He missed you just as much as me and Evan. Fact is we always knew you were our mate, and when you left, Dane was the one ready to go after you.”

“Shut up, Joel,” Dane demanded.

Evie blinked in shock. What the hell was up with the way they said that? “Mate?” She remembered feeling attracted to all three, but she had figured one day one of them would make a move and ask her out, or she’d get up the nerve to choose one and go for him. In the end, she had waited too long.

Evan sucked his teeth. “She was too young and hum...uh...I mean, we couldn’t go after her then. We had to wait.” He took her hand, turned it over, and kissed her palm. “We had to wait until you came back. I always believed you would.”

Three sets of male eyes stared back at her as she looked around the room. Her heart pounded in her chest. She didn’t know them. She didn’t want to stay. She *wouldn’t* stay—no matter how drawn she was to these sexy men and the past they represented. A wave of loneliness swept over her, but she tamped it down and lowered her gaze to the dull, wooden floor.

Evan seemed to sense the turmoil in her mind. He stepped forward and engulfed her in his gentle hold. She was of average build for a woman, wearing a size twelve, but Evan made her feel tiny. That wasn’t a bad thing.

“Come to our ranch,” he offered. “It’s more modern than this. Besides, Christmas is just a few days away. You can’t go back to Dallas and spend it alone.”

She ignored the reference to the coming holiday and said instead, “Your ranch? Do you all live together now?”

Joel grinned. He stepped forward and bowed, looking silly in cowboy boots, jeans, and a Stetson. “You’re looking at entrepreneurs. A few years ago, me and them pooled our money and bought the neighboring ranch. If I do say so myself, we’re pretty good at raising cattle.” He shrugged and took on a humble expression, something which Joel was not. “At this

point, we're self-made. You know what that means, right, Evie? Means we can take care of you."

"Thank you very much, but I can take care of myself." For something to do, she hauled her suitcase onto the bed and unzipped it. "I will stay right here. I don't want to spend my night being mauled."

"Mauled!" Evan said in outrage.

"You heard her. Let's go," Dane commanded, and dragged the two men toward the door. "Joel will bring you dinner later, and then he will leave you in peace for the night." The warning glance he tossed his friend was no doubt meant to keep Joel in control, but Evie remembered that the minute Dane—the voice of reason—wasn't there, Joel was all about a good time.

Joel's sexy grin surfaced, paired with a mischievous glint in his eyes. "You got it. I'll be back soon, Evie. Feel free to slip into your nightie while I'm gone...or nothing."

She laughed and pushed him through the door before slamming it behind them. Something told her this short trip was going to be a lot more involved than she planned.

Chapter Two

Something woke Evie in the middle of the night. She sat up in bed listening, but the night was silent—almost too quiet. She pushed her thick blankets aside and shivered. The wood in the stove had burned low, and now the cabin, while not freezing, wasn't exactly what she was used to with central heating. When her bare feet hit the floor, she cringed, but tiptoed over to the window anyway. The curtains pulled back, she gasped. At some point after she'd gone to bed, it had snowed. At least two inches had piled up on what was already on the ground, and it hadn't stopped. Large flakes floated down, and with the addition of the moonlight casting shadows among the surrounding trees, the area seemed creepy.

On the rise a little ways away, something moved. Evie clutched the front of her nightgown. Heart hammering in her chest, she struggled to make out what it was, and then the thing shifted into view. Her breath fogged over the window, but she scrubbed at it quickly. By that time, the animal had disappeared. Had she really just seen a snow leopard? It wasn't unheard of around here, but so close to a home was rare, if ever.

Something thumped on the other side of the house, and she jumped. Her mouth went dry. After searching the small cabin, she located her grandfather's rifle and checked to be sure it was loaded. Dane had taught her to shoot one when they were kids, and she was pretty sure she remembered how.

Freezing cold air blew into the cabin when she opened the door, taking her breath away and almost knocking her over. She pointed the rifle in front of her and inched out onto the porch. By the time she got out there, clouds had rolled across the moon so that it was pitch black. Somewhere nearby, a big cat growled. Her mind hadn't been playing tricks on her.

When snow crunched, and she still couldn't see, all of Evie's bravado evaporated. She darted back into the cabin and slammed the door.

After tossing the gun aside, she raced to grab her phone and punched the speed dial for Evan. He had been the one to drop off her dinner earlier, not Joel, and he'd given her his number. The phone rang and rang until his voicemail picked up. Evie grunted in frustration.

"Evan, please call me. I'm a little freaked out. I saw a snow leopard outside. I know I'm safe in here, but that's not stopping me from imagining him breaking through the window and having me as a midnight snack. Call me!"

She jabbed a finger on the disconnect button and grabbed a blanket from the bed. With it wrapped around her, she crouched in the farthest corner from the window and waited. She must have fallen asleep because the next thing she knew, someone was knocking at the door, and she hadn't heard a vehicle drive up.

Evie hurried over to the door. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Evan. Sweetie, are you all right?"

She jerked the door open and flung herself into his arms. As usual, Evan swallowed her in his hold and walked them both into the cabin before he shut the door behind them. "Hey, hey, easy," he murmured. "Aw, sweetie, you're shaking."

She struggled to pull herself together. "That's more being frozen to the bone than being scared. I know I'm acting like a wuss. Maybe I've been gone too long."

He lifted her suddenly like she weighed nothing and deposited her onto the bed. "You wait here. I'll get the fire going again."

She watched as he bent in front of the stove and added more wood. The flames blazed to life, illuminating him. Evan looked like he'd thrown his clothes on in haste, and he wasn't wearing a coat. Guilt plagued her. The man must have been sound asleep when she called and rushed over here to calm her stupid fears. In all these years, she'd never heard of a snow leopard attacking, so why had she gotten so scared seeing it? Either way, she was happy he was with her, surprised even that she didn't want to be alone.

“Will you stay for a while?” she asked with her eyes lowered to her hands. “Just until I calm down and fall asleep.”

“I’ll stay all night if you want.”

Evie looked up to find him standing over her. She scooted aside to allow him room to sit down. The bed dipped with his solid weight, and she had to keep from drooling over him when he lifted an arm to smooth back damp hair. The life of a rancher could be grueling at times, but Evan’s body seemed made to bulk up in muscle at the slightest activity.

She reached for his hair and brushed a lock away from his blue eyes. “You should have worn a hat. You’ll catch your death out there in this weather.”

He grinned. “Trust me. I’ve spent more time outdoors than indoors in my life. If I haven’t succumbed to the elements up till now, I won’t.”

“I bet you think I’m an idiot for getting scared. You must have seen hundreds of wild animals up there in the mountains—you and the guys.”

It was his turn to touch her hair. He tangled his fingers in the curls, and she trembled when he brought the strands to his nose and inhaled. “I don’t think you’re an idiot.” His gaze locked with hers. “I think...I *know* I love you.”

Evie’s mouth dropped open. “You don’t even know me, Evan. I’ve been gone a long time.”

“I loved you from the moment I met you.” He stroked her cheek, and she found it hard not to turn her face into his. No one had loved her for many years, and she had to admit, thinking that he did felt nice. “I let you go back then without telling you how I felt, but I didn’t want this opportunity to pass.”

“I...”

“You don’t have to say anything.” He shrugged. “No obligation to say it back or even to acknowledge it. I wanted you to know.”

“I’m going to leave,” she whispered. “I can’t stay here.”

He leaned in and brushed her lips with his. Evie should push him away, tell him this wasn’t a good idea. She didn’t want to lead him on if he thought he felt something for her that she didn’t return. And yet, when Evan spanned her waist with his big hands and lifted her onto his lap,

being trapped between his massive biceps with her breasts flattened against his chest felt right.

“I’m not asking for anything more than tonight.” His eyes burned into her and set her body on fire. Without knowing what she would choose, he worked her nightie up over her head and tossed it on the floor. Evan caught her beneath the arms and leaned her away from him so he could examine her breasts. Evie shivered, but Evan seemed stunned.

“You don’t like them?” She brought her hands up to cover her nipples, angry and hurt at the same time. Plenty of men found her attractive. She’d had her fair share of lovers, and if this one didn’t like what he saw, then that was his problem.

“Don’t you dare, Evie.” He brushed her hands aside and plucked a thumb across her nipple. “I knew you would be beautiful as a woman, but I never imagined...let me taste you, Evie. *I have to.*”

His hunger took her by surprise. Evan looked almost desperate to take her, as if he’d been waiting a long time. In response to his desire and the fact that he was one of three of the hottest men she knew, her body temperature rose. What could it hurt to have a little fun after all? They were both adults. Evie climbed off Evan’s lap and crawled up the bed. She glanced over her shoulder to find his attention riveted to her ass.

When she was at the top of the bed, she flipped over and lay on her back. Spreading her legs, she ran a hand over her breast, paused to tease the nipple, and then continued on across her belly. At her apex, she stopped again. Evan’s gaze flickered from her hand to her eyes. Evie lifted one side of her mouth in a half smile. “If you’re not careful, you’ll release too soon, Evan.”

“Never.” He stood to shed his clothes and then climbed on the bed between her legs. “We have better control than that.”

“We?”

He didn’t answer, but grasped her thighs and jerked her down toward his hungry mouth. Evie felt wetness pooling down there in anticipation of his tongue. Would he eat like he loved the taste and the act, or would it be as some of the men she’d been with, like a service he performed in order to get her to go down on him. Not that she hadn’t had excellent lovers in

her past. She had, especially since she'd taken more lovers than she should to bed—all to fill that empty void that would never close.

Evan didn't answer her question. He was too busy burying his nose between her thighs, breathing deep. He groaned, or she thought he did. The sound was more like a cat's purr, made when it had gotten into the cream. Evie thought she might have been mistaken, but she couldn't concentrate on that thought because Evan's tongue made contact. The tip slithered over her clit, causing her muscles to contract and a zing of need to pierce her. The sensation was strong, but she wanted more. She raised her hips off the bed and grasped the back of his head. Pressing him down, she moved closer and watched as he stuck his tongue out again.

"Lick it," she pleaded. A shout left her when he did. Her clit swelled and stiffened. Evan pulled it between his lips and sucked unmercifully. Evie began pumping against his mouth and holding him to her. Her pleas were a mantra as he worked her with his mouth. When her bud could no longer hold out, her body exploded in orgasm. The intense pleasure shattered her control, and she lost all strength in her limbs. Her hands fell to her side, and her hips sank. Evan followed her down to the mattress, never stopping his onslaught for a second.

When her cream began to flow, he licked down her slit and scooped it up. Gently but with firmness, he shoved her legs wider so he could eat more. His thick long tongue shoved aside her folds, and he pressed deep. The wiggling movements sent chills over her spine. Evie was ready to come again.

She thrashed on the bed when Evan went after her sensitive clit a second time. Without thinking, she put a foot on his shoulder and pushed. He didn't move. She rolled to her belly and crawled away, but he reached out and caught hold of her ankle to pin her down. Evie whined, but Evan wasn't giving up what he had finally sampled. He nuzzled up from her calf to her thigh and then up across her ass. His tongue wet her quivering skin before he forced one of her legs up and spread her cheeks.

"Evan," she cried out, but he wouldn't be stopped, and if he didn't, she was going to come again. The pressure was so much she might yell loud enough for the entire county to hear. The tip of his tongue found her anus,

and he licked without reserve. Under her Evan pushed two fingers into her wet center. Evie couldn't hold back. While he thumped the heel of his hand against her pussy, he licked her anus. Her orgasm shattered her mind, and she screamed loud and long.

Even before she could come down off that insane high, Evan sat up. He jerked her body back, and his cock slid into her like it had found its home. Something sharp dug into her sides. She gasped, but almost immediately, the pain was gone. Evan spoke soothing words while he pounded into her with a cock that matched his thickly muscled body.

Lightheaded, yet drunk on Evan's expertise, she pushed hair from her face with a trembling hand. "Oh, hell, Evan, you're going to ruin me for every other man. You're so wide." No more intelligent words passed her lips. Her lover's arms were a vise around her waist sealing her to him. He drove in like a wild beast, punishing her for leaving Slate Ridge, but doing it in a way that made her feel like she'd grown addicted to him.

When he came, his seed seemed to burn her insides, laying claim to her in a way she didn't understand. Out of breath but sated, they lay flat on the bed with Evie beneath Evan. He pulled the covers up over them, staying right where he was. "I didn't hurt you?" he asked with concern coloring his tone.

