



ZORA'S CHANCE

A Trescott Cove Story

ALIAH
BURKE

Red Rose Publishing

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By

Aliyah Burke



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Dedication:

To all who serve without hesitation
and undying loyalty for those who you
may never meet.

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Chapter 1

Zora muttered under her breath as she climbed up the ladder. There were days homeownership sucked. This was one of them.

“At least it’s still autumn and not winter,” she reasoned with herself as she ascended the roof. She had to do a patch job on one section.

The fall rains that had come to Trescott Cove were gracious enough to show her the leak in her roof.

“I hope it dries fast enough, we’re due for another bout of wet weather soon.” Shrugging her shoulders, Zora got to work.

* * * * *

Chance Jameson sat in an Adirondack chair on his back porch. His eyes flickered up to the roof of the house next door.

Damn woman was up on the roof.

He shook his head. “Isn’t there a man willing to help her? She’s going to get her foolish ass hurt.” He slammed down another swig of beer and let his eyes drift back up to where the woman sat fixing her roof. The gentlemanly thing would be for him to go over there and offer to do it for her.

His thoughts toward her had become increasingly less than honorable. Many nights he had jerked awake with the image of Zora naked and in his bed. The gentle smell of lavender, vanilla, and lemon filling his senses.

He loved how she smelled and each opportunity he had to have her in his arms, he made sure to refresh his memory on how wonderful it smelled on her.

* * * * *

Ms. Zora Nicolette had shown up on his doorstep the day he had moved to the picturesque town of Trescott Cove. He'd sent the moving truck away and five minutes later she'd shown up with a basket of cookies, muffins, and even scones.

"Welcome to Trescott Cove. I'm your next door neighbor, Zora Nicolette," she said. The basket was handed to him. "This is for you. I hope you aren't allergic to wheat, nuts, dairy or pretty much anything."

He stared at his guest. She had a heart-shaped face with brown hair in micro-braids that fell past her chin. Big medium-brown eyes framed by thick sooty lashes gazed unblinkingly back at him. Her skin was smooth, unblemished and the color of dark toffee with a hint of nutmeg.

Ms. Zora Nicolette had curves fitting in *all* the right places on her lovely body. He would say five-six and about one hundred forty pounds. Her full lips formed a beautiful smile.

For the first time in a long, long time, Chance felt the stirrings of lust.

“Thank you,” he said. “For the welcome and the basket. It smells great.”

Her eyes sparkled like brown diamonds as her grin grew. “Thank you. Well, I gotta go. Again, welcome to Trescott Cove.”

Just like that she was gone and he was left with the view of her almost nonexistent shorts and the bared expanse of her back, courtesy of her white halter top. When he closed the door and looked at the enticing goodies he realized he’d never told her his name.

* * * * *

Chance sat forward and watched the sun glint off her hair. Zora had this habit of changing the color of her braids. He’d seen them brown, blonde, orange, and red. Now they were jet black.

The woman was an enigma. He had yet to see her in a bad mood. Even when he had been less than polite, she seemed unaffected.

Unfortunately, she was forever getting herself into dangerous predicaments. He’d bet almost anything she would need help today. His first instinct when she

came outside was to go in. But he couldn't. Day after day he found himself looking forward to his interaction with her.

He couldn't understand it. She was his total opposite. Outspoken to his solitary. Loud to his quiet. A free spirit to his reserved self.

A man used to discipline and order, this woman was on the other end of the spectrum. She screamed chaos and yet he was drawn to her.

So, he sat in his chair and listened to her off-key singing. He knew he had to stay seated or he would be up that ladder himself.

She's probably got a man. And one much younger than myself.

If that was true, where was he? Chance couldn't recall any particular man stopping over there. If there was one, they were very discreet about it. Maybe she went to his place. His fists clenched and he took another drink of beer.

Why have you been checking up on her? His brain taunted. *You've even dreamed about her.*

Determined to ignore the internal ranting his mind was doing, Chance lowered his eyelids and continued to spy on his neighbor.

Today her hair was gathered into a loose ponytail. It wasn't the only thing the afternoon sun had decided to caress. Her rich candied skin shone beautifully in the light. Kissed by the rays.

Chance cursed under his breath as his cock stirred. Only Zora had the ability to get that reaction from him. The town of Trescott Cove had many attractive women but the fire burning for his carefree neighbor caused a volatile reaction in him.

He was forty-one and Zora looked so much younger than him. Why even begin imagining she would want an older single man? Part of him felt if he had been expected to have a wife, the Marine Corps would have issued him one.

* * * * *

Zora knew he watched her. That familiar tingling sensation that began on her skin and worked its way to lodge between her legs had arrived. She shifted to try and control the desire flaring up within her.

On numerous occasions, she had stopped by and tried to get him to open up. Chance was always respectful and at the same time abrupt. Almost like he didn't like her. She didn't feel it was racial, but more like he was trying to avoid contact with her.

All the times she had been to his house, she had never made it past the front door. She realized then he preferred privacy and solitude.

However, as time passed, she admitted to herself, some of her numerous “risky” situations were deliberate. Making sure the ladder fell over. Struggling with something extremely heavy. Anything like that. Just to get him over there. To her. Where he would speak to her in his low sexy voice and take her in his arms to help her out. There was something powerfully arousing about having his strong arms surround her. He smelled like leather, nutmeg, and anise. His chest was rock-solid and the way he lifted her displayed the strength he possessed.

She chuckled as she smeared the roofing tar over the necessary spot. *Maybe I should knock the ladder down, or hang off the edge and see if he comes over.* Zora stopped singing and turned all her concentration to fixing the roof. There would be time later for her to come up with a new way to get that handsome neighbor of hers to touch her.

She recognized the military standard haircut; blondish-brown hair clipped short on his head. He had a beautiful pair of smoky gray-blue eyes framed by dark brown lashes.

“Focus, Zora,” she admonished herself. Shoving Chance to the back of her mind, she redoubled her efforts to get the job done.

Finally finished, Zora wiped the sweat off her face with her arm. Apparently, it was much hotter on the roof than she anticipated. Her white shirt was damp and she could feel the increasing breeze cooling off her heated skin.

Cleaning up, she made her way carefully over to the ladder. Looking over the side, she felt her breath hitch as she met the steel blue eyes of her neighbor.

Chance Jameson.

“Afternoon, Chance,” she said with a smile.

Her belly clenched as he responded in his delicious bedroom voice,
“Afternoon, Ms. Nicolette.”

“Something I can help you with?” *Lick your body from head to toe, perhaps? Strip naked and say ‘take me?’*

“Figured you could use some help. The wind’s picked up.” His eyes traveled over her body, lingering on her breasts before he pulled them back up to her face.

Zora wanted to cheer. The man wasn’t so unaffected by her after all. He, at least, liked how her breasts looked. “So it has, and what exactly do you propose to help me with?” she questioned.

His eyes swirled with emotion before he said, “Hold the ladder so you don’t fall. I’ve already stopped it from sliding once.”

“And here I thought you didn’t care,” she said with a wink.

“Come down the ladder, Ms. Nicolette.” His voice strummed her taut nerves.

She cocked her head and leaned forward a bit more. “Only if you let me make you dinner.”

“What?”

“Surely you have to eat. I’ll accept your help now, if you let me make you dinner as a thank you.” Zora watched his face.

“Fine, now come down from there.” He pointed his finger at the ground beside him.

“Wow, don’t sound so gracious,” she teased as she turned around and walked down the ladder carrying the items she had brought up with her.

Once she was on the ground, she stared up at the man beside her. His body always seemed more powerful up close. She bit her lower lip and stared up at him. He gazed down at her, eyes more gray than blue.

Her eyes trailed over his straight nose and those firm kissable lips set in an unyielding line. He was clean shaven and again the delectable mixture of scents surrounding him flowed to her nose; today the hint of beer lingered, as well.

Zora locked her knees to keep from collapsing at his feet. Although...the idea had merit, he’d put his arms around her again.

“You shouldn’t do such things by yourself,” he reprimanded.

Did she detect concern in his tone? Zora lifted a shoulder and said, “Well, I don’t have anyone to do it for me. So either I climb up on the roof and fix it or I clean up the inside of my house every time it rains.”

With her free hand, she reached out and brushed some imaginary dirt off his shirt. "Dinner's at six. Don't be late, Chance." She walked away before she did something foolish, like jump him in her yard.

"Wouldn't dream of it, Ms. Nicolette." His voice followed her to the shed.

Zora shut the door of the shed behind her and sank against the wood. Her pulse beat rapidly against her chest. Palms were sweaty and she could feel the moisture pooling between her legs.

"Damn it!" she swore. Maybe she just needed to get laid.

Putting her tools away, Zora took a few deep breaths before opening the door and going back out for the ladder. Chance was no longer by the ladder but she could smell the lingering effect of his cologne. It shot straight from her nose to her pussy and created a craving she almost forgot existed at one point in time.

* * * * *

Chance muttered to himself as he walked back to his house. What the hell happened? All his intentions of staying away from her fled the second he saw that ladder shake. Immediately, he had gone over to her yard and waited at the bottom for her to come down.

Somehow, he had managed not to climb up on her roof with her. When she looked over the edge, his eyes had shot straight to her breasts. They looked mouthwatering. She had on a plain white bra that barely concealed her nipples. He longed to rip it off and see how big they were. How they would fit in his hands. It almost made him forget that he meant to tell her she shouldn't be up there in the first place.

Hard won control was the only reason he hadn't acted like a primitive being. He was grateful his pants were baggy enough to cover the erection he got seconds after seeing her full breasts hanging there above him.

He prayed to remain a gentleman as she walked down the ladder toward him. His eyes had glued to her ass as it moved with each step she took. Harder and harder his cock got until he felt it would explode. His balls had begun to tighten as she turned around and looked up at him with those big doe eyes she had. Especially when she was checking him out.

Chance swore again. How did he get himself into this? Dinner with Zora? Just the two of them alone.

His penis began to swell again at the thought. Shoving down those thoughts, he glanced at his clock. He had a little over two hours.

“Shit,” he muttered as he ran a hand through his cropped hair. “I need a fucking cold shower.” His stride took him down the hall to his bedroom; he stripped, placed his clothes in the hamper and walked naked into the bathroom.

As he stood under the pounding spray, he closed his eyes and tried to forget the impishness in her all-encompassing gaze. It didn’t work, her face hovered before him, full lips tempting him, leading him, enticing him.

With a low groan, he slapped the shower wall. “This isn’t going to be good. I don’t know if I can control myself around her.”

He focused on his shower and tried to ignore the rock-hard erection that throbbed. How long had it been since he’d been laid? He wasn’t sure but he couldn’t bring up the face of the last woman. The only face that came to him was the sexy ebony neighbor who invited him to dinner.

A moan of pleasure escaped his mouth as his hand fisted around his cock and began to stroke it. The pressure of the water falling on his back was the only sound aside from his hand sliding up and down his rigid erection.

His free hand braced against the wall as he increased the speed of his pumping. Faster and faster, he stroked himself, Zora’s face leading him to bliss. With a low grunt he exploded in the shower, his cum landing on the shower wall.

“Jesus,” he muttered as the aftereffect of his volatile eruption made his knees weak. Chance finished his shower and climbed out.

Five minutes before six he headed out of his house and walked the short distance to Zora's house.

* * * * *

Zora was a total basket case. She had no idea what to wear, she didn't want to overdress but she also didn't want to look like a slob. So, it was a pale yellow halter-top dress with a handkerchief hem. Nothing too dressy, but not sweatpants either.

She headed up the hall toward the kitchen where dinner would be ready promptly at six. Zora loved to cook, always had and someday wanted to own her own catering business. Right now, she worked at one of Trescott Cove's higher end restaurants. Unfortunately, with the new management, her love of being in the kitchen waned, drastically. Every day was difficult for her to go to work and that wasn't how she wanted her life to be.

The smell of penne with eggplant, roasted peppers, and sausage filled the air. Her stomach grumbled. She was hungry. She had garden salad as a side and a Fluffernutter pie for dessert.

Her doorbell rang and immediately the palms of her hands grew damp. *Get a grip, Zora.* Smoothing her hands down the sides of her dress, she walked to the door and opened it.

Holy shit!

If Chance Jameson in jeans and a tee shirt wreaked havoc on her system, seeing him in a suit set it on overload. He wore a royal blue suit and it fit him like a dream.

She shifted her legs to try to alleviate her problem. “Good evening, Chance,” she said with a smile. “Come on in.”

“Ms. Nicolette,” he nodded his head, “this is for you.”

Zora took the bottle of blush wine. “How sweet, you didn’t have to bring anything.” She stepped back to allow him in. As he moved past her, she inhaled deeply and allowed his intoxicating scent to embed itself in her pores. “And would you please call me Zora.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Sorry, I mean Zora.” He looked around her house.

Her pussy convulsed as her name rolled off his tongue. *Oh my God! With a voice like that he could sell sand to a Bedouin.*

“See, that wasn’t so hard now, was it?” she asked, determined not to let her out of control emotions ruin the evening.

He spun around and speared her with those amazing eyes. They were more blue than gray for the moment. “What’s not hard?”

Zora felt like tipping back a shot of bourbon. It took all her willpower not to glance at his cock. “Calling me Zora.”

“No, I guess it’s not.” He smiled. “It smells wonderful in here.”

“Thank you.” Zora led the way to the kitchen. “I love to cook. Always have. Cooking and eating, that’s what I love.” *Rambling girl, stop rambling.* “Hope you’re hungry.”

“I sure am.” His voice was a low rumble lined with blatant sexual tone.

She trembled as she placed the wine he’d brought on the counter.

“Wonderful.” Zora looked back at him and winked. “Now I hope you enjoy it.”

He didn’t respond immediately and Zora was floored by the way his eyes changed to a mercurial gray. It was a few moments before he blinked and said, “I’m sure I will.”

With dinner over and the coffee along with the Fluffernutter Pie between them, Zora stared across the table at her guest. He wasn’t much of a conversationalist. Chance Jameson didn’t offer up much personal information. In fact, he had asked about Trescott Cove and what it was like living there.

“What do you do, Chance?” Zora bit the bullet and asked.

“I’m retired. A friend came through here and told me he thought I would love it here.” He took a drink of coffee and a bite of pie. “Before I was totally retired I came out to look. He was right. I love it here.”

“Yes, this is a wonderful place.”

“I’m beginning to realize that.” His eyes moved over her like burning coals.

She tried to control her reaction but it was almost impossible. Her moist core demanded attention. Zora shifted in her seat. The man seemed to dominate the entire room just by his presence alone.

“What do you do, Ms. Nicolette?”

“Zora.”

“Zora,” he amended with a half smile.

“Right now I’m a chef but am looking at opening up a catering business.”

Chance stared unblinkingly at her. As if he truly listened. “You are an amazing cook. Dinner was delicious.” He pointed his fork at the pie. “This is heavenly.”

Never been so damned envious of a fork before. Look at the way his lips curl around the prongs.

“Glad you enjoyed it. My specialty is pastries.” Zora felt flushed. Her body throbbed and cried out for relief. The problem was that the man who made her experience those emotions adamantly kept her at arm’s length.

Zora got up from the table and stood by the sink. She tried desperately to calm herself down. Her throat was dry and scratchy.

The sound of a chair scraping back was followed by Chance's voice by her ear. "Ms. Nicolette?"

She gripped the edge of the sink. "I'm fine. I apologize."

"Look at me." His warm breath fell like a satin ribbon along her neck.

Zora turned around. Chance stood before her. His legs braced shoulder-width apart. She forced her eyes to the floor and prayed for strength.

"Zora," he uttered. One finger touched the underside of her chin and lifted it. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she insisted. "I'm fine."

"Perhaps I should leave if I'm making you uncomfortable."

Oh you have no idea... "No, please. I'm okay. Just feeling a bit flushed."

"Do you have a temperature?" He placed the back of his hand on her forehead.

Hell yes! Wanna play doctor? Zora almost gave into the urge and snuggled her cheek into his hand as it moved down her face. "You do feel a bit warm. Let me clean up."

"Oh no!" Zora stepped back. "I couldn't have you do that. I'm fine."

Chance seemed to think about her statement for a few moments. His tongue snaked out to lick his lower lip. “If you’re sure you are okay.”

She wanted to say no. She wanted to ask him to stay. To hold her, kiss her, make her feel like she knew his touch would.

“I am making you uncomfortable.” He stepped away from her, his finger dropping away from her face.

“You aren’t. I promise. I don’t know what’s come over me.”

A low rumble rolled from his chest. “Me either, but God help me, I can’t stop myself.”

Before she knew what happened, he had hauled her up against his solid chest and covered her mouth with his own. Like a wildfire, his tongue swept through her mouth. Zora’s legs crumpled and if not for his steel-banded embrace, she would have collapsed.

Her body exploded at his kiss. He tasted like coffee and a hint of pie, all of that highlighted by something else. Something distinctly masculine. Chance’s own taste.

Fire danced along her synapses as he dominated her very presence with his kiss. Zora was shaken. Never before had a kiss robbed her so intensively of her sense of surroundings. Her lips were tender as he released her mouth and helped balance her.

“Goodnight, Ms. Nicolette.” He spun sharply and left her alone, woozy, panting, and horny as hell.

The click of her front door snapped Zora out of her hypnotic state. She touched her swollen lips with two fingers and shuddered.

“Holy shit!” she whispered to the emptiness of her home. “That was some kiss.”

It wasn’t until Zora had cleaned up the remains of the dinner did she regain her full composure. Collapsing on her sofa, she checked her pulse. While fast, it was much slower than it had been; but by no means was it normal.

Her eyes kept drifting out her window and looking in the direction of Chance’s house. What was he doing? Was he thinking of her? The kiss? Did he regret it? Did he want to do it again?

Chapter 2

Chance wanted to kick himself. How the hell had he let that happen? “Jesus, I acted like an idiot teen.”

He strode to the fridge and grabbed a beer. With a practiced move he used the counter edge to help him pop the bottle’s top. Chance took a large drink, the cool beverage not doing much to alleviate the heat Ms. Nicolette activated within him.

Eyes closed, the image of her full pouty lips flashed before him. All night watching her eat, drink, and talk all he wanted to do was kiss them and see if they were as soft as they appeared. They hadn’t been.

They were softer.

To be able to hold her in his embrace as a lover would had been almost indescribable to him. For the life of him, Chance hadn’t wanted to release her. Those lovely purrs she made and the way she pressed against him as her legs collapsed electrified him.

He longed to lower her to the floor and strip her naked. Ever since he entered her home, he’d been walking around in a state of semi-arousal. That damn dress she wore, all it did was make him long to not be a gentleman.

The frothy looking material snagged his attention with each movement she made. The pale color of the dress only highlighted the creamy darkness of her gorgeous skin.

Zora had her hair unconfined and those long braids fell about her face. He wanted to touch them, experience them rubbing against his skin.

He knew his answers to some of her questions had been a bit abrupt, but he just wasn't a very public person. Still, her cheer and manner had been upbeat. There was a smile continually on her face and her sepia eyes sparkled with life.

Her cooking was superb, every bite better than the last. If he just could have controlled himself around her. But the second his lips had landed on hers, he knew if he didn't leave the second he released her, he would be doing something he wasn't sure he was ready for.

At least not with a woman who made him feel like Zora did.

"Zora," he spoke to his lonely yet pristine kitchen.

Hell, the way he'd acted, Zora would probably never want anything to do with him again.

"It's for the best. I'm not good at relationships anyways."

He paced while he drank. What was wrong with him? Order. Discipline. That was what he demanded in his life. From the look of Zora's house, aside from the immaculate kitchen, she didn't keep a spotless home.

Her house wasn't dirty by any means. Just that it wasn't clutter free like his. Chance walked slowly through his home. Everything had its place, not a lot of knickknacks around. On one wall, he had past awards and commendations. On the mantle of his fireplace sat a photo of his family and some of his friends from his service in the Corps.

Zora's house had piles of things all over. Neat piles, but still piles. Her sofas were smattered by vibrantly colored pillows. The walls covered by abstract paintings. Her home screamed wild, impulsive, free.

And it scared him.

Chance wouldn't admit that there was much in the world that did make him uneasy, but the feelings he had developed over the months he had lived in Trescott Cove for his next-door neighbor did.

"Damn!" he swore as another vivid image of Zora popped into his head. Chance longed to cross the short span between their homes, take her in his arms and...the ringing of the phone distracted him.

"Hello?" he said into the receiver.

"Whoever she is, keep her," his mother's voice rang in his ear.

"Mother." Chance finished his beer and sat down on his couch. "What are you talking about?"

“I’m talking about how you answered your phone. Ever since you went and joined the Marines it was always, ‘Jameson’ or your name and rank. But tonight you actually said hello. So whoever this woman is, keep her. She’s already making you more relaxed.”

He stifled a laugh. Relaxed isn’t what he’d describe the way Zora made him feel. Hard. Randy. Horny. Primitive. Protective. Possessive. Relaxed wasn’t one of them. “What do you need, Mother? Is everything all right?”

“Can’t a mother just call her son to say hi? Why does there have to be anything wrong?”

Chance allowed his gaze to drift toward the window that overlooked Zora’s house. He could see the lights still on. “Because you never call unless something is wrong.”

Her harrumph was loud and undignified. “I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing. It’s not like you’ve come to *visit* your parents lately.”

“I know and I’m sorry.”

“How are you handling your retirement?” she questioned. “It’s not like you to sit around and do nothing.”

How right she was. “I’m adjusting,” he told her.

“Come home for a visit, Chance.”

“I’ll be home for Christmas, Mother.” He stood. “Give Father my best. I have to go.”

“We love you, son. I hope you know that,” she said softly.

“Yes, Ma’am. Love you, too.” He replaced the receiver gently.

Chance turned off the light in his kitchen and headed to his second bedroom currently being remodeled as his office. Sitting down at the desk he straightened up the few papers that were there and then sat still for a moment. He needed something to do.

But what?

Golf? Ever since he had moved in, he’d kept himself busy by working on the house. Now that was winding down, and he was becoming more and more restless. Inactivity didn’t mesh well with him.

“Why’d I retire then?” he asked himself.

It seemed like a good idea at the time. But now...months later, the idea wasn’t as shiny or bright.

Unable to sit around and do nothing any longer, Chance headed off to change. Dressed in sweats he headed out his front door to go jogging. As he stood on his front porch, he cast a glance over to Zora’s. His heart caught as he saw her laughing and joking on the phone. With one final stare, he moved off the porch and down the street.

* * * * *

Zora was grateful for the phone call. It was just what she needed to take her mind off the way she felt after Chance Jameson kissed her. Not just a simple brief kiss either. This one was long, thorough, and soul-rocking. Not to mention panty-soaking.