"No."

"Good. Now sleep. We have the funeral in the morning." He kissed her hair and tightened his embrace. "I will stay with you the rest of the night to keep you safe."

Evie thought she felt much less afraid now, but she didn't want Evan to leave. Just a little longer, she mused as dreamland claimed her.

Chapter Three

Evie waited until Joel opened the door for her before she stepped out of his SUV. She paused to tug on the hemline of her black dress. Seeing other town residents arrive with respectful clothing on made her feel naked. And the fact that the day had turned out blistery cold with snow covering the ground made it worse. Her thigh skin burned on contact with the frigid air. Well, the sooner she got inside in some heat, the better. This would all be a thing of the past in a few hours.

Joel moved up behind her, so close his body brushed hers. “You look good enough to eat,” he whispered in her ear. Knowing her cheeks flushed pink more for what she and Evan had done last night than Joel’s inappropriate comment, she elbowed him in the ribs. He grunted, but laughed.

“Knock it off, Joel. This isn’t the time.” She started forward, but he grabbed her arm. “Joel, I mean it!” She glared at him.

“The street’s clear, but that walkway could use some work. Your feet will be frozen solid before you get to the door,” he pointed out. She was about to tell him he was right but that she had no choice, and kicked herself for not bringing warmer boots. Joel scooped her up into his arms, dislodging all arguments she’d been having with herself.

She wiggled in his arms. “Are you nuts? Put me down, Joel.”

He grinned and appeared to enjoy himself too damn much. “When it’s clear.”

“My ass...” she began, but as soon as she spoke the words, ready to explain to the idiot that her dress was too short to be carried this way, Dane and Evan fell into step just ahead and beside them, and blocked anyone from getting a view of her panties.

Dane, at her side, had no compunction about looking. His eyebrow rose, not lessening his habitual scowl in the least. "Red bikinis?"

"No one is supposed to be looking up there," she shot back.

Joel sucked his teeth. "Aw man, I thought you'd be a girl who wore a thong. Now that would be a great sight. I would have to bust any guy other than the three of us who got a look at that."

"She's got those," Evan tossed over his shoulder.

"Shut up, Evan!" she all but screamed.

"You would know, wouldn't you, Evan?" Joel teased. Evan didn't respond. Comprehension dawned about what Joel meant, and Evie began to beat at Joel's chest to get down. They were at the funeral home's cleared front walk anyway, so he set her on her feet. She didn't waste any time yanking on Evan's arm to pull him to a stop. He turned to face her with reluctance. Guilt reflected in his handsome face.

"You told them?" she demanded.

He cast an apologetic look. "I'm sorry, Evie. I didn't have to say anything. They smelled you all over me."

She put her hands on her hips and tapped her foot. "What the hell does that mean?"

"It means—"

"Shut up, Evan," Dane commanded, echoing her earlier words. "It's time to go in. We need to find a seat before it starts." His hard expression dared Evie to ignore him. If he hadn't been right, she would have. Dane Forsythe did not rule her like he seemed to with Evan and Joel.

She turned and flounced toward the entrance. Evan hurried to open the door for her, and Evie walked past, not saying a word to him. Inside, every eye turned her way, some with reproving glares, and others with sympathy. She held her head up, but her next step faltered a little. Dane moved beside her and put a hand at her lower back. Evan and Joel flanked them, and the four made their way down the aisle and found a seat near the front.

Evie would have preferred something farther back, but Dane had spurred her on with a whispered, "I'm sure you're not afraid of a few stares." The man knew how to piss her off at every turn.

Through the service with people standing up to share a few words of how great her grandfather was, Evie bit down on her lip and kept her silence. When the funeral director asked if she had a few words to share, she declined. Whispers broke out all around, but she didn't care. They would think what they wanted anyway. Ridiculous words of how she'd miss him or how he was a good grandfather were pointless. Everyone else had piled on their bullshit. She knew the truth of what that man had been like.

When the program ended, Joel stood up and reached across Evan to get to Evie. He popped her onto her feet. "Come on, honey, I'm starving. Let's go get something to eat."

"We'll all go," Dane said. A short while later, they were piled into a booth at their favorite restaurant. Evie couldn't remember going there, but Joel assured her they had the best food.

"Aside from my mama, of course," Joel told her as he flipped through the menu.

"Hm," Evan agreed. "Your mama does cook well. We need to take Evie down to see her one of these days."

Joel nodded. "Yeah, the old girl is getting up there, but that won't stop her from making enough food to feed all of Slate Ridge."

"I'm not staying," she interrupted before they could get too far in their plans for her life. "I told you, I'm leaving after I meet with my grandfather's lawyer. I see him this afternoon, and then I'm heading out tomorrow."

"Where are you spending Christmas?" Dane asked.

She shrugged, lowering her eyes to her own menu. "In Dallas." The truth was, she didn't really celebrate Christmas. Not because she didn't believe, but because it was too depressing. Every year nothing changed.

"Alone? Did you decorate?"

"Lay off her, Dane," Evan said. "She doesn't need the third degree from you. Besides, it's not like you were all that enthusiastic about decorating the ranch."

"That's because I intended to spend the holiday with Joel's family, as did you both. If you wanted to hang wreaths and act like five-year-olds

running around with mistletoe, that's your business. You can leave me out of it."

"For the record, that was Joel. He just wanted an excuse to kiss all the beautiful women down at Stinky's."

Evie remembered Stinky's and wasn't surprised that the bar was still around after so long. Men had to have their drinking holes, and the women wanted a place they could convince them to dance. Evie didn't examine the twinge of jealousy she felt knowing what Joel had been up to. The feeling was absurd since they'd never had a relationship, and they still didn't. Besides that, she'd just climbed out of bed that morning with Evan.

Dane was not distracted by the side conversation. His dark, almost black, eyes had never left her face. "You never answer my questions."

She sighed. "Yes, alone, and no, I didn't decorate. It's not that big of a deal. I don't have family in Dallas...or here now. I'm used to it, and I work a lot, so I can take some home with me. Not a problem."

Dane narrowed his eyes. He didn't have to say that her words displeased him. She saw it in the set of his broad shoulders and the anger flashing in his eyes. He pinched his lips together and stared at her long enough to make her squirm. Dane knew how to intimidate others, and Evie had always wondered what made him tick. What made him so angry? When she was twelve, Joel had been thirteen and Evan, fourteen, but Dane had been sixteen. He was already living on his own, but she never knew where. Every time she saw him, Dane was with the others, hanging out at Joel or Evan's house. No one had admitted what his home situation was like. Nobody even mentioned it.

She thought Dane would continue to question her about her holiday plans, but he changed tactics and threw her for a loop. "Why are you so afraid to stay here?"

Evie gasped. She was relieved the waitress came by to take their orders, and she pretended that took all of her attention. Dane wouldn't be put off. When the woman left, he reached across the table and grasped her hand. He tugged.

"Move, Evan. Let her sit over here," Dane told him.

Evan scowled, but he stood up, and not seeing any way to free herself beyond making a scene, she scooted out of the booth to take the seat opposite. Evan dropped into the space she'd just vacated. Dane pulled her close and put a hand under her chin to force her to look at him. Where she had thought he was a bully, she realized he cared. He had seen the hurt she tried to hide.

"Tell me about it," he coaxed in his gruff, deep voice.

Evie glanced at the other two men. They sat in silence. For once, Joel wasn't goofing around. He met her gaze and winked his encouragement. She sighed. "You may not know this, but my mother was pregnant when we left sixteen years ago. My grandfather never liked her. He said his son could do better and that my mother was just a disgusting whore." She clenched her hands into fists, but Dane worked the fingers of her left hand open and laced them with his own. She absorbed strength from their touch to continue the story.

"I guess she proved him right when she had an affair with a married man, but it was like she was cursed. My father died in that car accident, and her married lover ran when he found out she was pregnant. My grandfather would never have known the disgrace she'd brought on him if it wasn't for the man's wife coming down to Pebble Creek Ranch to accuse her."

Tears spilled down Evie's cheeks. In a deft movement, Dane twisted her around so her legs extended over the booth and he hoisted her onto his lap. She buried her face into his shoulder. He practically crushed her ribs as he held her and stroked her back. She felt the hands of the other two men when they reached out to add their own comfort. Now that she'd begun the confession of her family's sins, she couldn't stop.

"On some level, I understand why my grandfather would be shamed. I mean, because she couldn't keep her legs closed, she caused the destruction of a marriage and young kids to not have their father. I can only hope that the man later made amends and returned to his family." She sat up and wiped her nose with the napkin Evan handed her. "My mother insisted that the man loved her and that he never told her he was married. She met him in Cheyenne, and I think he lived there. We didn't know any

different than what he told her, but it all came out when his wife drove down to Slate Ridge to accuse my mother.

“That day, my grandfather hit the roof. He told my mother she had thirty days to get out of his house. She pleaded with him to let her stay and give her more time. She asked him to think about me since I was his son’s only child. That cold son of a bitch didn’t care about me. I wasn’t a boy, which would have made me at least useful. He said as it was, I’d probably turn out just as much of a whore as my mother. So, he threw us out.”

“That when you moved to Dallas?” Joel asked.

She shook her head. “No, we lived everywhere. My mother hustled to put food on our table and give us a place to stay. She got boyfriends who would support us for a little while, but once she started showing, they weren’t interested. Things got really bad, and all the time she wrote to my grandfather begging for a little bit of help. He told her to go to social services. She did. It helped, but...well, something went wrong, and she lost the baby at four and half months and soon after that she caught an infection she couldn’t shake and died. I think it was just a broken heart.”

Dane startled her with a kiss on the lips just as the waitress brought their food. The woman cast Evie a disapproving look, and she scrambled off of Dane’s lap. They all tucked into their food, Evie doing so just to keep them off her back, but her appetite was gone. Being here brought back too much heartache. It reminded her of the security she had lost and never found again no matter how much money she made in her job in Dallas. She didn’t belong here.

“So you see,” she announced to no one in particular, “I don’t belong here. I’m leaving tomorrow.”

Chapter Four

Evie caught a ride with Joel to her grandfather's lawyer's office, but first they had to stop at their ranch so the men could change. She'd already watched them in amusement as they fidgeted in their suits and yanked on their ties. These rugged cowboys were used to jeans that rode low on their narrow hips and cotton shirts that stretched with the flexing of their muscles.

She climbed out of the SUV and ambled over to where a ranch hand was working with a horse in a pen. She'd thought they only raised cattle, but maybe she'd heard wrong. With her elbows resting on the metal railing, she watched the man pat down the horse and then try to ride. Each time he got good and settled on the animal's back, it bucked and jerked so hard the man was thrown.

"That must hurt like hell," she muttered.

Maybe because she watched, the man grew frustrated and angry. He jerked hard on the bit in the horse's mouth. The poor beast whinnied in pain, trying to get away. Without thinking, Evie climbed up on the fence and shouted, "Stop it! You're hurting him, you dumb ass!"

The man whirled around in her direction. "Why don't you mind your own fucking business and let me do my job?"

"You're lousy at your job." She threw a leg over the rail, fully ready to go give him a piece of her mind and rescue the horse at the same time, but strong hands took hold of her and pulled her back. Unable to get away, she tumbled back onto a hard chest and looked up into Dane's eyes. Anger surged through her. "Is this how you start your horses, Dane? Because if it is, you're the worse kind of rancher there is."

His eyebrow flicked upward, and he didn't seem to be fazed by her insult. He looked instead to the ranch hand. "Lyle, you're fired. Get your stuff and get off my land before I beat you off of it."

Lyle's eyes widened. "You're going to take the word of that little—"

"Three seconds," Dane interrupted.

The man's lips thinned. He dropped the reins and stalked off in the opposite direction. Dane glanced over his shoulder and shouted for someone else. A man came walking around the bend behind the house, and when he saw Dane's gesture, he jogged over.

"What can I do for you, Dane?" the man asked.

Dane nodded to Lyle's retreating back. "See that he's off this ranch, and make sure someone packs his stuff and takes it to his sister's house. I don't want him back here. Got it?"

"Got it, boss." He shuffled off after the retreating figure. Evie turned back to Dane, ready to tell him how wrong she was, but he was already climbing over the fence. She watched in fascination at his different approach to the horse. The way he spoke in a low, calming voice with his hand outstretched, palm down showed he cared about the horse.