Her daze had remained with her until the phone rang. It wasn't until her friend Cami had asked her if she was all right did she manage to shake the rest of the haze off. They were talking about getting together for dinner. Cami loved to cook, as well, and when the women got together, the meals they created were amazing.

She laughed at Cami's bluntness. There were many who couldn't take her brash friend, but Zora loved her just the way she was. She knew there was more to her than the cold attitude she loved to portray.

"Girl, please. Your attitude may scare off some but not me. Now just make sure your ass is here on Friday. I'm done early that day, so I can have things ready." Zora saw Chance on his porch out of the corner of her eye. She wanted to wave at him just to see his reaction, but instead she stared at him while he looked over in her direction before heading off into the dark.

"Fine," Cami griped halfheartedly. "I'll be there."

“I know.” Zora’s tone upbeat despite the increase in her heart rate at the mere sight of Chance.

“Bitch!” Cami snapped.

“And I’m all yours.” Zora never took offense when Cami called her that. It was like her way of being affectionate to her.

“See you Friday.”

“Friday.” Zora agreed and hung up the phone.

Leaning against one of the windows in her living room, Zora stared over at the lit porch and hoped she would get to see another glimpse of him. *Perhaps one of him all hot and sweaty*, her mind teased.

Zora groaned as she headed to one of her couches. Her mind could be oh so cruel at times. Propping her feet up on the coffee table, she hit a button on a remote and the house was filled with deep strains of ragtime and jazz. It didn’t take long and she felt much better.

Leaning forward she began leafing through some magazines on catering businesses. With a red permanent marker, she made notes by the ones she liked and the ones she didn’t.

A bit of time passed before she was hit with the urge to bake. Nothing like filling the house up with the smell of chocolate chip cookies. Or cupcakes. Perhaps both.

Feeling better already, Zora began gathering the necessary items. Soon she was lost in her own world. A world where nothing could go wrong. Where roofs didn't leak and handsome men *never* kissed and ran.

It was after midnight when Zora turned off the light in her kitchen. Her countertops were covered by cookies and frosted cupcakes.

"Guess I'll be taking some into work in the morning," she said with a chuckle. "Otherwise, my ass will get so big I won't fit through the door."

It was just a reaction that she glanced over the four foot fence separating her property line from Chance's and into the windows of his house. It was completely dark.

A sigh escaped as she headed back to her bedroom. Zora slid into bed and burrowed under the covers. The sheets were cold against her naked skin.

Bet Chance could keep you warm, her conscious taunted.

Chance.

His gray-blue eyes stared at her from the dark. So serious was his gaze and then...then it changed. The impassionate stare seemed to melt. His eyes swirled with emotion and grew darker with desire.

She felt her body grow hot. Skin prickled as she shifted around, trying to find a comfortable position. Even the cotton of her sheets tantalized her overly sensitive skin.

With a groan, Zora rolled onto her belly, punched her pillow, and tried to fall asleep. The morning was going to arrive very early.

* * * * *

Chance opened the front door and stopped. Sitting on the bench seat by his door sat a plastic container. He opened it and muttered, “Oh Zora.” Inside the container were chocolate chip cookies and frosted cupcakes.

Tucked along one side was a note. Picking it up, he read:

Enjoy, Chance. Have a wonderful day!

He brought the note to his nose and inhaled. In the back of his mind he believed he could smell Zora’s scent among the delicious ones of the treats she’d given him.

Tucking the note in his pocket, Chance placed the lid back on the container and took it inside his house. Before he knew it, he was headed over to her house. He trotted up the two steps to her porch and pressed her doorbell.

Nothing.

He raised his hand and knocked. Still nothing. Chance glanced at his watch, seven-thirty in the morning. *Where the hell is she?*

Chance scowled. What right did he have to be so possessive about her whereabouts? Reluctantly he headed back to his home. He went out to the garage to finish installing the shelving and organizing his tools.

A low wolf whistle grabbed Chance's attention from where he stood on the ladder. He had a scowl on his face as he whipped his head around. Zora leaned in the open doorway. His breath escaped him in a whoosh.

"Afternoon, Chance." She smiled up at him.

His skin prickled. Suddenly it felt a hundred and ten in his garage as opposed to the late autumn weather they were having. "Ms. Nicolette," he returned with a nod.

"Figured I'd stop by and make sure that you weren't going to try avoiding me or anything like that after last night's dinner." Her gaze stared at him unerringly.

An overwhelming urge to race down the ladder and kiss her senseless crossed his mind. He watched her back. She wore tight blue jeans, an oversized shirt that said, "Jazz Rocks," and green shoes.

Shoving his hammer back in the tool belt he wore, Chance made his way back down the ladder. He wiped the back of his hand across his forehead before striding over to her.

“What do you need?” he asked. His resolve to keep a distance from her weakened as her pink tongue snuck out to wet her lips.

“Me?” Another one of her brilliant smiles filled her face. “I don’t need anything. But considering how frickin’ uptight you are, I just thought I’d let you know that I’m not upset over last night.”

“Good.” Chance crossed his arms, silently gloating at how her eyes traveled over them. “And I’m not uptight.”

“Please,” she choked out. “I have never met anyone more uptight than you.” Zora waved it off. “I just wanted you to know that I’m not upset over what happened.” She shrugged. “I mean, it was just a kiss, no big deal. See you later, Chance.”

Just a kiss! No big deal? His resolve flew out the open garage door.

Chance growled low in his throat. That kiss had burned him and he knew she had felt it as well; there was no way that was ‘just a kiss.’ He stood there as she whirled around and headed out of his garage.

His hand shot out and grabbed her upper arm. He spun her back into his chest. “No way that was ‘just a kiss,’” he growled dangerously as his mouth landed over hers.

Chance couldn't explain why it bothered him that she had totally blown off his kiss as insignificant. It didn't matter that he was kissing her in view of the street.

Even though his manner had been gruff as he hauled her against him, he was extremely gentle and he explored her mouth. She tasted like a mint julep. The exploding force of his yearning to be inside her shuddered his whole being.

Chance wrapped his arms tightly around her; one hand threaded itself into her braids and held her head where he had the best access. His cock surged against the confines of his jeans as the lovely bouquet she wore settled into his senses.

His tongue sought out everything she had to offer in the warmth of her mouth. He thrust in deep and retreated as his hips mimicked the action. She whimpered.

He felt her body slump against him, her fingers digging into the thin t-shirt he wore. Her chest pressed snugly against him and he could feel her pebbled nipples through their shirts.

She wanted him.

It was a wonderful feeling.

Drawing back from her mouth, Chance stared down at her. Zora's eyes were half open and darkened by craving.

Keeping their lips almost touching, he whispered, “There is no way that was ‘just a kiss’ between us.” He dropped his arms from around her and watched as she righted herself. She touched her lips with three fingers and stared at him.

“Perhaps,” she muttered. A brow arched. “But you are still uptight.”

“Showing restraint isn’t being uptight,” he snarled.

Flames flickered in her eyes, replacing the earlier desire. “Restraint? The past two times you’ve been around me you showed restraint?”

He narrowed his gaze. She was right, he hadn’t. “I apologize, Ms. Nicolette. It won’t happen again.”

Zora placed her hands on her hips and stepped closer to him. “See...this is why I’m saying you’re uptight. Did you hear me complaining about the kisses? No. Lighten up, Chance.” One finger poked him in the chest. “I happen to like you. A lot. So there, now you know. Ball’s in your court.”

He was speechless as she walked out of his garage and out of sight. Was she for real? His hand rested on his tool belt. “Damn it!” He watched the curtains in the house across the street move.

Great, now he’d turned into a spectacle for the street. “All she does is confuse me.” Chance climbed back up on the ladder and finished the shelf he was working on.

* * * * *

B.B. King played as she worked. Zora was still amazed at how bold she had been with Chance Jameson. Never before had she been so blunt with a man. But, damn it all, this man got under her skin and if he needed her approval to act on the feelings growing between them...well it seemed she had just given it.

He made her feel like perhaps it was time to settle down. Hell, she was thirty-five and had never even given any thought to a family until she met her gray-blue eyed neighbor.

She grabbed a carrot stick as she passed the platter sitting on her coffee table. Zora ate it as she kept going through the piles of magazines she was shifting through. She tossed a few more magazines she considered outdated and of no further assistance to her.

Her doorbell chimed and she grabbed another carrot as she headed for the door. She pulled it open and froze. Leaning against the doorframe was a man covered by a tight long sleeve black button-down shirt and a semi-loose pair of khaki's.

Chance Jameson.

She raised a brow in silent question and in a wordless response, he held out her container.

“Thank you,” she said with a small smile as she reached out to take it from him.

“Ms. Nicolette,” he began.

Zora sighed heavily and held up a hand to stop him. “Look, don’t call me that. My name is Zora. Either use it or don’t speak to me.”

Chance entered her home and shut the door behind him. “Is that what you’d prefer? That I don’t speak to you?”

“How is that different from what you do now? You act as if it’s a goddamn chore to talk to me. Look, I know I’m not a ‘typical’ woman, I’m crazy and loud but I do have feelings and can tell it is like pulling your teeth to get you to speak to me.”

His eyes swept over her and around her house before he shook his head and finished closing the distance between them. “It is not a chore to talk to you, Ms. Nicolette.” He placed two fingers over her mouth when she opened it to speak. “No, let me finish.”

Zora crossed her arms and waited. Her body already on high alert from his mere presence being in her house. She could feel the calluses on the tips of his fingers and she shivered faintly.

Dear Lord, I want to experience his touch all over my body. She did as he said, she held her tongue. *Ohhh, you know his tongue is the devil itself. Can't you imagine it moving all over you?* Her wanton side teased.

“My chore is not grabbing you in my arms and making love to you until neither of us can walk. All my manners and common sense run away the second I smell that damn mix you wear, you know, the perfect blend of lemon, lavender, and vanilla.”

Zora reached up, gripped the wrist on the hand he placed over her lips, and moved it. Instead of dropping it, she placed her fingers through his. “Are you scared of me, Chase Jameson?” she asked.

“Yes.” He dropped one hand to settle on the collar of her shirt. She shivered as it dipped under the material of her shirt.

She inhaled sharply at his simply inquisitive touch. “Why?” she queried on a sigh.

“I like order and discipline in my life. When I’m near you, I lose all that.” His words were low and resonated through her.

“So I shatter your calm?” Zora smiled a bit as she dropped the container on the floor and slipped her other arm up over his shoulder.

“You have no idea just how much,” he murmured against her lips.

Pressing a brief kiss to his lips she asked, “Enough to call me Zora?”

“Zora.” The word was like liqueur pouring off his tongue and flowing over her skin.

She clamped her legs together to try and stop the flow of moisture from dripping down her legs. The one word out of his mouth turned her to mush. “Oh my God,” she whimpered.

“I’m not the only one affected, now am I?” His tongue traced her lower lip before dipping slightly into her mouth.

No, take me here and now, please! Zora looked up at him. “You know the answer to that.”

“Tell me,” he commanded, his finger teasing her bra strap.

“No,” she refused as her fingers skimmed across the back of his shorn head. “Not until you give me a kiss for it.”

A slight chuckle escaped from Chance. “I am pretty sure I can do that.” Both of his hands cupped her face. His mouth landed tenderly on hers.

Zora sighed. This was heaven. Being held in his arms, enjoying his kisses. She tried to pull him closer, but he held back, keeping the kiss light and gentle.

“Tell me,” he whispered again.

“You aren’t the only one affected.”

Her reward was Chance deepening the kiss. His tongue swept over her lips before delving into her mouth and dueling with hers. He put his hands around her

and held her close. The feel of his erection digging into her only inflamed her blood even more.

Zora repositioned her hands to settle on the front of his shirt. The rapid beating of his heart was easily noticeable under the smooth material. She ran her hands over his hard chest.

Naked. Limbs entwined. Pleasure unlike any experienced before.

Those images flashed in front of her mind's eye.

She balled her hands into the excess cloth at his sides. His hands began kneading her ass as the heat in the kiss intensified.

“Zora?” The single word was a question that asked a whole lot more.

“Yes,” she answered. “Straight back at the end of the hall.”

He lifted her and she curved her legs around his waist as an anchor. Her breasts were aching for his touch and her pussy was dripping with anticipation.

Chance took three steps toward her bedroom. *Ding-dong*. Her doorbell went off.

With a growl of disapproval, Zora stopped kissing the man who held her. “Did I hear what I thought I did?”

“I heard it, too,” he muttered softly, before his lips covered hers again.

Ding-dong. It rang again.

A reluctant sigh came from Chance as he placed her on the floor. “You’d better go answer that.”

“I know.” Zora reached up and gave him a brief kiss. *It better be fucking important if it’s keeping me from getting some!*

She willed her body back under control, stopped to grab the container off the floor and opened the door.

Cami Maxwell stood there. “About time, Zora. It’s cold out here.”

“Hello to you, too, Cami.” Zora waved her in and shut the door.

“And you are?” Cami demanded as her gaze landed on Chance standing near the kitchen.

Zora watched Chance’s reaction to Cami. He merely met her gaze, offered his hand and said, “Chance Jameson.”

Cami shook it and flicked her gaze back between the two of them. “Did I interrupt something?”

Chance shook his head. “No, Ma’am. I was just returning a container to Ms. Nicolette.” His eyes landed on Zora where they flared with promise. “Thanks again for the cookies, Ms. Nicolette. Have a wonderful evening.”

He left without saying anything else. Zora wanted to run after him and finish what they had started.

“You cook for him?”

Zora arched a brow at her friend. “I brought him some cookies and cupcakes when I made my last bunch. Why?”

“Nothing. Just curious.”

“Right,” Zora scoffed. “What’s up? I thought we weren’t on until Friday.”

“Sorry, swamped on Friday so I figured I’d stop by tonight on my way home from work and see what you wanted to talk to me about.” Cami walked over to the couch and sat down. She ate a carrot stick and said, “So tell me.”

“Have you had dinner yet?” Zora asked, watching Cami eat a few more carrots.

“No.”

“So let’s cook and talk.” Zora headed for the kitchen and put the container in the sink.

Chapter 3

“So let me get this straight,” Cami said as she ate a bite of her rice pilaf. “You want to open up a catering business with me?”

“Yes. I’m tired of working for someone else. I want to be my own boss, be able to tell someone ‘no I don’t want to make that for them. This town doesn’t have an exceptionally good caterer, we both know that.”

Cami ate in silence.

“Look, I know you love to cook, Cami. I’ve known that for a long time now. We get together and have our own cooking competitions. I also know you are getting burnt out working at that firm. I don’t know if you’re planning on starting your own private practice. Look,” Zora took a deep breath, “I know this is a lot to digest, so take some time and think about it. I’m going to do it and would love to have you in on it with me. It’s not going to happen overnight, but I am planning.”

“Zora. Thank you so much for thinking of me. I’ll think about it. I do want out of my job. I became a CPA because it was good money, but my first love always has been cooking.” Cami took a bite of the salmon.

“And this way, you won’t have to be such a bitch all the time.” Zora laughed at the glare that formed on her friend’s face. “Please...I’m not just off the turnip truck. I’ve known you for a long time, Camilla.”

Cami curled her lip. “Enough about me. Tell me why you looked all flushed when you opened the door. What’s going on with you and your neighbor?”

Zora was grateful for darker skin as she felt the blush going up her face. “Nothing is going on between us.” *Your untimely arrival made sure of that.*

Wise eyes stared at her. “Fine. Let me try this again.” Cami sat forward. “What *would have* happened if I hadn’t stopped by?”

“I’m sure he would have gone home. Like Chance said, he was only here to return the container.”

“Chance?” A plucked brow rose in disbelief.

Shit! Can’t believe I made that slip. “Yes, you know I’m very informal.” Zora held Cami’s gaze without blinking.

“Right,” Cami drawled.

Zora tossed a bread roll across the table at her friend. Sometimes she could be oh-so exasperating. “Hush woman.”

Cami snatched the food out of the air without blinking and whipped it right back at her. Zora wasn’t so fast to react and it hit her right in the forehead.

“Ouch!” she complained over Cami’s laughter. “That hurt.”

“Please, my rolls are soft as cotton, not hard enough to injure you.” Cami snapped playfully from across the table.

It was true. The rolls that Cami made always seemed to melt like butter in one’s mouth. “Well, on principle it hurt.” Zora stuck her lip out and sighed dramatically when all Cami did was laugh harder and louder.

“Think about it, Cami,” Zora said as she stood with her friend out on the porch.

“I will, Zora. Promise.” Cami tugged on her chocolate brown leather coat and spun around. “I’ll call you soon.” She jogged down the steps and got into her already warm car.

Zora remained on the porch until her friend was safely in her vehicle and backing out of the drive. There was a serious bite in the air. “I think winter’s finally here,” she muttered as she looked up into the cloudless night. “I bet we have snow by the end of the week.”

Shivering in the cold, Zora rubbed her arms as she snuck a peek over at Chance’s house. The warm inviting glow from the living room lights shone out into the dark. “One day, Chance.” With a shrug, she took herself back into her warm home and made her way over to the piles that still required her attention.

She sat there and worked diligently for about five minutes until her doorbell rang. Zora looked up in concern. Cami didn’t live far; in fact, she was on the same

street. The only reason she had driven was Cami had not even gone home after work, just came right over to Zora's.

Was something wrong?

Jumping off the couch, Zora hurried to the door and yanked it open. "Cami?"

The figure facing her on the other side of her oak door was in no way her friend Cami.

It was Chance Jameson.

Her heart skipped and jumped into her throat. He wore a black leather jacket that only added to his appeal. It wasn't zipped and she could see the same black button-down shirt he had worn earlier only now it was unbuttoned enough so she could see his bronzed chest.

"Chance," she managed to say without much stuttering.

He stared straight into her eyes. The light from behind her highlighted the shadow of growth on his face. He remained silent.

"Something you needed?" she asked.

Chance stepped closer to her, bringing with him in the air the smell of a very cold, night. The kind of night that brought images of being curled up on a couch, in front of a fire, with a loved one. She inhaled sharply as his body brushed passed her when he entered her home.

Zora licked her lips as she shut the door and turned around to stare at the man watching her. His eyes rolled over her like a wave of desire.

“Well?” she demanded.

“I shouldn’t be here,” he uttered.

Her heart sank. He didn’t want her after all. Perhaps he couldn’t force himself to pretend long enough to fuck her. “There’s the door.” She jerked her thumb over her shoulder.

Chance took a step toward her. And another. His stride turned predatory as he erased the remainder of the distance between them. His scent seemed stronger than usual, the smell of it so pungent she could almost taste it on her tongue as she licked her lips that seemed so dry again.

Zora tried to keep her quavering under control. If the damn man was going to leave her again, she wasn’t going to let him know his nearness affected her so much.

He didn’t pass her. No, he stopped right in front of her. His eyes were a dark and swirling mass of colors. She couldn’t decide which color was more predominant.

“Good night, Chance,” she said, doing her damndest to keep the pain out of her voice.

Chance backed her up until the door was at her back. The man was mute, his eyes never moving from her face.

When she could move no further, Zora would've sworn she witnessed a lift of one side of his mouth in a primitive masculine smile. His hands settled on either side of her head, blocking her in.

Her breasts began to ache for his touch, her skin prickled, and her breathing increased. Zora clamped her lips shut to contain the moan of desire inside.

Chance held her gaze and then dropped his eyes down to her lips and then back up to meet her eyes. Zora shuddered but didn't look away from his burning stare.

"You seem to be blocking the door," he whispered, his warm breath flowing over her, covering her with heat.

"Apparently," she mumbled. Her eyes moved down to hone in on the tease of golden flesh that peeked out from his shirt. And stayed there.

"Ms. Nicolette," he murmured.

Zora flashed her eyes back up to his. "What did I say about calling me that?"

That damn grin was on his face. He wanted her to look at him. Those intense eyes of his stared unrelenting at her as she tried to regroup.

"Would you say something?" she pled.

Chance bent his arms and lowered himself until their mouths were millimeters apart. He lowered his sinfully thick lashes until his eyes were almost hidden from her gaze.

“Tell me to go home.” His words were low and raspy, as if he had been gargling with pebbles.

“No.”

No. She said no.

Chance was torn. Part of him longed for her to demand he get out of her house. However, the part of him that was undeniably attracted to his neighbor crowed with victory.

Staring at her from under his lashes, Chance took in the vision before him. Her lips were parted as she tried to control her breathing. He could hear the short, sharp pants she tried to hide.

She wore the same baggy shirt but had exchanged jeans for a pair of gray cotton pants.

Her creamy, rich toffee skin held a hint of a flush. His gaze traveled to rapid pulse visible on the side of her neck. And then there was the damn way she licked her lips, just using the tip of her pink tongue to moisten them. Each swipe gave

them a shine which only highlighted just how full and delectably kissable her lips truly were.

Chance used his tongue to trace along the outer edge of her lips. Once. Twice. The third time he slid along the middle, seeking entrance. He heard her sigh of pleasure as he slipped inside her mouth.

He moved closer to her, placing his legs inside of hers, trapping himself between her thighs. The kiss was gentle, their tongues stroked each other. Chance loved her taste. It was a combination of different flavors and yet he could still identify a hint of the mint julep he had recognized earlier.

Opening his eyes, he glanced down at her. Zora had her eyes squeezed tightly shut. *Was that good or bad?* Chance ended the kiss, lowered his hands from the door and moved his thumbs over her closed eyes in a slow, almost reverent motion.

Everything on her was so soft and silken. His lips graced each eyelid before he kissed the tip of her nose. "Look at me, Zora," he ordered.

His breath caught as she did as he bade. Her amazing eyes shimmered as they stared at him in the light. Her stare asked the question her mouth didn't.

"I want you," he admitted. "I want to rip your clothes off right here and take you against the door. I want your nails digging into my back and drawing blood as you scream my name to the heavens."

He pressed against her lower body, knowing full well that she could feel his rigid erection against her. Chance could feel her shudder. She began breathing faster and more ragged as his hands skimmed the outline of her body.

“So you tell me to go right now, if you don’t want this to continue any further,” he whispered into her neck.

Her hands settled on his chest and she pushed him a bit. Chance backed up enough so their eyes could meet. Her gaze smoldered with latent passion.

“Stay.” Zora’s one word resonated through him like he stood next to a five-inch gun as it fired.

He reached down and grabbed her ass before lifting her right off the ground. This time when their lips met, it was far from gentle. The urgency building seemed to overflow and saturate them both.