Skittish, the horse danced back several steps, but Dane didn't give up. He kept soothing him. Evie had never heard him speak that gently to a human being. Just hearing and watching him warmed her and drew her closer. Dane reached out to grasp the reins, and then he removed the bit. He rubbed the horse's muzzle and pulled a piece of carrot from his pocket. The vegetable disappeared in seconds.

"You're amazing," Evie commented. "I'm sorry I jumped to wrong conclusions."

Dane eyed her but didn't respond. He handed the task of returning the horse to his stall to someone else and walked around to the exit gate rather than climb over the fence. Evie wondered if he was still offended at what she said, but he met her on the other side and took her arm. "Come on. We'll be late if we don't leave now."

As if they'd received an inaudible call, Evan and Joel strolled out of the house and walked down to where she waited with Dane. Joel, his usual roguish self, whisked her away from Dane and twirled her around the

other side of the SUV to the passenger front seat. Before she could open the door, he pressed in close and whispered into her ear. “So, when are you going to give me what you gave to my buddy?”

She shivered. His hard thigh brushed against her ass, and she imagined his cock was just as solid. Evie drew in a shaky breath. Meeting a lawyer about her grandfather’s will was not the time for her to get all hot and wet. She tamped down feelings of desire and elbowed Joel in the stomach.

“Will you stop? What happened between Evan and me was...unexpected...and what’s more, he shouldn’t have told you.” Not giving him a chance to say more, she wrenched open the door and climbed inside. If she didn’t put space between them, she’d jump in his arms and demand he take her into the house. The fact that she still hadn’t separated her attraction to each of them into wanting just one was testament to her needing to leave before someone got hurt—especially Evan. But when she glanced over her shoulder at him in the back seat, the amusement she saw there knowing what Joel said to her didn’t match up to a man who’d seen another moving in on the woman he loved. She might never get these men as long as she lived.

They arrived at the lawyer’s office, and Evie hopped out of the vehicle expecting to wish the guys a nice day. They all piled out with her. She wrinkled her nose in confusion. “Where are you three going?”

Joel winked. “With you, honey. We can’t be away from you for more than a minute.”

She stepped back, holding her hands up. “You’ve got to be kidding.” Her foot hit the curb sooner than she thought, and she fell backward. Out of nowhere, Dane stood behind her and stopped her fall with his big body. He curved strong fingers around her waist and righted her before moving away.

“Do not listen to Joel,” he grunted. “We were named in the will, so we have no choice but to go.”

“And you were going to mention this when?” she asked, accusing him with her glare.

“We’re going to be late.”

She rolled her eyes and blew out a heavy breath. The man was impossible. Stomping around him, she headed toward the building. Evan reached the door before she did and opened it for her. At least he was always a gentleman. A memory of their time in bed flashed through her mind. Well, *almost* always, she amended.

A gentleman did not handle a woman the way Evan had with her in bed. Evie had never been so satisfied, and recalling it made her hot. She tried to pull her thoughts together, but it was no use. Evan's hand burned through the material at her lower back as he escorted her into the elevator. Her libido had always been high, and she'd never denied herself for any length of time. She needed a release like crazy.

"Evie?" Evan called out, and she realized they had arrived at the floor they needed. Soon they were sitting in her grandfather's solicitor's office listening to the reading of the will. Evie blinked at what she'd just heard.

"I'm sorry, can you repeat that?" she asked in a quiet voice.

The lawyer, Jay Stanley, who appeared to her like a snake—in all fairness, when she entered the office he looked like someone's pouch-bellied uncle, but that image had changed when she learned of her grandfather's last bit of cruelty before he died.

Mr. Stanley lowered his bifocals. "I can probably explain it little clearer, young lady. It basically means that your grandfather left the ranch, including the one thousand nine hundred acres to these three gentlemen. He stated to me that it made good business sense given that they own the ranch next door and that he believed you would sell the property anyway. He decided to remove the possibility of the land falling into the wrong hands."

"In other words, he didn't trust me to handle it," she muttered. Why had she even hoped that he would show her one last shred of feeling after all this time, after he had abandoned them? Tears sprang to her eyes, but she blinked them away. Evan, at her side, took her hand and squeezed it gently. That only made her emotions worse. She hated that they were all looking at her, waiting for her to pull herself together. Something crashed in the corner by the window where Joel was standing. Evie looked over there and found that he'd knocked over a coat rack.

He grinned. "Sorry. My bad."

Mr. Stanley frowned. "Mr. Miller, please be careful. Perhaps you want to join us over here?" he offered.

"Nope, I'm good." Joel met her gaze. She knew the immature idiot was just looking out for her, getting everyone to focus on him so she would have time to pull it together. Since it worked, Evie was grateful and silently thanked him.

Mr. Stanley turned back to her. "Now, miss, you should also be aware that your grandfather left you ten thousand dollars to spend any way you like. The rest of the money, I'm afraid, he's allocated to charity."

Evie pressed a hand to the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes. "You can't...he couldn't...I'm sorry." She stood up. "I can't deal with this."

She hurried to the door, flung it open, and ran down the hall. Taking a wrong turn, she ended up in an unoccupied area rather than back at the bank of elevators. Needing to calm down, she huddled in a quiet alcove, hidden from anyone who might come into this hallway.

Why had she even come? That dumb ass lawyer could have told her all this over the phone. He could have said there was nothing here for her and just sent her a check. Hell, for all she cared, he could keep the money. Ten thousand was nothing compared to what her grandfather could have given her. She had never wanted his money. She had wanted his acceptance and love, but he hadn't had a heart, and she didn't know why she'd spent her life looking for something that didn't exist.

When Evan was suddenly in front of her, she didn't question how he knew where to find her since she'd been muffling her sobs. She just threw herself into his arms and cried her eyes out. "Why?" she whispered. "Why did he bother? Why do I care? Maybe because I have no one."

"That's not true." He rubbed her back and held her close. "You have me, and Joel, and Dane. We love you, Evie. We always have." He leaned down and kissed her lips, then drew back. "It gets to me to see you cry. I could rip that old man's heart out for making you feel this way, and if you like, me and the guys can just turn over the ranch to you after all the paperwork is done. We don't give a rat's ass what that will said. Then you

can do whatever you want, sell or keep it. The place is probably valued at a little over a million, and that's just the land, not the cattle."

She couldn't believe what he was saying. They were willing to just hand her Pebble Creek Ranch for nothing? No, she didn't want it like that. Just thinking of it seemed spiteful and greedy. She'd feel like she was no better than her grandfather who cared about his standing in the community more than his family.

"No, it's okay," she said, her face buried in his chest. Breathing in his manly scent, something woodsy and wild, calmed her stormy emotions. Her old friends liked nothing more than to be outside all the time. Evie remembered thinking they were no different than the mountain animals they said they were visiting when they left her behind. *For my safety*, she thought. *Just another way to leave me.*

Only when Evan lifted her chin and nuzzled her lips with his did she realize she'd spoken out loud and he guessed what she meant. "We will never leave you. If we go into the mountains, I promise, we'll always come back for you."

The hurt in her heart right then was too much to bear. She couldn't believe his words, or pull herself together. Fresh tears streamed down her face. Evie tried pulling away from Evan, but he held on with an arm around her waist, sealing her to him. He ran his other hand along her hip and then between them.

"I have to calm you the only way I know how," he said.

She didn't know what he meant until he pushed her dress up and slid his hand into her panties. Evie's mouth fell open. Her tears halted in an instant, and her body heated up. Within seconds, she felt moisture pooling between her legs. "Evan, you shouldn't..."

"You need it. Don't fight me, Evie. Let me help you to feel better." He ran a finger along her slit, testing her wetness. When he found her ready, he pushed her folds apart, and his digit glided inside of her.

Evie sucked in a sharp breath. She grasped his hand to push him away, but what he was doing felt so good, she didn't want him to stop. Her head went back, and she was shocked when it impacted another chest. Evie cried out, but Joel's hand came up to cover her mouth. When he seemed

sure she wouldn't scream, he moved his hand down to her breast. A gentle squeeze and a pinch at her nipple made her moan.

Worried that Joel touching her this way would upset Evan, she opened her eyes to look at him, but he concentrated on stroking between her legs. This close, he must know Joel was behind her and running his hands all over her body, but he didn't care. The two of them together? Her pain was forgotten as Joel leaned to the side to grasp one of her legs. He raised it, which allowed Evan to push his fingers deeper. His palm pounded against her pussy, and she couldn't stop from crying out.

Joel tugged a few buttons open at her chest and pushed the material aside. He yanked her bra down and found her nipple. While he tweaked it, he covered her lips with his, effectively keeping her quiet. Evie shook from head to toe. Her core muscles tightened. She was going to come right here in this business establishment. Drunk with pleasure, she wrenched her mouth from Joel's after he began pushing his tongue between her lips.

"We should stop, Joel, Evan."

"Not until you come," Joel said. He grinned down at her. "Better hurry. I don't think Dane would approve if he found us."

Of course he had to add angering Dane to the danger of getting caught. She didn't want him to think badly of her. She wanted...Who was she fooling? She *needed* to come now! Evie rocked her hips and met each of Evan's thrusts. Now that his hand and her pussy were slick, each time they came together, the slap of flesh against flesh resounded in the hallway. It seemed too loud and too obvious what it was, but she couldn't hold on. Her climax was coming fast.

Joel trapped her head on his shoulder and covered her mouth with his cheek. She uttered a muffled scream, churning into Evan while pushing back against Joel's thigh. Joel hadn't stopped pinching her nipple. He tugged harder and plucked until she thought she'd lose her mind. And then, when she couldn't take it another second, her orgasm came crashing through her system, making her tremble and go weak.

Joel caught her when her knees sagged. Evan straightened her bra and blouse. A person's step nearby made her heart, which had begun to slow,

kick up again. All three of them looked around the wall of the alcove to find Dane standing there. Evie bit her lip in embarrassment.

“Here of all places?” he demanded. “While I took care of some last minute business?”

“I’m sorry, Dane,” she whispered. She moved out of the two men’s arms and stumbled a little way toward Dane.

“I’m not.” Joel chuckled. “It’s a real rush watching Evie come. Can’t wait for more.” He caught up with her and gave her a slap on the ass. Evie jumped and glared at him. Joel kept strolling by as if he had not a care in the world.

Evie and Evan followed more slowly, and they all headed down to the SUV. Evie half expected Dane to lecture them some more, but he sat sullen in the driver’s seat. Joel hadn’t argued when he took over his vehicle. When she slipped her shoes off and drew her knees up to her chin, Evie tucked her head down. One of the men stroked her hair.

“Hey, I know what you need, Evie,” Joel announced. “You need to have some fun. That’s how I always work out problems or shake loose what’s bothering me.”

Dane grunted. “Everyone isn’t as childish as you are, Joel.”

Ignoring him, Joel said, “I’m taking you down to Stinky’s tonight for some drinkin’ and dancin’, so get changed when we drop you off. I’ll pick you up at nine.”

She lifted her head. “Thanks, that sounds great, but I don’t have anything to wear.”

“You got those jeans, right?”

She nodded, doubtful.

“Honey, that’s all you need, and trust me, you will look mighty fine in them.”

Evan chimed in that Joel was right. All anyone ever wore at Stinky’s was a good pair of jeans and boots. That, he explained, was the perfect attire for two-stepping. Despite everything that had happened before the hall incident, Evie smiled.

“Okay, that sounds like fun, but I can’t stay out too late. I have a flight in the morning.”

The plans were set, and soon Dane dropped Evie off at her front door. To her surprise, it seemed like the most natural thing for her to kiss each of them on the lips and tell them she would see them later. When she came to Dane, she hesitated, but he grasped her chin. His kiss devoured her more than the other two and was more demanding. When he pulled back, she stared at him, blinking.

He faced forward in his seat. "Go."

She turned and scrambled out of the vehicle, warm from her toes to the roots of her hair. Never in a million years had she expected this kind of thing to happen when she came back to Slate Ridge, but the truth was, she wouldn't have missed it even with all the pain she'd suffered coming here.

Chapter Five

Joel glanced out of the back window of the house he shared with his two best friends. He estimated having enough time for a quick run in the woods before coming back to shower and go pick up Evie. He was determined that tonight he would be the one to claim Evie, and damn it, he couldn't wait. Watching Evan finger her in that hall had come close to making him come in his boxers. Her sweet moans had driven him to the brink.

Evie was beautiful with long, wavy brown hair and big blue eyes. Her body did things to him he could only ease by jerking off, and even that wasn't enough. From the moment he drove up to that terminal and saw her standing there waiting, he knew Dane had been right years ago. She was their mate. The hardest part of that was what he'd also said. Evie was human, and they would have to wait for her to grow up before they made her theirs.

When she left, he thought Evan would go over the deep end, and he'd wanted to join him, but Dane had assured them she would return. He was right, as usual. That was why they listened to him. He laughed. Most of the time. Dane was the level-headed one.

"Going for a run," he shouted to the others. They were in different parts of the house, but he knew they heard him because of their enhanced hearing. Joel bet they could smell his excitement and knew his heart raced to be free. All of the hands had left the grounds for the day, so Joel wasn't worried he'd get caught. They enforced strict rules around the ranch that allowed them to let their inner animal out as often as they needed to.

Joel shed his clothes, dropping them as he walked. Dane would ride his ass later about being a slob or some other insult, but right now, he

wasn't worried about it. Those trees and the feel of the snow beneath his feet was what called to him. He shifted as he ran out the back door. Muscles contorted and redistributed throughout his body. Hair grew where he had little to none—white hairs with black spots. His nose itched as if he needed to sneeze, and then it bumped out and whiskers grew.

He opened his mouth to laugh in glee, but the sound was more of a mewl. The vocal chords, too, went through a metamorphosis. He and his buddies couldn't speak in shifted form. Their communication was more the way they acted, an occasional growl, and just instinct. As snow leopards their desires were simple—run, hunt, play...not the complex options of man. That's what made it all the more of a head rush.

Joel bounded across the snow, the cold, hard-packed ground unyielding beneath his paws. As he ran, the terrain began a slow incline, and he knew he was now climbing the mountain. In spots the trees were thin patches, others thicker. He darted between them, challenging himself with accuracy of step and speed. A rabbit made the poor choice to leave its hole, and Joel chased it to another before he continued on.

When his lungs felt ready to burst, he slowed and topped a small peak. Glancing out at the valley below, he noted a distant light pinpointing a ranch. The sun had long since gone down, and the moon shone bright overhead. Joel tipped his nose in the air to catch a scent. He didn't have to, of course. Instinct told him he had traveled in the direction of Pebble Creek Ranch.

Down there was where Evie was, maybe bathing in preparation for their date. He imagined her naked skin, smooth and pale. His tail beat a slow tattoo against his leg, and he lowered his head, emitting a soft growl. One glimpse, he decided, and then he'd go back. So much for wanting to run, play, and hunt. Oh yeah, he thought, this was a mixture of playing and hunting. Having Evie would be fun, and he'd hunt for her until he got her.

Within minutes, he reached her porch and strolled on quiet pads over the aged wood. At the front door, he scratched once, but then stopped. He didn't want to scare her. After all, he wasn't a stray cat that she would let in and feed and hug. Mentally, he sighed and lamented for the first time over the ability he'd been born with.

After circling the entire cabin, he found a window with the curtain gapped enough for him to see into. His luck was in. Evie looked like she was just preparing everything for her bath. He watched as she laid clothes across the bed and rummaged in her bag to out toiletries. What bothered him was that her suitcase lay beside the smaller bag, and it sat open half-packed. She was still preparing to leave. *No, she can't leave us.*

He raised a paw to scratch at the glass when a familiar scent reached him. Turning, he wasn't surprised to see Dane in his leopard form just inside the line of trees. If Evie glanced out the window, she wouldn't see him. Joel knew what he wanted. They had agreed to keep to unpopulated areas to lower the risk of being seen and have humans think they were a threat. The last thing they needed was to be hunted down and shot. Centuries of snow leopard shifters had hidden their existence, Dane had once lectured him, and Joel Miller was not going to be the one to blow it. Tell that to Evan, who Joel was sure had come down here shifted the other night.

Joel decided to follow Dane, especially since, in just a couple hours, he'd be back in her presence. He planned to show her a good time tonight and convince her Slate Ridge was where she belonged.

After a hot shower, Joel pulled on a pair of black jeans and slipped his feet into boots. He found a decent black shirt to pull on and stuffed his favorite hat down over his head. Fifteen minutes later, he was headed out the door. "Later, guys, I'm going to fuck an angel."

"Joel!" Dane grumbled.

He cared about Evie a lot more than his words indicated, but he loved to piss Dane off. Joel laughed all the way to the SUV, jumped behind the wheel, and peeled out of their driveway. *Evie.* Anticipation hardened his cock. Joel would do everything in his power to make her laugh, or at the least smile. He knew, like him, the others had sensed her unhappiness. She held onto past hurts like a vise, but Joel would help her to have fun. That was his prescription for everything, but hell, it worked.

When Joel pulled up to the cabin, he was surprised Evie didn't wait for him to knock. She came bounding out of the house in skintight jeans. Under her jacket, which gapped open, she wore something silky and thin.

So thin, in fact, that when she climbed into the truck and slammed the door, he saw the imprint of her peaked nipples.

He whistled. "Like the top."

She rolled her eyes. "You would."

He half expected her to cover herself, but when she didn't and instead buckled up, he grinned. His beautiful mate was ready for fun. He'd always known she was perfect. Joel rested one hand on her thigh and held the steering wheel with the other as he headed for town. Each mile he ate up, Joel moved his hand higher. He kept thinking she'd smack the hell out of him, but she let him touch her. And since she wasn't going to stop him, Joel went all the way up. Her apex was hot as he cupped it through her jeans. In response, his cock grew harder, making his jeans tug too tight.

"Find what you were looking for?" she inquired.

He grunted. "Mm, yeah, just what I wanted." He glanced at her. "You seem a little more upbeat. Put that junk from earlier behind you?"

For a minute her lovely face clouded, but then she nodded. "For the time being. You always were the wild one of our bunch, and I'm counting on you to keep it that way—at least for the night. Can you do that?"

"Guaranteed."

Stinky's was in full swing with country music blaring from the speakers and people hooting and hollering along with it. The small dance floor was packed, as well as the bar. All along the walls folks leaned on high tables tossing back their drinks and chatting. Joel elbowed his way through the crowd, bringing Evie along with him. When they'd squeezed into a small spot at the bar, he ordered a couple of beers. He handed one to Evie and took a long drag on his own.

"So, you wanna dance?" he asked her.

Her eyebrows went up. "You dance?"

He laughed. "Why not? I know you ladies like to do it, and I figure, who doesn't know how to two-step, right?"

Her cheeks pinked, and he didn't think twice about leaning in and kissing her. He held the side of her face while he pushed his tongue between her lips. She tasted of his favorite brand of beer and something sweeter he guessed that was all Evie. After a few moments of exploring

her mouth, he raised his head, looking into her eyes. She blinked in confusion. He glanced away. Sometimes, when he got all worked up like he was now, his eyes leaked color. The human tint seemed to bleed away until he took on the snow leopard's shade of pale silver. He just hoped Evie attributed the change to the bar's lighting. They weren't ready to tell her the truth until she accepted that she belonged with them.

"I've never two-stepped before," she admitted.

He stared at her. "But you live in Dallas."

"And they only like country music or what?" She grinned. One goal met, he thought.

Joel took her bottle from her and set his down as well. Then he took her hand. "Come on. I'm going to show you how it's done." At the start of Easton Corbin's *Roll With It*, Joel swept Evie out on the floor. He grasped her around the waist and drew her close. "Let me lead you. Trust me."

Her eyes glowed while he guided her through the steps. Not for a second did they break eye contact, and he led her with one thigh pressed between hers. Joel knew she must feel his cock on her belly, but he didn't mind. Let her know what she did to him and get a hint of what to expect later. He rocked his hips, grinding closer. Evie's lips parted, and her head tilted back as they moved around the floor. The air circulating overhead stirred tendrils of her hair. Joel felt like he was taking a nosedive into the spell she cast on him. He struggled to keep his head on straight, but he dipped down instead and breathed in her scent.

"Evie, you mess up my head," he whispered in her ear. He, of course, heard his words clearly, but he couldn't be sure she did. Hungry for her, he nibbled her ear, at the same time dragging her closer. At that point, he didn't much care if she missed a step, or if he did. He was about to lose it on the dance floor. "I want to be inside you," he almost demanded.

Evie pulled back and studied his face. He didn't hide anything from her. If she could see his change, that was okay. Her expression didn't register shock or fear. Nearby, someone sent up a cheer, and another person gave an answering call. The music changed and grew faster. People spun around them, and Evie, all of a sudden laughing, pulled him along. They fell into a line dance, which he wasn't too good at. Evie learned from

other women and wiggled her hips and stomped just as they did. Joel watched her ass as she moved.

He tugged her against him, but she broke free and danced some more. Another guy came up with a look on his face like he would ask her to dance. Joel growled.

Evie held up her hand to his chest and smiled. "You wanted me to have fun. I'm having it, okay?"

He backed off, drifting to the side of the dance floor. This wasn't like him. He was usually the center of the fun, the first to yell and encourage others to do it. He couldn't take his eyes off Evie as she was handed from man to man with each song. Had they put their disgusting hands on her body, he'd have to kill, but they kept it clean. So he watched, arms folded over his chest, never wavering from his vigil. He felt like Dane, and it grated on his nerves.

"Hey, stranger," someone said beside him. He didn't have to look to know who it was, one of the local girls he'd messed around with a couple months ago. Dane had told him she was clingy and to choose another, but he didn't listen. He never did when it came to women.

"Hey, Shelby." He turned back to watching Evie.

Shelby turned to look in the direction he focused. "Who's she? Your new girl after you threw me aside?"

"Don't start. We've been done a while."

She pushed a deep rose lip out and arched her back. The white blouse she wore was cut so low, he was surprised her nipples weren't showing. Shelby was never well-endowed in that area, so he figured she did what she could. That attitude was what had drawn him to her. He knew she'd put out, which was what he had wanted. He'd known for years no one he would take to bed would be permanent. They were entertainment, mutually used to satisfy sexual urges, but Evie was the one he waited for.

"Aw, come on, Joel, don't be like that." Shelby pushed closer to him. She ran her long nails over his jeans, which used to turn him on. When she tried to grab for his cock, he caught her hands. She whined. "We had good times, Joel. I know you're needing it right now. You're so hard. I can suck you off right now. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Having temporarily lost sight of Evie during this conversation, he was surprised when she walked up behind Shelby. Tonight was a series of surprises from his mate when she shoved between him and Shelby and faced the other woman. She planted her hands on her hips and glared. “What do you think you’re doing? He’s with me.”

Shelby tilted her head. “Didn’t look like it.”

“Whether it looked like it or not, he is mine.”

Joel could only watch in awe as Evie placed a hand on his chest and ran it down toward his abs in the most animalistic claim he’d ever seen from a woman. If he didn’t know better, he’d think she, too, was a shifter, but he and the guys were sure she wasn’t. Perhaps the reason she behaved this way was because she’d slept with Evan, some kind of transference of instinct or whatever. Either way, they were drawing a crowd, and Joel knew from experience that crowds meant fights, and that was a bad idea.

He bent down and scooped Evie around her waist, his heart pumping with the excitement of the situation. He kissed her cheek. “Oh, honey, I didn’t know you cared so much. While it would be fun to watch two beautiful women fight over me, I think we’d better make our exit.”

“What?” Evie complained. “I’m just getting started.”

He whipped her over his shoulder and walked calmly toward the exit. Several men called out encouragement. Shelby shrieked, but he ignored her. He was sure before long she’d find some other guy to sink those clawlike fingernails into. Joel was more interested in sinking into Evie.

Chapter Six

Evie ran out ahead of Joel to the bar's parking lot with her hands over her head. She'd had one beer, so she couldn't blame the wildness running through her veins on alcohol. That moment when Joel took her out on the dance floor, she'd let go of all the hurt and the disappointment. She just danced. And when those other men asked her to dance, she started having a great time.