Chance felt a thrill ripple through him as she became the aggressor. Her tongue thrust into his mouth and dueled with his own. He tightened his hold on her derriere and groaned as she rubbed against him in response.

Her arms went around his neck and she held the back of his head in her hands. He struggled to retain the hold on his control as the pointed tips of her breasts poked him. Chance stepped into the door a bit more, so there was more support behind her and took a hand and grasped one breast, shirt and all.

Her groan filled the room. Zora arched her back pushing more of her full breast into his palm.

He stopped kissing her for a moment and buried his face in her neck, nipping the skin as his hand massaged her breast. Her head dropped back against the door giving him more access.

Chance licked her skin, trailing a path along her jaw, over the erratic pulse in her throat. He bit lightly along the pulse and smiled as she jumped slightly. He let go of her breast and slid his hand up under her shirt.

Jesus! Her skin is so soft. He could feel her quivering as he slowly moved up her body and placed his hand back onto her breast.

Zora undulated against his waist, whimpering incoherently. With one last bite against her warm neck, Chance moved away from the door, turned and headed toward the hallway.

Halfway down the hall he stopped and braced her against the wall again. He couldn't wait any longer. He tore his mouth off hers and ripped her shirt off, dropping it on the floor beside them.

The emerald green of her bra stood out vividly against the creamy complexion of her skin. His cock throbbed in his pants. His mouth covered one breast, bra and all and he sucked on the pebbled nipple.

“Ah hell,” she moaned to the room. Her mound shifted against him as she rubbed along his length.

Chance reached up between her breasts with one hand and opened the front clasp. Releasing her breast from his mouth he stared as the material fell away from her breasts.

They were beautiful. The same smooth, dark toffee color as the rest of her body. Her nipples, dark and large, called to him to suckle on them. They were pebbled and he dipped his head forward and ran his tongue over one hard tip.

His cock surged as she thrust against him with a whimper. Drawing it into his mouth, he made love to one breast as his hand captured her other one. His fingers rolled and tugged gently on her nipple, drawing out more cries from the depths of her throat.

Zora’s hands clutched his shoulders as if he were her lifeline. Her lower body constantly created friction against his swollen penis. Her legs had pulled him in as close as possible to her and held him there.

Chance didn’t think he wanted to be anywhere else in the world. Well, except perhaps for one place. And he was taking care of that.

He nuzzled his way across her chest, laving a path between her big luscious breasts until he came to the second taut nipple. His hand and tongue swapped

places and soon he loved her second one just as thoroughly as he had the first.

Fingers teasing the other nipple, not allowing it to feel left out.

Zora's voice became more and more breathless as she squirmed against him. With a mind of their own his hips began thrusting back, rubbing his cock against the juncture of her thighs. His own body growing hotter with each motion.

Chance tweaked her nipple and moved his hand down her bared belly. He could feel her shuddering beneath his touch. His blood pumped through him in a way he hadn't ever experienced before.

His fingers sank below her waistband and were brushed by lace. He swallowed hard, the blood surging faster.

"Unhook a leg, I'm taking these off," he ordered in a raspy voice.

Zora did as commanded and within seconds her sweats were on the floor beside him. His eyes raked over the woman in his arms. The one who offered herself to him so willingly.

Her bra was open, the material hanging down. Her head was back against the wall, lips parted, her chest heaved with each breath she took, an act that moved her bared breasts just so perfectly. They swayed with each inhalation and begged for attention. From him.

He noticed her bellybutton was pierced. Although he wanted to take a closer look, now was not the time.

His hands rested on her hips and under them were her lace boy shorts. Identical in color to her bra. Licking his lips, he ran his hand over her panties. The moisture at the juncture of her thighs soaked his hand.

Chance groaned in anticipation. “So wet,” he murmured as his hand began stroking her through the material. “Watch me.”

He felt a surge of triumph as her desire-glazed eyes met his. She sucked on her lower lip, the tips of her white teeth showing. He rubbed harder and she squirmed more.

Chance wanted to be buried deep within her. But he wanted to make sure it wasn't animalistic in taking. He was wound so tight, he was ready to explode, yet, her satisfaction came first.

He slid his fingers into her panties and groaned as the smooth skin of her bare pussy met him. The violent jerk of his erection reminded him that it was still waiting for its turn. He trailed his fingers down the middle of her lips before slipping two of them deep inside her.

“Oh shit!” Zora's scream filled the hallway as her back arched shoving him in deeper.

“Come for me,” he demanded, flicking a finger over her swollen clit.

She did. Her thick cream flowed over his fingers and down his palm. Chance pumped his digits inside her and rode out her orgasm. Only when her body shuddered and sank down against the wall did he slow.

Chance pulled his hand out of her panties and looked at her glazed eyes. Cleaning off his fingers sent his body into overdrive. She tasted incredible. As he licked the last of her cream off his fingers, he ran his tongue over his lips to capture the last bit of her essence he could.

Using his hands, Chance ripped her panties down both sides and slid them out from between her legs. Now the minx in his arms was naked except for the socks she wore and the dangling bra.

Lowering his zipper on his pants, Chance held her still as he positioned the head of his cock at her wet entrance.

“Chance,” Zora mewled, struggling against his restraining touch.

“My speed,” he told her and slowly entered her body.

The warmth of her body encasing him sent shivers up his spine. “Ohhh,” he hissed, eyes closing, as her muscles massaged around him, gripping him, welcoming him.

“Jesus,” she panted. Her hips tried to move but he continued to hold her still.

“Just wait, Zora,” he growled low. “Give me a second.”

His body wanted to devour her. He wanted her to scream out his name at the top of her lungs. He longed to drive into her, over and over, until she no longer had the slightest inkling of what any other man had been like, nor any desire for another.

Two seconds inside her velvet heat and he felt his balls beginning to tighten. Chance opened his eyes and watched the passion engulf Zora. Her skin took on this ethereal glow as she approached euphoria. He could see the perspiration beading on her brow as she tried to prolong her pleasure.

Drawing back, Chance slid forward. The effect was just as intense, sparks shot up along his body. Soon he had a rhythm going. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out.

Her cries grew louder in time with each thrust of his hips. Chance could feel the sweat dripping down the back of his shirt as he moved within her.

Knowing he was almost at the end, Chance took one hand and placed it between them, finding her slick clit with his fingers. He rolled it, flicked it and teased it.

“Fuck!” Zora shouted as she came unglued. Her thighs tightened around him, nails dug into his skin, and her internal muscles milked him as they convulsed around him.

A low growl erupted from deep in his chest. Chance thrust deep, once, twice, three more times before he spilled his cum within her. His heart was pounding and he couldn't quite seem to catch his breath.

Pulling Zora to him, Chance kissed her long and deep. Unable to find any words to convey what he had just experienced, he allowed his body to talk for him.

Without separating them, he walked down the hall to her bedroom and laid her gently out on her bedspread. Her room was filled with flickering candles and the subtle glow highlighted the beautiful tone of her skin.

Zora toed off her socks and stared at him while he undressed. She never covered herself, just lay there and observed his every movement.

Every inch of her body tingled. Zora didn't know what to make of her reaction to the tall man undressing before her. Chance Jameson. From the gleam in his eyes as he disrobed, she'd bet anything he hadn't finished with her yet.

Her heart skipped as she recalled the feeling of having his thick length buried deep within her. Filling all sides, hitting spots she hadn't known existed.

The way he had stared at her made her experience something else new. It was as if he were unwrapping a present he had been waiting his whole life for. The intensity with which he stared at each part of her body, made her burn even more.

Now, he was letting her see all of him.

Zora couldn't stop watching him. His hands were steady as he unbuttoned his shirt and rolled his shoulders so it fell to the floor. She could see the marks her nails had made in his arms from their earlier joining in her hallway.

His chest was hard. A slight covering of hair was there, but it wasn't a carpet. There was no fat on his body and she could make out his abs. quite easily.

She wet her lips as another pulse shot through her pussy. He looked amazing standing there, shirtless, his semi-erect cock sticking out of his zipper still coated with their combined juices, and hunger in his gaze. For her.

Zora longed to stroke herself as she enjoyed the undressing before her, but instead she remained lying there, legs spread, watching him as he watched her.

He carefully lowered his pants and boxers after kicking off his shoes. Zora felt the fire licking at her skin as a naked Chance strode toward the bed. His dick grew harder as he eliminated the distance between them and it jutted out proudly from a nest of brown hair.

She licked her lips as the urge to suck him ran through her. His erection jumped and she looked up at his eyes and shuddered from the intensity in his gaze.

Chance knelt at the foot of her bed and tugged her down the smooth comforter. She shuddered as he ran one hand up the inside of her leg. Her hand touched the top of his head, but he placed it back beside her.

“Let me touch you,” he murmured. His warm breath was close to the juncture of her thighs and she knew he could smell her arousal.

Zora wanted him to touch her, her pussy cried out for more attention. She longed for him to be balls deep back inside her. However, he wanted to spend his time exploring her.

She whimpered as both his hands landed on top of her thighs and he nuzzled her crotch. The stubble on his face lightly scraped and teased the insides of her legs. His tongue swept up the opening of her lips and sent off another round of fireworks within her.

“Oh, damn,” she moaned.

“Yes,” he rumbled against her.

His tongue stabbed deep, penetrating her and bringing her hips up off the bed. When he placed her legs over his shoulders, she shook with anticipation.

“What do you want?” he asked against her bald slit.

Arching her hips, she tried to bring her moistness closer to his mouth. She mewled in the back of her throat as his tongue swept up the middle of the lips once.

“So intoxicating,” he mumbled, vibrating her sensitive clit. “You taste like a rich spice, so heady, so addicting.”

Another lick of his tongue sent a spasm through her body. Zora clutched the bedspread in her hands as Chance ate her out like no one ever had before.

His tongue licked, laved, and stabbed into her. Catapulting her to a new level of sensation. Zora couldn't see for the stars that flashed before her eyes.

She was only slightly aware of Chance moving up her body until his lips covered hers as he slid inside her with a single stroke. Placing her legs around him, she gave herself over to the mastery of his touch.

Chapter 4

Chance opened his eyes and looked at the slumbering woman beside him. Zora Nicolette.

Her lips were still swollen from the force of his kisses. Her skin raw from the abrading his facial hair had given her during the night.

She lay there totally asleep. On her back, head to the side, one hand curled under her chin, giving her an innocent appearance. Her braids fell about her haphazardly and he reached out with one hand and picked one up.

“Zora,” he whispered as he ran the braid through his fingers.

She had unleashed in him a hunger he didn’t know what to make of. They had made love all night; Zora had kept up with his appetite that she had only recently sated. She was an incredibly giving and passionate lover.

I don’t know if any other woman would ever be able to sate me after this night.

Glancing at the clock, Chance realized he had only dozed. It was a few minutes before five. There was still a light on, Zora had wanted to be able to see him, and so she made him turn one on after the candles were almost out.

He stroked one smooth and flawless cheek of her face. She sighed and burrowed deeper into her hand and pillow.

Pulling back the blanket, Chance let his eyes travel over her nakedness. Her belly wasn't perfectly flat, but he didn't care. And as he glanced over her stomach one more time, he caught sight of a sparkle in her bellybutton. It was pierced. Now was the perfect time to check it out. He knelt between her legs and took a closer look.

It was pierced and not just a ball, a dangle piercing. The large symbol looked like an Egyptian hieroglyph and there were three dangles below it, each one had a disc with a design on it. One was a fairy, one a crescent moon and a star, and the final one was one that said: Kiss my ass.