Then something came over her that shocked her even more. She'd just taken another man's hand to dance when she glanced in Joel's direction to see how he took it. As much fun as she'd been having, she missed being pressed up against his firm body. The sight of that woman, whose jean skirt showed too much leg in the dead of winter, had set Evie off. Joel, Evan, and Dane had every right to date whoever they wanted to, but in that moment, Evie wasn't giving Joel up to anyone else. She'd been ready to rip that girl apart and would have if Joel hadn't thrown her over his shoulder.

She reached Joel's SUV and opened the door, but he pushed it shut and turned her to face him. With his entire unyielding form, he pinned her to the side of the vehicle. His cock teased her belly with its hardness.

"What do you think you're doing?" she asked with no real protest.

"You know what I'm doing." Joel shrugged. "The understanding I got back there was that I belong to you, and if that's true, then I figure you're the one to go to when I have a need."

"A need, huh?" She smirked and stepped to the left, or tried to. He held her in place. "What kind of need is that?"

Joel leaned back enough so there was scarcely an inch between them and took her hand to place it on his cock. The shaft twitched under her

touch. Evie resisted squeezing it. Joel raised his eyebrows as if she should get what he meant without him having to say anything further.

“Maybe you should get that cheap girl from the bar to take care of it.” To her surprise, jealousy raised its ugly head, especially since she had the feeling Joel had been with her before. This was ridiculous. They were not teenagers stealing each other’s boyfriends. She glanced away. “You should take me home.”

With the additional space and maybe because Joel knew all the lightheartedness had suddenly drained out of her, she managed to turn her back to him to open the door. For the second time, Joel closed it.

“Did you hear what I said to you out on the dance floor?” he asked.

“Yes, but—”

He reached around her and pinched open the button on her pants. Evie gasped. His words had set her on fire. She’d felt close to letting him do what he wanted out there, knowing everyone was watching. The thought alone had taken her to the edge of sanity.

“Someone might see us,” she told him, looking around.

“Do you care?” He lowered her zipper, but didn’t go any further until she answered. Evie’s body was primed and ready to go. Her panties were soaked for all the moisture that had gathered. She arched back against him, pushing her ass into his thigh. Joel ran his hand along her hip and then bent his knees so she could feel what he had in his pants waiting for her decision.

“We should go to my place,” she suggested.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Joel put his hand inside her jeans and pushed past her thong. “Mm, so Evan was right. You do wear thongs. I love it, yet I would love it a whole lot more if you had nothing on in here. Better still if you had on a skirt.”

His fingers found their way to her clit, and he circled it with one finger. Evie panted. She curled her fingers on the chilled glass window. She’d freeze if she let Joel do what he wanted. *Correction, do what we both want.*

She glanced around again. Yes, they were in public in Stinky’s parking lot, but Joel had parked to the side where no street light shined. They were

cast in deep shadows. Someone might be able to see that they were there, but not what they were doing. The thrill of having sex so close to the bar where anyone could find out—she'd never thought that kind of thing appealed to her. The incident in the lawyer's hall should have cured any unknown desire for it, but maybe it ignited something new, something yet untapped.

Decision made, Evie moved to push her pants over her hips, but Joel stopped her. He replaced her hands with his and lowered her jeans. The chilly air gave her instant goose bumps, but when Joel pushed two fingers into her pussy, she forgot all about the cold. She covered his hands with hers and pushed his deeper. While he rhythmically stroked in and out of her, she tweaked her clit between two fingers and began to rub. Evie cried out, feeling the beginnings of an orgasm.

Not one to be selfish, she reached behind her and loosened Joel's pants. Biting her lip because she was so eager to get her fingers wrapped around him, she eased inside his boxers to find him solid as granite. Pulling him free, she turned her head and offered him her mouth. While they kissed, tongues exploring each other's mouths, Evie squeezed Joel in her palm and tugged on the domed head of his cock.

Joel groaned and sagged against her. His lips rested on her cheek like he'd lost some strength. Hot pants warmed her face. "If you don't stop that, I'm going to come in your hand."

"I thought you wanted to come." She gave him a wide-eyed look.

He shook his head, took one of her hands from her clit and the other from his cock to flatten them on the window. "I'm going to come in your mouth or in your pussy, or not at all." He jerked his pants down farther and pushed her thong aside. Evie extended up to her tiptoes, arching her ass toward him. He grinned and nodded. "Pussy it is."

From his first piercing, she cried out in ecstasy, a little too loudly. Evie pushed a hand to her mouth, but Joel wasn't hearing of it. He put it back on the window and shoved harder. She half shouted her pleasure a second time. Headlights flashed on a car turning into the parking lot. Thankful for the small miracle that the car had been coming from the opposite direction

so the lights didn't illuminate them, Evie tried to get a handle on herself. But it was too hard. Joel pumping deep inside of her was too good.

She pushed back on him while bracing herself. Their bodies slapped together, loud in the quiet of the night. Every now and then, someone opened the door of the bar, maybe to smoke outside or to cool down. Knowing they were so near skyrocketed her pleasure, and Joel seemed to get off on it too.

He shoved her blouse up and ran his hand roughly over her breast. While he pinched her nipple, making her sigh and drop her chin on her chest, he whipped them around. His ass pressed against the side of the SUV, and he plastered Evie to him. One hand locking her into place, he rammed his cock into her aching pussy. Evie felt like she was on display, like she'd been put on a stage in a darkened room with blinding lights in her eyes so she couldn't see the audience but they could see her. Only this situation was reverse. She could see the front of the bar, see a couple of people standing in the low light, but she was hidden in the darkness.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," she gasped out. Her core muscles contracted. Tension zinged along her belly and thighs. "Mm, I'm so close, Joel."

He lowered his hand to her pussy and parted his fingers so his cock slid between them on its journey up her passage. His palm teased her clit, and he pressed harder. She jerked. Joel bent his knees more and slammed upward. Evie screamed. Her climax roared throughout her body. Behind her, Joel found his release, and he yelled right along with her.

"Joel?" someone called out. "Is that you?"

He laughed. Evie clamped her lips together, and now that she'd come down from her sex high, embarrassment took the place of her pleasure. She elbowed out of Joel's arms and quickly yanked her pants up. "I need to get out of here right now," she demanded.

Still chuckling, Joel opened the door and helped her inside. Evie was glad he did since her legs were shaky. While they pulled out of the parking lot, she scooted down in the chair and covered her face. Joel hooted.

"You think it's funny," she shouted, "but I'm embarrassed. You've probably done that a million times with half the girls in town."

His eyebrows dropped, and she knew she had offended him. Evie opened her mouth to say she was sorry, but he cut her off. “I have never done that, actually, only with you. And contrary to the impression I give, I’m not some dumb fuck that don’t know anything other than sex and fun.”

“I’m sorry, Joel.” She put a hand on his arm. “I didn’t mean that.”

He was quiet for a moment and then said, “I know.” In the SUV’s dimly lit interior, he grinned and winked at her. Evie loved Joel’s personality from what she’d seen so far. Nothing kept him down, and there was often a smile on his face. He reached out and laced his fingers with hers. Her heartbeat quickened. What they had done outside the bar was incredible, but it was not nearly enough. She wondered if she could convince him to come into the cabin.

Evie turned to look out the window and noticed white flakes falling. “It’s snowing again.”

“It is winter.” She rolled her eyes at him. He shrugged. “I forgot you’re out of wood for the stove, and I didn’t pick up any. You can’t stay at the cabin, or you’ll freeze. You’ll have to come over to our ranch for the night.”

Evie peered at him, trying to gauge if he’d set it up this way. After all, how could he forget to get wood? The possibility that she could spend the rest of the night making love with Joel dissolved. With Dane and Evan in the house with them, she couldn’t see sneaking into Joel’s room. Evie stared up at the night sky previously filled with millions of stars. Now the view was blocked by heavy snow clouds. She hadn’t watched the news, but hoped this was just a sprinkling. Tomorrow was Christmas Eve. The flight out had been hard to secure last minute, but because of a death, space had been found. She had no plans for the holiday, and she didn’t even have a tree or any other decorations at home. Christmas had never mattered.

Joel turned into the drive leading to his house, and Evie caught her breath. From the top to the bottom, white Christmas lights lined the windows. Earlier when she was here she hadn’t noticed the wreaths in each of the windows. “Wow that looks pretty. Who did it?”

“Me and Evan,” Joel said. “It was special for you. Sir Grumpy didn’t want to, but we bullied him into it, of course.”

“You mean Dane?” She climbed out of the SUV when he pulled to a stop. “He didn’t want to decorate for me?”

Joel pulled her close. “Don’t be silly. He wanted to welcome you, but he’s a real scrooge. Said you might not want it.” Joel shook his head like he didn’t get turning down the excitement of the season and all that went with it. “We don’t usually go all out, but when we heard you were coming, we assumed you were staying through the holiday and we’d seduce you to spend it with us.”

She liked how her hip brushed his leg as they walked up to the front door. “In other words, the wood thing was a lie?”

Joel smirked. “I’ll never tell.”

“But y’all said you were spending the holiday with your parents.”

At last, Joel had the grace to flush, his handsome face turning red. “Another lie, I guess, but we won’t make a habit of it.”

“Uh-huh, why don’t I believe that?”

The front door opened, and Evan pulled Evie into his arms. He kissed her lips and, like Joel had done, he breathed deep as if he took in her scent. What was with them and the nose, she didn’t know. When Evan drew back, he cut an annoyed expression at Joel.

“I thought you were going to wait,” Evan said.

“That’s not what I said,” Joel quipped.

“Wait for what?” Evie glanced from one to the other of the men, but neither bothered to explain. They walked ahead of her down the hall and into a room on the left. Evie hurried to follow, and when she stepped into the room, she realized it was a living room. No doubt regarding the gender of the people living here, the walls were adorned with various pictures of cattle captured in landscapes and a deer head over the fireplace. The furniture was rustic and strong, nice but not fancy. A forest scene decorated the large rug covering most of the hardwood floor, and an afghan over the couch pictured a buck caught in a thicket.

Beside the raging fire was an enormous tree, which touched the high ceiling. In a chair on the opposite side sat Dane, Christmas decorations at

his feet. Someone had dumped him with the job of sorting bulbs, and he didn't appear to like it at all.

"Hello, Dane," she said, and he glanced up. His hot gaze swept her figure, and then he glared at Joel too. For some reason, it was like both Dane and Evan knew she'd had sex with Joel before they came back. "Do you have anywhere I can get cleaned up?" she asked, knowing her face was flaming.

"I'll show you where your room is," Evan offered.

"No, I will," Dane grumbled. "This decoration stuff is not my idea of fun."

"Do you even know the meaning of the word?" Joel teased. He swiped a cookie from the bowl sitting on the table and popped the entire thing into his mouth. Around noisy munching, he said, "Wait until you taste Paula's cooking. It's unmatched in all of Wyoming. Oh hell, she's off for the holiday. Well, do you know how to cook, Evie?"

She spun on her heel. "I'm not staying."

As Dane led her out of the room with a hand at her lower back, she thought she heard Joel say, "that's what you think," but she couldn't be sure. Her room was two doors down from the top of the stairs. Outside of it, Dane paused and pointed to another closed door. "That's Joel's room, and the one next to it, which is open, is Evan's."

She peered up and down the hall. "Where is your room?"

For a minute he just looked at her and then scratched the back of his head. "I'm downstairs."

Evie's eyebrows went up, but she didn't question him further. She let him open the door, and then she stepped inside. Evie knew this ranch hadn't been in any of their families before the three men bought it. Over the years, much about who was who and where they lived had slipped from her memory. Whoever had lived here previously must have had a very girly daughter. The room was done in various shades of pink, and a canopied bed dominated the center.

"Wow," she said, stopping to look around. "That's really girly."

“It’ll be re...” Dane began. “Uh, most of the other bedrooms don’t have furniture in them, and this bed seemed least likely to be uncomfortable. I can see that you are not into this type of thing.”

“Uh no.” She smiled. “Maybe if I were a pre-teen.” She thought back to climbing trees with the Dane and the others and ripping holes in her clothes as she chased after them wherever they went. “Okay, not even then.”

“If it makes you uncomfortable, we can find something else.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Dane stalked across the room and yanked at the gauzy material hanging from the canopy. The sound of ripping filled the room. Evie shrieked and rushed to him to pull his hand away. “I said it’s fine. You didn’t have to destroy it. Do you ever just chill out?”