I'll be damned.

Chance got ready to draw the blankets up over her and leave. Before he could, she stirred in her sleep and moaned his name at the same time her fingers slipped into her pussy.

The sight of her lying there, pleasuring herself, changed his mind. Sliding over her body, he replaced her hand with his rigid cock and found a most delightful way to wake in the morning.

* * * * *

Zora couldn't believe it. She had never been in a relationship like this before and she didn't know if she wanted to continue being in one. It had been a few weeks since she and Chance had finally surrendered to their desires and gone to bed together. They still slept together but he was careful to keep it quiet.

"Don't get me wrong," she mumbled as she worked on a batch of almond honey rugelach, "it was everything I could have ever wanted. That man sure knows how to make me scream."

But now she wasn't sure it was enough to continue with a basically fuck buddy status with Chance Jameson. Didn't he want something more? She did.

"And what man is that?" a smooth voice asked from across the room.

Shit! She'd forgotten she wasn't totally alone.

"No one, just a man in my dreams." Zora looked over to where her good friend Lewa Staller sat on a stool and ate one of the finished cookies.

Lewa laughed. Her eyes sparkled with amusement as she shook her head in total disbelief.

Zora glared at her friend. Lewa had stopped by to get some cookies and other treats for one of the children's homes Lewa visited on a regular basis when she was in the country. Her friend was deeply involved in charity work and Zora loved helping out in this way.

“Please, Zora. You act as if I’d forgotten how you are during these past few years.” Lewa slid off the stool, picked it up, walked closer, and sat back nearer to Zora.

Zora smiled over the accent her friend had picked up while living in South Africa for the past seven years. “Ah, Lewa. It’s my neighbor.”

“Oh, that handsome bloke that spends most of his time outside watching your house?” she asked as she swiped some almond pieces.

Just the thought sent shivers up her spine. Chance. His damnably seductive gray-blue eyes and how they set her body on fire.

“He does not,” Zora argued.

“Right,” Lewa teased. “If you say so.”

Lack of anything better to say, Zora smacked her friend’s hand as it reached for some more mix. “If you keep eating this, there won’t be anything left for the kids.”

Lewa almost choked on the food she had swiped because she began laughing so hard. “Have you looked around your kitchen?” She waved a dark hand adorned with colorful beaded bracelets.

Zora did and shrugged her shoulders. Her counters were covered with different things. Casseroles, breads, soups, and desserts. “Well, they won’t get as many rugelach if you keep shoving them in your mouth.”

Her friend stuck her tongue out at her. “Not too worried about that.”

“Well, go eat something that I’m not baking right now. There are plenty of choices over there.” Zora pointed with the rolling pin.

Lewa chuckled, obviously not intimidated. “Tell me more about this man of yours.”

“He’s not my man.”

“But you are gettin’ all hot and bothered just thinking about him,” Lewa observed.

“How about this,” Zora suggested desperate to keep Chance out of her thoughts, “tell me more about your charity works and your time over in Africa.”

“Fine, deprive me of sexual exploits.” She got off the stool and walked to the stove to turn off the burner. The water had boiled and ready for their tea bags.

“I’m expecting some from you, little lady.” Zora pointed a floured finger at her friend.

Lewa grinned evilly and waggled her eyebrows. One finger tapped her lower lip, showing off her short unpolished nail. “Let me see.”

* * * * *

A round of expletives rolled off the normally unflappable man as he pounded the heavy bag in his workout room.

Sweat dripped down his body but he continued on as if he had just begun his exercise. Chance couldn't get her out of his mind. Everything about that woman was imbedded in him.

"What the hell am I doing?" he questioned as he sagged against the bag, letting it hold him upright.

"She deserves someone who will not dampen her enthusiasm for life. I don't know how to let go of my rigid control."

A low rumble roared up out of his chest at the mere thought of another man touching Zora. She was his. Plain and simple.

The wind rattled his window and he cast a glance out. The weather sure had changed drastically. It had barely made it over freezing for the past two weeks. There were no leaves on the trees and even from inside he repressed a shiver.

It just looked cold.

Taking off his gloves, Chance grabbed a towel and walked out to his living room and snuck a glance over to his neighbor's house. "Zora, what am I going to do with you?"

Visions of what he would love to do *to* her popped into his head.

He opened the fridge and took out a bottled water. As the cool liquid ran down his throat, he knew it wasn't Zora who was the problem. It was him. He was her polar opposite and no matter how good it felt to be with her—and it felt amazing—he wasn't sure about the other aspects of their lives.

How would she be with kids? No discipline?

Chance leaned against his counter. Kids? That was a new thought for him. He hadn't even entertained the notion before. The Corps was his career and that was that. He knew his mother wished he would have given her grandbabies, but he had never found a woman in which it crossed his mind.

Until now.

Was he strong enough to let go of some of his control?

"Zora, Zora, Zora," he muttered as he walked from the kitchen to his bedroom and climbed into the shower.

* * * * *

"What do you think of this place, Lewa?" Zora asked her friend as they walked through the building.

“It’s very big. I don’t know how well you’d pull off the intimate and friendly feeling you said you were looking for in this big place.” She paused. “Although, it would definitely give you enough room.”

Zora looked around the interior. Even though Lewa wasn’t a chef, Zora knew her friend understood what she was after. Zora had hoped that Cami would have been able to make it today, but she had called last minute, sounding very stressed and canceled.

“I think you’re right, Lewa. But I want to take another look at the back.” She cast a glance over to the realtor who stood patiently by the door.

“No problem,” the woman said. “Take your time. You don’t want to get a place you are going to regret a month down the road.”

Zora smiled at her. She had taken a quick shine to her realtor. Delinda Marks knew her job and did it well. There were a group of properties for her to look at and Delinda had set aside her day to go along, not wanting to rush Zora into anything.

Leaving Lewa and Delinda alone in the front room, Zora walked into the kitchen area in the back. Standing in the middle of the empty room, she stood with her feet shoulder width apart and closed her eyes.

Her hands hung loosely at her sides. She took some deep breaths and got a feel of the place. When she opened her eyes, Zora had her answer. The place was

nice, it was big and spacey, but there was no special feeling in her when she stood there.

In her mind there was a specific way the store she was supposed to start her business in to feel when she walked in it. This place was nice, but it just wasn't *it*.

Pasting a smile on her face, she headed back to the main area and shook her head.

"Nope, not this one."

Delinda smiled understanding. "We have more on the list."

Lewa grinned at her and Zora knew she was up for more places as well.

The women bundled up and opened the door to the outside and cold day. As they headed for their vehicles, a man got out of a SUV and jogged over to them.

"Lewa, go start the car, I have to talk to him," Zora said.

"Okay. He's hot." Lewa winked and ran to the car.

Zora rolled her eyes at her friends comment and waited for the handsome man coming toward her. Lewa was right, he was hot. Rafael Carmichael always had been in her opinion.

"Hey, darling," he said as he swept her into his powerful arms and planted a kiss on the cheek.

"Rafe, honey. It's so good to see you. How's Kenya treating you?" Zora's sister Kenya was a detective and Rafael's partner. "Where is she?"

“Well enough I suspect,” he said with an easy grin. “She’s back at the squad room. I had something to take care of. Although she did make dinner for me last night.” He shuddered dramatically.

Her sister was an awesome officer of the law but a hellacious cook. Boiling water had been known to give Kenya issues.

“Oh you poor baby. Did you have to go to the emergency room?” Zora pulled back a bit and looked him over carefully.

He was not a small man. Rafael stood six-four and well-muscled all over. His skin was the color of honey and fit beautifully with his sharp masculine features. He had smoky gray eyes that seemed to pierce your soul. His hair was shoulder-length and he kept it in one tight braid. And for the moment he wore a hat to help ward off the frigid air.

“It was touch and go for a while, but I pulled through,” he teased, his white teeth flashing brilliantly against his honeyed skin.

“Well, come for dinner tonight at my place. I’ll make something to purge whatever she fed you.”

A wide grin split his dark face. “Sounds wonderful. Only a fool would turn down a meal that you made. Can I bring anything?”

Zora grabbed the front of his jacket and tugged him in close. “Flowers, chocolate and a good wine to go with...red meat.”

Rafe wrinkled his nose and brushed a kiss over the top of hers. "Consider it done. I'll be there about seven."

"Six-thirty," Zora corrected as she kissed her finger and touched his lips. "See you then." With a wave she jogged over to the waiting car and slid in the passenger side.

Lewa smirked but remained silent.

"Yeah, you keep quiet, you hear?" Zora quipped. "Just...you just follow that car." She pointed at Delinda's vehicle as it pulled away from the street.

Clouds rolled overhead as Zora opened her front door. Chance stood there, his face ruddy with cold.

"Evening, Chance," she said, stepping back so he could come in.

He followed and shut the door behind him, keeping in the heat. "Ms. Nicolette," he replied on a low purr.

Her body reacted immediately and violently. Shoving back her emotions she gave him a grin that was more bared teeth than anything. "Stop calling me that."

"My apologies." He stood there and stared at her.

"Something on your mind?" she asked. *A quick fuck on the couch, perhaps?*

"Yes." His reply was low and guttural. Chance blinked his eyes and swallowed. "But I have to ask you something."

Wonder what he was really thinking about? “Shoot,” Zora spoke with an easy shrug.

“I have to go out of town for a few days; can you keep an eye on my place?” He stepped closer to her.

Zora was lost in his eyes. There was so much raw strength and emotion in them it nearly floored her. This man had no idea how much power he had in his gaze.

“Ms. Nicolette?” His voice shook her free from his hold.

“Yes, sure. No prob. Have plants or anything that need to be watered, or is this more of a make sure your house doesn’t burn down kind of watching?”

Despite how often they had shared in the pleasure of each other’s bodies, Zora still hadn’t been to his home. Well, not inside at least.

“No plants. Please don’t let my house burn down.”

He stepped so his body was flush to hers. One finger tipped her face up toward his.

“Don’t worry. If I see flames I’ll call the fire department.” Zora longed for him to kiss her, to remind her what it was like for real, not just in her memories.

“Zora,” he whispered, his face lowering slowly.

She licked her lips, enjoying the flare of heat in his gaze. Her body screamed out for his touch. Eyelids started to close as his mouth grew nearer.

Ding-dong.

Zora released a short bark of laughter. “Figures,” she muttered. Before Chance could say a word, she moved across the minute distance between their lips and kissed him. It was a short kiss. Then she backed away.

She opened the door with a grin on her face. “Hey, Rafael, come on in.”

His eyes twinkled down at her. “Smells wonderful, my dear.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek. “These are for you,” he said with a smile.

Zora smiled and took the flowers and chocolates from him. “Thank you. They are simply gorgeous. And you know I love these chocolates.”

She looked at the beautiful bouquet of orchids. Her favorite flower. She recognized the ribbon colors making up the bow on the vase; they were from the hottest floral shop in Trescott Cove, On the Vine.

“You are most worth it, babydoll.” Rafe touched her cheek gently.

Chance took that opportunity to step up beside her. “I didn’t know you were having company. I’ll drop a key off for you tomorrow before I go. Thanks for taking care of things for me while I’m away.”

Zora did a double take at Chance’s tone. The man sounded downright surly.

Could he actually be jealous?

Instead of dwelling too much on that, she adjusted her hold on the flowers and chocolates and made introductions.

“Rafael, this is my neighbor, Chance Jameson. Chance, my good friend, Rafael Carmichael.”

The men shook hands.

“Nice to meet you, Jameson.”

“Mr. Carmichael,” Chance returned. He placed his eyes, that seemed bluer tonight, on her and said, “Have a great evening, Ms. Nicolette.”

With a sharp nod to Rafe, Chance walked out the door without looking back.

“Something going on between you two?” Rafe asked.

Zora shook her head. “No.” she went to the kitchen and placed the flowers on the counter. “Let’s eat.”

“Does Kenya know about him?” Rafe questioned, opening the wine he brought.

“No.” Zora pinned her eyes on him. “And if you want to *ever* eat my cooking again, you won’t tell her.”

His deep laugh filled her house.

Chance clenched his fists to keep from ripping open Zora’s door and flying back into her house. He was filled with rage at the thought of her and that man

having a date of any sort. Everything else faded away even the cold as he stood there at war with himself.

The man was handsome, taller than himself, by an inch. His gray eyes had sparkled with affection as he looked at Zora and handed her not just flowers, but flowers with chocolates. And he brought wine.

The sound of masculine laughter filtered to his ears through the door. Chance turned away from her entrance and walked home, each step he tried to convince himself it was better this way. That he hadn't wanted anything full on with Zora outside the bedroom.

Bullshit! His brain called his bluff.

A moot point now considering she was entertaining another man at her house. Chance walked into his garage and turned on the lights. Somber, he moved toward his latest creation and got to work on it. He worked until the tension had left him, then and only then did he go inside his home and head for bed.

In the morning, he was not in a better mood. His mind raced with the possibilities of how Zora ended her night with Rafael Carmichael. Had he gotten the privilege of tasting the succulent woman Zora was?

"Shit!" he swore as he ripped back his covers and stumbled from bed. "It is none of my business what she did or does or who it happens to be with."

Ding-dong.

Running a frustrated hand over his face, Chance shoved his legs into a pair of sweats and headed for the door.

He pulled it open and even the cold air that hit his chest couldn't stop the grin on his face. Two buddies from the Marines stood on the other side. Colonel Frank Kipper and Captain Dillon Shaw.

"What are you two doing here?" he asked, waving them inside.

"Figured we'd come see what was so special about this place," Kipper said.

"I see retirement has turned you lazy. What, did you just get up out of bed?" Shaw questioned.

Shaking both men's hands, Chance merely smiled. "It's 0500. Yes, I just got up and no, retirement hasn't made me lazy."

"Coffee on?" Kipper asked.

"Automatically," Chance replied. "Now, tell me what you are really doing here."

The men shrugged out of their coats and hung them on the coat rack. "Get dressed. We'll start scraping up some chow." Shaw led the way to the kitchen.

Chance watched them go as if they still all shared quarters. Knowing they wouldn't tell him until they were good and ready, he took a quick shower and got dressed.

They were putting down food on the table as he walked back in the room.

“I was heading to the base today, so what’s so important for you to come to me?”

“Can’t we just come see our old friend?” Shaw handed him a cup of coffee.

Chance raised a brow. “You do remember we’ve been through enough together that I can read through the shit you’re spewing, right?”

“Mouthing off this early in the morning, must be serious. What, you got a broad in your room?” Kipper teased.

“I think if he did, he either would have had a smile on his face or told us to come back later,” Shaw piped in as he reached for some toast.

“There is no woman here.” Chance sat down and scooped up some eggs onto his plate.

“Figures. You always were uptight, Jameson.” Shaw pointed a lean finger at him.

“What the hell are you talking about? I’m not uptight,” Chance said vehemently. “Just trying to figure some things out.”

The men sobered.

“How is it going shifting into civilian life?” Kipper asked.

How was it going? Was it even going? Chance shook his head in dismay. “I honestly think I believed it would be an easier transition than it is.”

“So come back,” Shaw said.

Chance snapped his head up. “Come back? I’m retired.”

“Well...you don’t have to be. General Mitchy was going to talk to you about this when you got there today but decided we should approach you with it first,” Kipper explained.

A thrill ran through Chance. He was almost lost without the Corps. He didn’t know much else. “So talk,” he said as he ate a forkful of eggs.

Kipper sat forward and opened his mouth to talk. *Ding-dong*. The doorbell went off again. “Wow, Jameson, your place is busy.”

Sliding back his chair, Chance wiped his mouth and headed for the door. He pulled it open and froze.

Zora stood on the other side, her big sepia eyes blinking up at him.

“Morning, Chance.” Her alto voice flowed over him, banishing the cold morning air.

“Ms. Nicolette,” he muttered.

“I just stopped by to get the key from you. I won’t be home until late tonight and I wasn’t sure what time you would be leaving. And when I saw your lights on, I just figured I’d come over and get it.” She shoved a basket at him. “These are for you.”

“Come inside and I’ll get the key. It’s too cold out here.” He stepped back. “Thank you for the basket.”

“No prob.”

She brushed by him and walked into his house. Her familiar smell reached out and sucker punched him in the gut. Immediately his body clamored for hers to be closer. Underneath him would be better, well, hell, even on top of him would work. Just closer and preferably with less clothes. None.

“Morning,” a drawl from the kitchen yanked his head out of the gutter and back on the two men approaching Zora.

Shutting the door, Chance stepped close to her and shot a glare to his friends.

“Ms. Nicolette, these are two very good friends of mine, Colonel Frank Kipper and Captain Dillon Shaw. This is my neighbor Ms. Zora Nicolette.” He placed his hand on the small of her back.

“Morning, gentlemen,” Zora said lightly. “Please excuse my intrusion, I won’t be long.”

“Not at all,” Kipper took her hand and bowed over it, “you are a most pleasant distraction.”

Chance shoved the basket Zora had given him at Kipper. “Go put that on the table, I have to get a key for Ms. Nicolette.”

Shaw shook her hand as well and then the men peered into the basket. Chance left them there and went to find a duplicate key for her.

Wrapping his fingers around the key, he paused in the doorway and watched the three people who stood unaware of his scrutiny. Zora was so animated as she talked, even from a distance he felt like some of her energy flowed to him. The men seemed almost spellbound by her.

Taking advantage of his private ogling moment, he let his eyes roam over her. She had on a patchwork colored leather jacket, black slacks and white tennis shoes. Her hair was free and her many braids swung with each move she made.

As if feeling his inspection, Zora turned her toasted gaze toward him and flashed him a big smile. Her eyes warmed as they looked over him and she winked before her attention was back on the two before her.

He pushed away from the frame he leaned against when their heads all bent over the gifts she had brought with her.

“What’s going on?” he asked as he inserted himself beside her.

“We’re just looking at all these wonderful treats she brought you.” Kipper picked up a scone and bit into it. “Oh, this is divine,” he moaned with approval.

“Thank you.” Her watch beeped and she pulled up her right sleeve to turn it off. “I have to get going, you have the key?” she asked.

“Right here. Thanks again for looking after the place.” He handed it to her and watched her put it on her key ring.

“No sweat. I’ll just pile your mail on the table.” She smiled at him. “Just stop by when you get back. Have a safe trip.” Her eyes drifted to his friends. “It was a pleasure meeting you.”

Before he could say anything to her she faced him again, reached up, and kissed him. Then she left without another word.

Chance was still staring at the door when Shaw slapped him on the back.

“Well now, that explains a lot of your hesitation in coming back.”

“Shut it, Shaw,” he growled, his fingers unconsciously touching his lips as if he could still feel her.

“Someone’s got it bad,” Kipper chortled around a mouthful of scone.

“You do know I can kill you and say you were breaking and entering,” Chance threatened.

The men laughed.

“So...it’s Ms. Zora Nicolette then, is it?” Shaw asked totally deadpan.

Chapter 5

Zora was sitting on her couch, feet up, and looking through some more magazines when her doorbell rang.

“Come in,” she hollered over the sultry strands of Lena Horne as it played.

She glanced up as the door opened. Filling her doorway was the large body of Chance Jameson. He had on a black leather jacket, blue jeans, tennis shoes, and peeking out over the top of the zipper was his white shirt.

Zora licked her lips. Damn, he was fine. “How was your trip?” she asked from her seat.

“You shouldn’t just let anyone walk in your house that way.”

“Fine,” she shrugged, “shut the door on your way out.” Zora stared at the things in her hand, deliberately ignoring him.

Her insides clenched that the first thing out of his mouth would be a reprimand. Although in the back of her mind, she knew he was right.

Click.

Zora wanted to look up and see if he was still there, but refused to do so. She ran her tongue over her teeth and stared steadfastly at the blurred image on the page before her.

It was pulled out of her hand and when the crisp scent of winter air and Chance's cologne floated over her.

"I thought you were leaving."

His handsome face appeared in front of her as he stepped over one outstretched leg and knelt between them. "I haven't thanked you yet for taking such good care of my house." He grabbed her hands and pressed a kiss to the back of each.

She shivered and fought the urge to jump him right then and there. "Well, now you've thanked me."

"No, Zora," he purred, "I haven't even begun to thank you yet."

Her panties became soaked and she bit off a whimper.

Her pussy clenched as his hands ran over the outside of her thighs. He leaned in and kissed her.

Zora's eyes closed as his tongue made love to her mouth, in a slow and gentle manner. She squirmed on the couch as his hands moved toward the hem of her shirt.

"I've missed you," he admitted as he lifted her shirt, baring her belly.

"Really," she shuddered, "I thought you were going to kill me when I kissed you in front of your friends."

"Killing you wasn't what popped up in my mind."

She grinned and helped him with her shirt. Sitting forward, Zora lowered the zipper on his jacket and watched him shrug out of it. His shirt hugged his torso in a way she wanted to.

“What did?”

His eyes glittered. “Same thing that’s up now.”

Chance got up and leaned over her and nibbled at her lower lip. She wrapped her arms around his neck and with his encouragement hooked her legs about his waist. With a smooth and effortless motion, he stood upright and carried her down the hall to her bedroom.

She whimpered as his fingers began to tease her taut nipples. “Chance,” she expelled on a long breath.

“Yes, Zora?”

The way her name rolled off his tongue should be branded as illegal. She rubbed against him, shameless, wanting. She ran her hand over his head, loving how his short hairs felt against her palm.

Chance hadn’t been sure what he was going to say when he arrived on Zora’s stoop. He wanted to thank her and at the same time, he longed to demand what her relationship was with Rafael Carmichael.

Even now, thinking of him, made his lip curl up in distaste. It was a short memory of the man, disbanded by the seductive touch and smell of the woman in his arms. Her legs tightened around his waist and he rolled the taut nipple poking through her bra between two fingers.

Chance used his foot to edge her bedroom door open, there were candles burning throughout the room. He entered her room and smiled. Zora's room was like no other he had been in. It personified her so perfectly and each time he was there it grabbed his attention, it was always changing, like her hair color. The only constant were the candles that lit it and added a gentle smell to the room.

He didn't spend much time taking in the new layout of her room, just relocated the bed and walked toward it. When his legs bumped the mattress he lowered himself onto the bed, Zora remained attached to him.

"Planning on letting go of me?" he asked, loving the way she watched him.

"Not if you are just going to leave me again," she countered.

His fingers squeezed her nipple again, eliciting a sharp gasp from her. "I kinda wanted you out of these." He smiled as she released her hold on him and fell back onto the firm mattress. An action that pulled her breast out of his hand.

"So undress me then," she challenged.