They stood close together, Dane glaring at her and Evie glowering back. He reached out and rested his hand at her waist. She didn’t stop him, but neither did she move closer. Dane was the only one of the three she hadn’t slept with, and she was leaving tomorrow and not planning to return. Not that this was some kind of contest or a plan on her part to sleep with all three of her old friends. She’d never had more than one man at a time, never cheated on a lover.

Even as she thought these things, Evie knew not one of them felt “cheated” on. She’d gotten the impression that they expected it, like they had all planned to seduce her in their own way or—dare she think such a crazy idea—share her. The thought entering her mind shocked and scared Evie, but it excited her too. Three men at once? That was insane, wasn’t it?

“I’ll let you get changed,” Dane announced. “Then, if you’re not too tired, you can come downstairs and help those idiots finish decorating.”

“Isn’t it a little late to be putting up your tree?” she asked before he closed the door.

“Yes,” he grumped, and slammed it closed. Evie burst out laughing. Evan and Joel were going to drive poor Dane to drink if they hadn’t already.

She entered the adjoining bathroom and turned on the shower. Only after she'd returned to her room did she realize she had nothing to wear. The least Joel could have done was to let her pick up a few things from her cabin. She sighed and walked over to the dresser to pull open a drawer. Expecting to find it empty, she was surprised to see that several pairs of new jeans sat in there. When she lifted one, she found the tags still on them. Another drawer had blouses, and another was packed with thong panties, no bras. Evie laughed.

"Maybe I should be scared and think they're planning to kidnap me and keep me to satisfy their sexual needs." The feeling that arched down between her legs was decidedly not fear.

Among the undergarments, Evie located a long T-shirt she could use as a nightie. She pulled it out and tossed it across the bed with a lilac-colored lace thong. After her shower, she used the scented creams and lotions she found in the bathroom for her skin and then slipped into the T-shirt. Barefoot and feeling a little chilly, she hurried down to the living room. All conversation stopped when she appeared in the doorway. Three sets of eyes glued themselves to her legs. She was glad she'd shaved them.

Evan was the first to break the silence. "Come in, Evie. We have eggnog and cookies. Help yourself."

"Thanks," she said, feeling shy all of a sudden.

She strolled over, hiding her nerves, and poured a drink. Someone had spiked it, and it warmed her insides going down.

"That's bourbon whiskey and cognac," Evan said with pride. She assumed he had been the one to make it.

"Tastes good," she assured him, and took another sip. Soon, the alcohol helped loosen her up, and Evie sat amid a mountain of ribbons, balls, knickknacks, and garland, watching Joel act like an idiot in an effort to get her to laugh. She managed only a smile and was surprised at how sad she would be when they were no longer a part of her life.

"Be careful," she warned Joel just before he took a wrong step and fell backward to land on a box of glass bulbs. The pieces shattered beneath his palm, and blood began to soak the rug. Evie shrieked and jumped to her

feet. She rushed over to Joel to see how bad the damage was. “Oh no, we might need to get you to the hospital. This cut is deep.”

“No hospital!” the three men said at once.

Evie frowned. “This is not the time for acting macho. Your hand will need stitches.” She turned to Dane, knowing he would convince Joel to stop being a child.

“No,” Dane said. “If you want to help him, get it washed and bandaged. There’s a first aid kit in the kitchen. Joel will show you where.”

She stood there for a minute, staring at him, not believing that he could be this cold about his friend getting hurt. Evie turned her back on Dane and hurried to the kitchen with Joel. When she had run water on his wound and cleaned out as much glass as she could see, she used butterfly bandage strips to hold the skin together and then wrapped the entire hand in gauze.

“I can’t believe Dane would be so hard,” she said when she was done. “He acted like he didn’t care about you.”

“Don’t be so hard on him. He was just saying what I feel too—no hospitals.”

“What’s the big deal? I know you aren’t scared. The three of you strike me as not being afraid of anything.”

Joel grinned. He pulled her close and kissed her lips. “Thanks, Nurse Evie. Will you sponge bathe me later?”

She smacked his chest and stomped out of the kitchen. When they both arrived back in the living room, Evie avoided looking at Dane. She offered Evan her help in sweeping up the shards of glass.

“No way. You don’t have any shoes on. We would have to go to the hospital if you get cut. I don’t want you hurt.”

His concern warmed her. “Well, I’m sure I’d have to bleed almost to death if Dane had anything to say about it. I don’t think he has a heart.”

“Evie, stop it,” Evan snapped, startling her with his about face. “You don’t know what Dane has dealt with in his life. He—”

“Do not discuss what’s my business to share,” Dane growled, and Evan fell silent. Evie was about to announce she was going to bed and request a six a.m. ride to the airport when Dane touched her arm. She

hadn't even heard him move across the room. She glanced up into dark, troubled eyes. "Come sit by the fire."

"Is that an order?"

"Please...I will tell you what you should know about me."

Chapter Seven

Dane stared into the fire, his face a mask of indifference, yet Evie was sure that was the farthest from what he felt right now. While she waited for him to speak, Evie accepted a mug from Evan and watched him give another to Dane. Evan had made hot toddies. Evie sipped hers slowly.

“You may have noticed that I was never at my own house when we were kids,” Dane began. “I always stayed with Evan or Joel.” She nodded and remembered how, around Christmas time, while they were piled up with presents from their parents, Dane always concentrated on the things Joel’s mother bought him. She must have been spacey back then, but she never learned why. Maybe his parents had died.

“Did you lose your parents?” she asked, feeling insensitive just asking.

“Lose?” He sneered. “I guess, in a way, they lost me when I was fourteen. I woke up, and they were gone. No note, no explanation. Before they disappeared, life wasn’t that great. We never had a lot, and the ranch where we stayed wasn’t ours.”

Evie gasped.

“It turned out my dad was just the manager there. He’d lied to me about that, saying it was his. Since I spent most of my time rushing through my chores to get away from him and then went into the mountains with Joel and Evan, I never knew any different.”

Evie laid a hand on his arm, but when it didn’t seem like enough, she scooted closer on the thick rug and then climbed onto his lap. She half expected him to push her away, needing his space at the moment, but he twisted her around and pulled her back to his chest.

“Since my father had abandoned his position, the owner wasn’t too happy to keep his brat around. He kicked me off the property. So, that’s my childhood.”

Evie looked up at him above her head. “I’m so sorry. I guess we’re kind of the same. Both abandoned.” She smiled at him, hoping it would help soothe what she now realized was Dane’s way of dealing with the wounds his parents had inflicted.

“Yes,” Dane agreed.

He lifted her chin and kissed her. Evie shivered. Could she...*should* she sleep with him as she had the other two? It sounded so crazy, so slutty, but it wasn’t like that. Dane, Evan, and Joel meant a lot to her, much more than just sex.

“Only,” Dane continued, “I didn’t let what those bastards did to me drive me from the home I love.” When her eyebrows rose, he said, “Slate Ridge, the Laramie mountains, and my friends. That’s what’s important, Evie. But you’re still running away.”

“I’m not, I—”

He put a hand on her breast, making her gasp. “Tell me this isn’t what you want on a long term basis.”

She didn’t know what to say or what to feel. Of course she wanted him. That fact wasn’t something she denied. Staying was a whole other story. Dane teased her nipple until it hardened into a peak. He skimmed his fingers over the length of her T-shirt and found her throbbing heat underneath. Her eyelids fluttered closed until she forced them up. At some point, Dane had laid her flat on the rug and leaned over her.

“You think somehow you don’t deserve this thing that feels so right. *He* did that to you.” Dane shoved her T-shirt higher, exposing her flat belly. He kissed along her skin with each feathery touch exciting her more. When he tore her thong off and dropped it in shreds on the floor, Evie bit down on a scream. Dane’s anger was palpable, but she knew he wouldn’t hurt her. “He had no right to take you from us, and you have no right to stay away.”

His eyes blazed with emotion. Evie realized in that moment that she, too, had hurt Dane by leaving, even though he knew she had no choice.

Her heart ached for him, but the discovery was fleeting when Dane's fingers bit into her thighs as he lifted her up to his mouth. His movements rough and angry, he ate between her legs with violence. His tongue lashed out, shoveling deep inside her.

His desperate growl as he licked up her cream had her head spinning and her muscles quivering. Before she knew she was coming, the climax raged over her core, and she could do nothing but hang from Dane's hold. He didn't let up for a second but kept ravishing her, sucking her clit like it gave him life. Another orgasm built and then crashed over her. Evie whimpered. She wanted to grab for his hair and run her fingers through it, but she couldn't move. Her hands lay at her sides, useless against Dane's attack.

At last, he moved to her thighs and nipped them before climbing higher to kiss her belly. He dipped his tongue into her navel and slid a hand under her to massage her rear entrance. His gaze met hers, and then he raised her leg to smack her ass cheek. She yelped, but he soothed the pain away. He reared back on his heels, and not losing eye contact with her, he began to undress.

In her peripheral vision, Evie saw Joel and Evan still in the room, but neither had moved. They stood watching as Dane prepared to claim her like they had. She bit her lip, feeling the excitement rise. A third experience where others watched her having sex. She could come just knowing that, and still something inside missed the other two. Would they consider...? No, that was too much to hope for.

Naked, Dane paused as if he wanted her to inspect him. His long, lean form was all ripped muscle, defined and having not an inch of excess. Evie licked her lips. She couldn't wait to taste his smooth, bronze skin. Even though the weather had long since turned cold, his many hours outdoors had left a permanent golden tint to his skin. She imagined him working with his horses shirtless. The thought alone had her wet all over again.

Dane eyed her between her legs. He must have seen how his naked form worked her up. He leaned up on his knees to inch closer to her. That's when Evie's gaze dropped to his narrow waist and lower. She

couldn't hold back a groan. Dane's cock had grown out to at least eight inches. He wasn't as thick as Evan, but he had nothing to be ashamed of. The tip of his cock brushed against his lower stomach. Evie couldn't believe how badly she wanted it.

"Let me suck you," she pleaded.

He shook his head. "Not yet. Right now, I'm going to fuck you hard. There's no way I can wait for what I've been wanting for a long time. You tell me if it's too much."

Evie found it hard to drag in a breath. Dane basically warned her he was going to be rough. Desperate hungry need ravaged her body. She drew her knees to her chest and held her legs wide in anticipation, but Dane shook his head again.

"No, I'm too long. Feeling like I am right now, if I take you from the front, I'll hurt you." He smacked her ass. "Turn onto your side so I can have extra room to get in." Eyes wide in surprise, she turned, and Dane helped her get into position. He was ready, and waiting wasn't an option.

Dane didn't check to see if she was wet enough. All of them knew she was. He lifted one of her legs and pinned the other against the rug with one of his. Shifting his hips forward, he drove the head of his cock in. From the first piercing, Evie groaned in pleasure. Dane made sure that he'd buried himself to the hilt once before he picked up speed. With each slam of his cock into her, Evie cried out for more. She knew she'd be sore and bruised in the morning, but she didn't give a damn. She tried to arch her back and angle her ass a little, but Dane's strong hold was unyielding. He didn't allow her to move one inch. Grounding into her like an animal, he didn't let up. His intense stare never left her pussy while he watched his cock glide into her channel and out of it at lightning speed.

"Play with your clit," Dane demanded, and Evie complied. She reached in front of her and used her middle and ring finger to run a slow steady circle over her nub. Sparks of pleasure began to ignite. The dual activity of Dane's cock and her fingers made it hard to think, to do anything other than feel. The sensations were a little too much. She wanted it to stop or come to a head, but if it did, then it would be over. Not knowing what she desired, she lay there panting.

Dane banged into her body harder and faster. He held her ankle in a steel grip. His growl startled her, but she knew he was about to let go. The roar wasn't human, but then she must be delirious. His hot seed exploded into her pussy, and Evie came right along with him. His movements slowed, but continued until he calmed.

Grunting, Dane let her leg down and moved up behind her. His arms came around her and he kissed her neck. "Was it too much? Tell me if I hurt you too much, Evie?"

She tried wetting her throat, but her mouth was dry. "It hurt good," she croaked.

"Drink this." She opened her eyes to find Evan kneeling in front of her with a glass of water. Dane helped her sit up and held her chin and the glass while she drank. Being this cared for was amazing, and Evie didn't want the night to end.

When she finished, Evie thanked Evan with a smile and looked back at Dane. Her shyness had returned, especially since she'd come and her desire had calmed down. When she was hot and bothered, nothing embarrassed her about sex. But sitting here naked with three men was odd—exciting, but odd.

"So, Evie," Joel chirped when he walked over to join them on the rug. "Up for a little fun?"

She noticed Evan hadn't moved away when she finished with the water. He'd only set the glass aside and stayed where he was. She ran her tongue over her lips. "What kind of fun?"

"Three men at once," Joel said. "*Us*, in case it wasn't obvious."

She chuckled and looked around at all three of them. Her gaze stopped on Dane, and he raised his eyebrows. Dane being into it was a good sign, but what if there was jealousy or hard feelings later? These men were closer than brothers, and she didn't want to come between them.

"Have you all...um..." She didn't want to get into their business, and she certainly didn't want to know if this was nothing new to them. Believing she was the first woman they shared felt like she was special, but she needed to be sure. "I don't want to mess things up for y'all. You live together, and you're business partners."

“Evie.” Evan stroked her cheek and leaned in to kiss her. She returned his feather touch, lingering for a moment. “You make it right for us. We’re three loss kittens without you.”

She smirked. “You three are far from kittens.” She tapped a finger to her mouth. “I’d say you’re more like that snow leopard I dreamed I saw. Three beautiful, yet deadly, snow leopards.”

“You dreamed it?” Evan said.

“Well, I think I did. I mean, I felt like I was awake but maybe not. Remember that first night when I was so scared I called you?” she explained.

“Hm,” Joel murmured. “I thought that was something he cooked up to get into your panties. Although, it did work.”

“Joel,” Dane warned.

She glanced at Dane, but could read nothing from his expression. Whatever he warned Joel about, the subject was closed. Maybe they had argued about her sleeping with Evan. This was what she meant about coming between them. She wouldn’t.

Evie stood up. “I think I should go to bed. It’s late.” Her muscles ached satisfyingly, but then her pussy clenched because her movement had put it right in front of Dane’s mouth. She remembered how he’d eaten her, and her body heated up all over again.

“Is that what you want, Evie?” Evan asked, and she spun to face him, more to get away from Dane’s mouth than anything. That move landed her into the fire. Evan seemed determined to show her it wasn’t what she wanted. He leaned forward and ran his tongue along her slit. She squeaked. Evan had basically just licked a mixture of her come and Dane’s. None of the men seemed bothered by that.

Joel read her mind. “Anything licked from your luscious body is fine.”

“I’m not so...”

She would have said special, but Dane supplied, “You’re everything.”

Evie could think of nothing to say, but she didn’t need or want to because Evan hadn’t let up from licking her pussy. She moaned and held his head as he dipped his tongue deeper. She put her head back and was immediately claimed by Dane. He had stood up and covered her mouth

with his. Hearing shuffling nearby, Evie guessed Joel was shedding his clothes.

Dane pulled her from Evan and lifted her in his arms. He lowered her to the rug. He followed her down, his eyes locked on hers. "Don't leave."

Her heart stuttered in her chest. The words on her lips melted when Joel caught one of her nipples in his mouth. They were everywhere at once, pleasuring her. Dane kneaded her other nipple with one hand while playing with her clit with the other. Evie searched for Evan. She watched with longing while he tore out of his clothes. He couldn't kneel fast enough between her legs to resume eating her.

"I can't believe this," she murmured. "It feels so good. I never imagined it would be this way."

"This is the beginning," Dane assured her. "You still want to suck my cock?" He held it in his hand, stroking it. Evie was struck anew at how long he was. She'd never get it all into her mouth, but who cared—just so long as she got to taste him, to hear him groaning and know she was the cause.

Evie had scarcely gotten her mouth wrapped around Dane when she cried out on an orgasm. Excited, Joel left her nipple and pulled her leg higher. He joined Evan at her pussy. "Eat her cream while I suck her clit. She loves that, don't you, Evie honey?"

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes, do it now."

She clutched Dane's cock in her palm, keeping it at her lips while she stroked it and convulsed and moaned because Joel sucked her clit, and Evan hadn't removed his tongue from inside her slit. Two down there at once made her come again fast on the heels of the previous explosion. She wondered how many times she'd come with Dane earlier, but then it didn't matter. She wanted to come lots more with all of them.

When her body calmed down a little, she sucked Dane's shaft into her mouth. She worked his length as deep as she could take it and then pulled it out. Licking along the sides, she gave him tiny nips, enough to sting but not too hard so she didn't break his skin or hurt him. Dane swore and tangled his fingers in her hair. He tugged her closer, but she held off.

“Easy, baby. I’m going to get you there.” She looked up at him while she worked her way down to his balls. Dane’s eyes widened when she took one between her lips and lightly sucked. She had to pause when Joel pushed two fingers into her pussy. Arching, she began to push up to him so they’d pump together, and then she swallowed Dane’s cock.

Joel grabbed a throw pillow and put it beneath her ass. He used his come coated fingers and rubbed them across her anus. Evie shivered. She knew what was coming. While she sucked harder on Dane, Joel pulled her legs higher to allow Evan to begin working two fingers into her ass. She almost howled with sheer bliss running through her body. Joel’s fingers in her pussy, Evan’s in her ass, and Dane’s cock in her mouth.

But her men were not even close to finishing. When the muscles in her rear were relaxed enough, Joel held her up while Evan moved the pillow and positioned himself under her. Slowly, he worked his cock into her tight hole. Evie collapsed on his chest for a minute, unable to do anything more than let him ease his way in.

“Careful,” Dane commanded. He rested a heavy hand on her belly, watching as Evan pushed farther in. Evan’s shaft made her feel so full she almost couldn’t stand it. But Joel added to the fire by beginning to lick and suck on her clit. He lay down at her side, his head opposite hers. She could reach his cock, so she took hold of it to squeeze and stroke while she sucked Dane.

Evie let go of Joel and tapped at his ass. He took the signal and slid still closer. Now she could guide both men to her mouth, and she alternated between sucking one and then the other. All the time, Evan hadn’t stopped pumping into her ass, and Joel licked her as if she were his late night snack. He seemed ready to burst if his balls were any indication. When he pulled away from Evie and sat up, a grin spread across his sexy lips. “I think it’s time to give our little Evie a lot more than she was expecting.”

Her mouth opened, but she didn’t get a word to pass her lips before Joel flipped around and straddled her. Evan paused, resting on his elbows and kept his cock pushed deep in her ass. Joel, now above her, pushed her legs wider. Evie felt faint. They were going to be in her at the same time.

She licked her lips, ready for it, but scared. Two at once. She moaned thinking about it. Her fingers jerked around Dane's cock. He leaned down and stroked her breast, pinching a nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

"Calm down. You'll like it," Dane told her.

She stared up at him, and their eyes locked while Joel pushed into her. Evie clenched her jaw. Both of them stuffed into her was tight. She didn't have room, and yet her walls stretched. The pleasure made her lightheaded. She cried out, falling backward against Evan. Joel took his time to be sure she could take him without pain, but she knew he couldn't wait to start pumping faster.

Dane pulled himself from her hand, and he laid down to kiss her. He slid his tongue into her mouth and held her face between large, rough hands. Hungry kisses and nips at her lips made her tremble. When she needed to catch a breath, he seemed to sense it and moved to her cheek, then down beside her ear. "Take all of your lovers," he commanded. "Take every inch and please them."

Dane's words were like permission for Joel to take his movements to another level. He pumped all the way into her and withdrew until the tip of his cock barely spread her folds. Then, he ground in faster, in and out, over and over. Evan followed Joel's cue. He increased his speed once again.

Now Evie couldn't keep still. She writhed and screamed under Joel and above Evan. Their bodies slapped together from the front to the back. The men grunted their pleasure, their eyes locked on the movements of their cocks piercing her pussy. Dane went back to her nipple. His sucking coupled with what Evan and Joel were doing to her set Evie off. Her orgasm raged throughout her core. Wave after wave of bliss rolled over her until she shivered and moaned.

When she was done, Dane sat up to watch Evan and Joel finish. Evie stared at Joel as he leaned on his hands at her sides. His teeth were bared, clenched together. She thought they were sharper than she remembered, but maybe exhaustion had taken hold of her. Before she could study him

closer, he dropped his chin to his chest, biting out, "I'm coming. Evie, honey, I'm coming!"

Evan under her had dropped his head back, and Evie thought he was close as well. She squeezed Dane's cock in her hand and closed her eyes. Another climax came on her having watched her lovers. Dane clenched his jaw as she stroked him from the base to the tip. Their mouths met, and finally, the shouts exploded, filling the room. All three men had reached their release.

Chapter Eight

Evie woke the next morning with a heavy heart. She sat up and winced. Her body was so sore, and there were bruises in various places. Sliding carefully to the edge of the bed, she thought about having to leave this morning. With that came the realization that the sun had well and fully risen. Beams of light streamed through the curtains at the window.

“Oh damn, I’m going to miss my flight if I don’t hurry.”

She stood, but then had to catch herself on the nightstand, waiting for strength to return to her limbs. When it did, she stumbled over to the window and pulled the curtains aside. Her eyes widened at the white world. Overnight, the snow had not let up. In fact, there had to be a good foot on the ground.

Her bedroom door burst open and banged the wall. “Happy Christmas, Evie! Rise and shine, sleepy head,” Joel announced with too much cheer.

Evie didn’t cover her nakedness, although she did feel exposed. Joel had no such limitations. He wore an apron around his waist, but it had been twisted to the side to reveal his goods. He stood there in the doorway carrying a tray heavily laden with food.

“What time is it?” Evie asked, for the moment too achy to go back to the nightstand to check her cell phone.

“It’s time for your breakfast.” Joel set the tray on the bed and patted the rumpled sheets. She didn’t move. Her lack of perkiness didn’t dim his attitude one bit. “You’ll need your strength for when the others get up. We’re going out to play in the snow. Of course, we’ll have to twist Dane’s arm, but I’m sure you can convince him.”

She thought she could—if she had that kind of time. “Joel...”

“It’s eleven-thirty,” he said with casual ease. At her exclamation, he continued. “The time doesn’t matter since the airport is closed. No flights in or out today. Now, come and eat. I’m not as good as Paula or Evan, but I think I’m a decent cook.”

Evie didn’t see the need to argue since she wouldn’t be able to go anywhere, and besides that, the weight that had settled on her chest since waking lifted. If she was willing to examine her heart, she would probably come to the conclusion that her mood improved knowing she couldn’t leave the others. *My men.*

All three of them. Could they really be hers? Did they mean for this to be forever, or at least long term? What would people say?

Joel must have gotten tired of waiting for her to come to him. He stood up, marched across the room, and swept Evie into his arms. He settled her on the bed and covered her with a sheet before placing the tray over her lap. “Now eat before I have to spank you,” he instructed.

“That might not be such a bad idea.”

Evie glanced up to find Dane standing in the doorway. He would be the one to want to spank her, and she wasn’t against it. An arrow of desire zipped down between her legs. She squeezed them together and looked back at her food. “I think you all have worn me out. We went half the night unless you have forgotten, and while I have a huge appetite for sex, three men at once is a lot.”

“That’s why you need to eat,” Joel explained, and he broke off a small bit of toast, piled it with a bite of egg and sausage, and then held it toward her lips. Evie obediently opened her mouth and then chewed with enjoyment. At her tiny moans of delight, Joel’s cock came to life. He growled. “Less talk, more eating.”

Evie laughed.

When Evan joined them, the three men sat on her bed, each taking turns feeding Evie and watching her moan while she licked butter from their fingers. She’d never felt so cherished, so desired. After they were finished with the meal, Dane carried her to a bath in his room that Evan had prepared with scented salts and something to soothe her aching muscles.

“I think you three just want to touch me,” she told them when they each took up body wash and squeezed some into their palms. “It has nothing to do with massaging my muscles.”

“Well, we do need our payment for services rendered,” Joel said with a wink. “Now relax and open your legs.”

“Joel,” Dane grumbled.

Joel laughed. Evan bent to begin massaging her thigh. “Don’t worry, Evie. We’ll take care of you. We don’t want you to be in pain because of us. Trust me, it will feel good.” The kindness in his eyes got to her. She settled back in the oversized tub and then jerked up.

“What about your cut, Joel? The salts will irritate it.” She grabbed for his hand before he realized what she was asking about, and Evie shoved the gauze aside. She gaped at the perfect palm, whole as if he’d never been injured. Some time during the night or their rough activities, the butterfly bandage had come off. “I don’t understand. How could it heal like that?”

Evie looked into Joel’s face, but his gaze skittered away, just as Dane and Evan’s did. There was something they weren’t telling her. She waited in annoyance for them to share. They were not getting away with keeping secrets.

“If you want this to work...whatever *this* is...you won’t lie to me,” she whispered.

Three gasps pierced the silence.

“Evie,” Dane said, “are you sure?”

“No, actually. I’m not.” She scowled at him. “You have a secret, and I don’t appreciate it.”

“Let us get you cleaned up and feeling better,” Dane responded. “We’ll go out in the snow like this five-year-old wants.” He hooked a thumb in Joel’s direction. “I promise the day will not end before we tell you everything. Is it a deal?”

What choice did she have? “Okay, fine, but if you don’t, I’m heading out on the next available flight, and you’ll never hear from me again. That I promise *you*.”

Joel shaped snow into a ball. With a grin spreading across his face, he snuck up behind Evie ready to pounce. When he lifted his arm, before he could let loose his attack, a hand came down, and cold snow showered his head and face. As if he'd been hit by a truck, a force came from behind and shoved him to the ground. By the time he sat up and spit snow from his frozen lips, Evan had Evie by the hand, and the two of them were running away.

"You're going to pay for that, Evan," he shouted, and ran off after them. Like it always happened even during the most innocent jogs, the animal inside raised its interest, thinking this was a perfect time for him to shift and run on all fours. Joel had to beat down the desire. They had agreed to tell Evie about them later after dinner. "Easy, Joel, you'll get all the running out you want when she knows."

He topped a hill and found the three others waiting for him. Dane held a massive sled, wide and long enough for all of them to ride. Joel whooped. "Now you're talking. I call shotgun behind Evie."

His buddies grunted. Evan sat in front, and Evie dropped down behind him with her arms curved around his waist. Joel moved behind her, scooting close and hating that too much material kept him from feeling her soft body against his. No matter, soon he'd have her under him again. He couldn't wait, and when they'd helped her to become used to being with them, they'd have her as often as they liked. Life was perfect.

When Dane was positioned behind him, the four of them propelled the sled ahead, and over the ridge they went. Evie let go of Evan and raised her hands, yelling and laughing. Joel was glad to see she'd let go of the pain she had brought back with her.

"Let's go again," Evie said, and ran ahead up the hill. Joel paused beside Evan and Dane.

"Have you noticed?" Evan asked them.

Dane nodded. "Yeah, she's having fun. That doesn't mean she's not hurting inside anymore, so we have to stay with her. Eventually, she'll let it go for good. The next challenge is us telling her the truth about what we are."

“Think she’ll run?” Joel asked. He knew none of them could deal with it if she left again, least of all Dane, but he wouldn’t point that out. Dane didn’t take to hearing about any weakness in himself. The aggression he showed when his abandonment history had been brought up was proof enough of that fact.

“No,” Dane affirmed. “She might not know it yet—or maybe she does—but she loves us. Right now, she can’t imagine herself without us, and I’m counting on that. She’ll accept us for what we are.”

“Well, since you put it that way...” Joel said, and began stripping.

“Stop, Joel,” Evan yelled, but Joel prided himself on getting out of his clothes in seconds. Moments later, he was shifted into his big cat form and charging after Evie up the hill. He was just about to pounce and set to licking her beautiful face when Dane, also in cat form, throttled him.

Joel growled, and the two of them tumbled together in the snow. Evan joined the fight as a leopard as well, and they would have gone on trying to best each other if Evie’s small scream didn’t stop them cold. Joel unlocked his jaws from around Dane’s shoulder and glanced up. He knew just how much to bite down to cause pain without injuring his buddy, but Evie must think they were out of control wild animals ready to attack her after they finished with each other.

He took a few tentative steps toward her, hating the fear in her wide eyes. He was too impulsive and shouldn’t have done it this way. The last thing he wanted was to frighten her. *Evie, honey, don’t be scared. I’d never hurt you.* His thought came out in a rough mewl that didn’t make things better. She pressed a hand to her throat and stumbled backward. When she fell to the ground, Joel started forward again, but Dane blocked his path. The glare he turned on Joel told him not to make another move.

“Three of you,” she whispered, her voice hoarse and trembling. “Three like...” Her eyes grew wider, and she scanned the area as if she looked for them in their human forms. “That’s impossible, but I feel like...No, I must be crazy.”

Dane shifted back and hurried over to her. “It’s okay. Don’t be afraid, Evie.” He scooped her into his arms. She fought him, pounding on his shoulders and wiggling in his grasp. Joel could do nothing but follow

behind Dane as he carried Evie back to the ranch, and Evan went to gather their clothes.

* * * *

Evie hovered on the edge of her seat with her hands wrapped around a mug of hot chocolate. “So let me get this clear in my mind,” she said, even though she was pretty sure it would take a long time for her to grasp what they told her—hell, what she’d seen with her own eyes. “You’re all three snow leopard shape-shifters, and you were born that way?”

“Yes,” Dane answered. “Evan and Joel have the gene in their bloodline, although it is extremely rare, showing up every few centuries. I don’t know about my family, but I assume it’s the same.”

Evie tried to figure out what this all meant for her. She’d come to the conclusion earlier that she couldn’t leave them, and if they were willing, she didn’t mind seeing where this crazy relationship could go, but shifting...not being human...was a whole other issue. “You’re not human,” she repeated, unable to process the truth. “Is that why you don’t fight over which one I’ll be with because you don’t live by the same laws?”

Evan took her hand and held it firm in his when Evie seemed ready to bolt. “We live by the same laws. The only difference is we can change our form.”

“Any form?”

“No, just snow leopards. Now you know why we love the outdoors and the cold doesn’t bother us much.” Evan hesitated, glanced at Dane and then Joel. Evie wondered what that look meant, but then she knew when he spoke next. “Another difference is that we are fated for a particular mate. We’ve all known that. I don’t know how we knew. We just did, and we knew who it was from the first time we laid eyes on her.”

“Oh.” Evie was still scared, but something else welled inside of her. She didn’t yet want to identify it. “You don’t fight because you each believe that I am destined to be with all three of you?”

“Something like that,” Joel chipped in. “And we sealed it by having sex with you.” His eyes flashed with lust. Evie didn’t think he ever turned it off. He just resisted the impulse to give her time to rest.

“Made love,” Evan corrected.

Evie had learned right from the start, he was the most sensitive to her feelings, Joel all about lifting her mood with fun, and Dane, what did he do? She glanced in his direction. After he brought her into the house, he’d gone to stand on the other side of the room. All three men were still naked and displayed no embarrassment about it. Evie felt overdressed in comparison.

Her gaze met Dane’s. He was hard, even rude sometimes, but she’d seen gentleness in him too, like last night when he told the others not to hurt her, and when he had carried her in a few moments ago. Right now, his fists were clenched at his sides. Evie knew his patience with her questions had long gone, but he seemed to be fighting with something else. When his cock grew out and hardened, arching up toward his belly, he turned his back on her. *He wants to claim me again*, she thought with shock.

Just knowing that fact made her hot, but Evie wasn’t sure about all this. Maybe she was in over her head. Maybe they needed a woman like them who was not human and could change as they could. Evie would never be able to run through the trees like they could and go up into the mountains for days at a time without camping gear. She remembered now they loved to do that, to go away, and they never took her. The loneliness that memory brought with it choked her up.

“I can’t possibly be a right fit for you,” she said.

“Aw, my love, you are a perfect fit,” Evan told her, and brushed a hand along her cheek. Evie shivered at his touch. At least she knew she was still attracted to them. Being part animal, or however it worked, hadn’t changed that fact.

Dane pounded a fist on the mantel where he stood. All eyes focused on him. He gritted his teeth and clenched a hand at his side. “Whether you are a right fit or not doesn’t matter. You belong to us.”

Her mouth fell open, and she was about to tell him to go fuck himself, but she didn't get a chance. He continued.

"And we belong to you." He walked across to her and caught her beneath the chin. He lifted her head to make her meet his hot stare. "It's too late for you to run away. We've bonded together. What you need to do now is to push past the fears and embrace what you've found. Three men who would die for you, who love you very much."

She gasped. His tone was harsh, but his words were a balm to her soul. "Dane."

He put the head of his cock to her lips and swirled it around a little. Precome coated her lips, and she licked it off. "Please me, Evie," he commanded. She didn't hesitate to open her mouth and slid it along his length. When she leaned back, pulling on him as she went, he groaned. "Good girl."

Dane nodded to the other two men, and Joel and Evan moved to help her to undress. Evie couldn't wait. She was going to have them again, all at once. Her pussy was already soaking wet, and she feasted her eyes on their erect cocks, waiting for her mouth, her pussy, and her ass. She whimpered, reaching for them, stroking hardened abs as she squirmed in anticipation on the couch.

When the last article of clothing hit the floor, Evan picked Evie up and slipped under her. He reached between her legs and pushed a finger inside of her wet heat. She arched her hips, pumping against his hand. He added another finger and worked deeper. Evie rested her heels on his thighs and placed her head on his shoulder, but Dane was having none of that. He wanted her mouth's attention on his stiff rod.

When Dane tapped her lips, Evie opened her eyes and looked up at him. He placed a knee on the couch beside Evan and leaned in. "You forgot something?"

"Yes," she breathed, loving how forceful he was, so unlike the other two. Each of her lovers had a different personality and appealed to her in their own way. Evie waited until Evan had raised her up so that Joel could coat her ass with her own cream, flowing freely down her channel. When she was ready, he brought her slowly down on his cock. She shuddered as

he stretched her, and she was surprised that there was no pain at all—just explosive pleasure.

With her legs wide open and Evan moving the two of them in a steady rhythm, Evie concentrated on Dane's cock. She stroked him from base to tip and squeezed each time she reached the domed head. When she sucked his cock into her mouth, Dane hissed and knotted his fingers in her hair. He drove her forward, pushing gently until she took as much of his length as she could.

"Hey, I need some of that," Joel called out.

Evie didn't let go of Dane's cock, but she held out her hand to Joel. While he positioned himself between her legs, Evan scooted them close to the edge of the couch so they would be at the right angle for Joel's entrance into her pussy. That fullness was coming, Evie thought with excitement. She squirmed in expectation.

Joel lay on top of her and pushed his cock deep inside. Evie moaned around Dane in her mouth. She sucked harder, making him growl, and then Joel pounded against her body. Sensations came at her from every direction. She couldn't hold on. Her arms dropped to her sides, and she fell fully back against Evan. Dane, unwilling to let her go, moved closer, still pumping into her mouth while the other two men ravaged her body from the front and back.

Her orgasm took hold. She shook and cried. Dane suddenly pulled out and held her gaze. "You belong to us, and you'll never leave, will you?"

She shook her head.

"Say it," he demanded.

"I belong to you, and I'll never leave. I promise. I love you so much—Dane, Joel, and Evan."

"And I love you," each of them echoed.

The words seemed to set Dane off all the more. He tapped Joel's shoulder, and Joel moved. Dane grabbed her legs, shoved them higher, and pounded into her. Evie cried out in bliss. Dane's roughness drove her insane. She didn't want it to stop, but Joel thumped Dane, and they switched places. Over and over, the two men played tag team with her

throbbing pussy. All the while Evan worked his cock in and out of her ass. Evie came and came.

When each of her lovers had come once, Dane lifted her into his arms and carried her to his room. The king-size bed stretched out before them, and Dane paused. "I think we can all fit here tonight."

"Oh, we'll make it work," Joel assured him.

"But first another bath for our Evie," Evan said, and headed out of the room, she assumed to get the water running and the salts poured.

"You know," Evie suggested with a wicked grin on her face. "That bathtub's pretty big, too. I bet we could all get in this time."

Dark color seamed to bleach out of Dane and Joel's eyes until their irises were almost as pale as the snow outside the window. "Evie, honey, you know how to have fun!" Joel whooped and rushed ahead, and Dane followed with her tucked tight against his chest. Evie knew Christmas morning would dawn with her achy and more sexually satisfied than she'd ever been in her life, and that was more than okay with her.

The End

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