Chance placed both of his hands beside her ears and leaned down to kiss her briefly. Then he stood up and raked his eyes over her prone body. Skin still flushed

with desire, full lips parted and moist, eyes darkened and he noticed a few flecks of gold in them.

The image of her reclining back on her elbows watching him in her pale peach bra. It was made of satin and did nothing to hide her pebbled tips.

Chance slid his fingers under the elastic band of her pants and slowly pulled them down. Zora never took her eyes off him, just lifted her hips so they slid better. His body tingled as her lower half became exposed to his gaze.

He sat back on his heels after dropping her sweats to the floor. She wore a pair of boy shorts, the same color as her bra, the lacy legs hugged her smooth thighs. His cock throbbed painfully.

Running his hands down her legs, he tugged her socks off without looking away from the vision before him. "You're beautiful," he said in awe. "Absolutely beautiful."

When he reached for her she shook her head. "No, I want to undress you now."

He smiled and stood up. "Do with me as you will."

A jolt of electricity rocketed through him at the siren's smile that filled her face. He groaned as she sat up slowly and crawled toward him on her hands and knees. Her gorgeous and expressive eyes filled with endless promises and delights.

"Oh I plan on it," she vowed in a throaty voice, "I plan on it."

He never took his eyes from the angel in pale peach as she moved toward him. She stopped at the edge of the bed and sat up, her luscious lips moist from her tongue, eyes sultry and hooded.

Zora reached out with one hand, grabbed his belt loop and pulled him closer to her. She ran her hands over his thighs and skimmed over the ridge in his pants. His hips thrust forward instinctively as she touched him.

“Zora,” he groaned.

She remained silent and undid the button on his jeans. The zipper was lowered and then she ran her hand over his erection again before depriving him of her touch. Her fingers tugged his shirt out from his pants and inched it up his abdomen.

He ground his back teeth to keep from revoking her control of the situation. Her hands were so smooth against his skin. The trailing of her nails sent more shivers throughout him.

She rose on the bed as she removed his shirt. With the added height of the bed under her feet, her breasts were at his eye level. His palms itched to hold her full breasts. His mouth watered to taste her dark chocolate nipples.

But he held fast.

He tipped his head up to look at her; the mischievous sparkle in her eyes sent another rush of blood to his already swollen cock. Chance placed his hands on

her hips and began caressing her skin, moving up over her ribcage and teasing the undersides of her breasts.

“Chance,” she muttered. Her breasts brushed close to his face.

“Teasing me isn’t helping my control.”

She winked at him. “Aren’t you supposed to be patient? You know with all that military training you have.” Her warm breath flowed over him.

“Wanna know what they taught me in the Corps?” He licked the valley between her breasts and reveled in her shiver.

“What’d they teach you?” Her question was breathless.

“It may take a long, long time for me to get through it all,” he drawled, moving his hands down to cup her ass.

“Well, I’m not going anywhere,” she panted.

Chance drifted between her spread thighs and rubbed a lone finger up the wet crevice. He sucked on one breast and rolled the nipple in his mouth, bra and all.

“No,” she gasped. “I get to undress you, stop before you make me lose my train of thought.”

He smirked. “I like you flustered.”

She stepped out of his grasp, even though his finger between her legs was rubbing her. Zora knelt back on the mattress and placed her hands on his open jeans.

“Shoes off,” she commanded softly. The music filtering back from her living room was louder than her voice but he heard her without any problem.

He kicked them off and waited for her next order.

She didn’t say a word as she pushed his jeans down over his hips. Zora climbed off the bed and turned him to face her as she went to her knees and lifted each leg out of his pants.

He swallowed hard as she touched the erection tenting his boxers. His hips tried to keep her touch on him, but she only caressed him briefly. His groan of frustration was obvious as she looked up at him and shook her head.

“Patience.”

Was she kidding? The smell of arousal was in the air, her moisture on his fingers and her warm breath on his cock. And she wanted him to exercise patience?

He grunted and prayed for some.

“Better,” she praised.

Her fingers dipped under the band of his boxers and slowly lowered them. He licked his lips as he watched her stare at his rigid erection that was right in

front of her. When her teeth gathered her lower lip in her mouth, he almost lost all control.

He knew he was in trouble when her hands reached out and touched him. Her fingers caressing up and down his length sent his mind into a dark place where he knew that finding relief with her would be the only way to set him free.

His breath caught as she licked the tip of his penis, swiping off the precum that had gathered there. One, two, three swipes with her tongue as her fingers moved continuously up and down his shaft.

He groaned in pleasure as her mouth totally engulfed the head of his cock. Her lips held him with the perfect tightness, her tongue teased the slit.

“Zora,” he uttered.

She didn’t answer. His legs spread as she placed some fingers on his balls and began massaging and playing with them. Chance grabbed fistfuls of her hair and began to slide his hips forward.

He moaned in contentment as her mouth took his length and didn’t argue with his need to move. She ran her tongue up the underside of his penis using her lips to grip him as he pulled back. Her teeth lightly grazed him as he pushed into her.

Gripping her hair tighter until he heard a soft gasp from her, Chance increased the speed of his thrusts. In and out, he drove into her, loving how she

willingly took all of him. He needed something; he needed her, all of her.

Everything she could give.

His hips moved faster, her mouth kept him so wet; it was like being buried balls deep in her pussy. Almost as perfect as that was.

He looked down at her. She stared at him, her gaze holding his as she devoured him. He could read the hunger in her gaze as she slurped along his throbbing length.

Chance could feel his balls beginning to tighten. He couldn't take much more. Her entire body gave him chills, her acceptance of who he was, the amount of pleasure she radiated, everything about her.

Her free hand dug into his buttock as she shifted on the bedspread. The image of his white cock slipping between her dark lips heightened his experience in ways he had never dreamed about. It was so exotic.

She was so beautiful. The braids he didn't hold in his hands moved with his pistoning hips, teasing his skin, heightening his pleasure. He could see her shifting on the bed and his nose was filled with the scent of her arousal.

"I'm about to cum, Zora."

One side of her mouth lifted in a sexy smile, but her mouth never relented. He clenched his teeth and moved faster within her warm mouth. With a low shout

he emptied himself deep in the back of her throat, her nose brushed against his pubic hairs.

Zora kept her mouth milking him until there was nothing left in him. When she was done, she released him with a pop, sat back on her heels and gave him a Cheshire grin.

Chance pushed her back on the bed, wedged himself between her legs and kissed her. He rubbed his semi-erect cock against her lacy mound. His tongue thrust deep as he felt her pussy juices seep through her panties and coat his rapidly hardening penis.

“Chance,” she whimpered on a half beg. Her legs widened and she arched against him, her desire clear.

He didn’t waste any time, pulled back, removed her underwear and sheathed himself home inside her in one powerful thrust.

Groans left them both as his length filled her. He hissed in pleasure as her nails sank into his shoulders. Chance lowered his head to hers and prayed the night would never end.

He stirred and opened his eyes, Chance smiled as he saw he was still in her bed. He hadn’t the energy to go home after Zora had finished with him. Turning his head to the side, he realized he was in bed alone.

Stretching languidly, he rolled out of bed and slipped on his boxers. Chance heard a dish drop in the kitchen and he pulled on his pants before padding up there. He stopped at the entrance to the kitchen and stared.

His eyes traveled over her as she stood by the sink washing something. She had on a pair of red sweats, rolled down so they fit her, and a black sweatshirt on.

He watched her ass, so snug in the material, shake to the music that played. His cock stirred to life. Moving silently into the room, he approached her from behind.

“Morning baby,” he whispered, slipping his arms around her.

The woman in his arms didn’t sink against him. That was his first clue. The second was the fact her smell wasn’t registering to him. It was nice, but wasn’t Zora’s. The third clue was the elbow that jabbed him in the belly.

“Get your freakin’ hands off me, you bastard.”

He stumbled back, totally confused. The woman spun around and shoved him back further. His eyes grew wide as he looked into Zora’s face and didn’t recognize the woman. It was her and it wasn’t.

“You’re not Zora,” he said holding up his hands in surrender.

“No shit!” She stood balanced on the balls of her feet.

Battle ready, were the words that popped into Chance’s mind. This woman knew how to defend herself.

“Who are you?” he asked more than a bit unnerved. What was going on?

“I don’t think you’re in any position to be asking questions here. Who the hell are you?” the Zora lookalike demanded.

The door opened behind him and Chance looked warily behind him, unsure of what he would find. Zora walked in. He thought it was her at least.

“What’s going on here?” she asked.

He sighed, it was Zora. Her familiar tone flowed over him. He looked at her, confusion on his face.

“This man grabbed me!” her clone snapped, brown eyes spitting fire.

Zora laughed.

Chance watched her unsure if her laughter was a good thing or not.

Zora walked between them and chuckled again before holding up her free hand. “Sorry, I’d hoped I would be back before Chance got up.”

“Oh, so it has a name, does it?” the other woman snapped her stance not relaxing a bit.

“Be nice,” Zora insisted. “Kenya, this is Chance Jameson. Chance, this is my sister, Kenya, my twin.”

Chance should have known. He really should have. But the fact there could possibly be two of his Zora, didn’t cross his mind. He took the bag from Zora’s arm, kissed her on the cheek, and looked at her sister.

“My apologies for earlier, Ms. Nicolette.” He nodded his head in apology.

Kenya glared for another second, looked at her sister and shared some sort of twin thing before she burst out laughing. “I should be offended. I obviously am the pretty one of the two of us and my ass isn’t as big as hers.”

“Kenya!” Zora shouted. She jumped at her sister in mock anger.

Chance remained silent, opting instead to put the bag on the counter. He knew better than to comment on that.

As he emptied the contents of the bag, he kept an eye on the joking sisters. On the identical twin sisters. Kenya even had her hair like Zora’s. Both ladies had the same dimple in their left cheek when they smiled.

Their love for one another was apparent in the way they whispered to one another. He knew they were talking about him from the way Kenya kept arching a brow and looking at him. Suddenly he wished he had put on a shirt.

“So,” Kenya sauntered into the kitchen and leaned a hip against the counter, “what do you do? Besides my sister, obviously.”

“Kenya, be nice. No interrogations,” Zora growled.

Chance watched Zora as she took a dozen eggs and set them by the stove. “I think I’ll go put a shirt on.”

Popping a bite of cinnamon roll in her mouth, Kenya winked. “Don’t bother doing so on my account. I’m fine with a half naked man walking around in front of me. Especially in as good of shape as you are.”

“Excuse me, Ms. Nicolette.” He nodded at Kenya determined not to blush. He walked over to Zora and wrapped his arms around her, whispering in her ear, “Morning beautiful.” With a kiss to the skin behind her ear he headed out of the room to get dressed.

Kenya’s cry of “What, no condoms in the bag?” reverberated through the house.

He couldn’t help but laugh at Zora’s return wail of, “Shut *up*, Kenya!”

Zora was pleased that Chance had just accepted her sister being here. When she had shown up back at the house to find them almost squared off with one another, her heart sank. Even though she understood why Chance would have made the mistake, it still bothered her a bit to think he had tried to kiss her sister.

Kenya was doing her best to throw him off and get him to admit something he may have been hiding, but if there was something, Chance wasn’t letting her get

to him. He handled Kenya like no man she had seen do in a long time. Respectful but not at all intimidated. And Kenya could be extremely intimidating.

Chance had come up from her room, dressed as he had when he arrived the previous night, sans his jacket. Kenya had held her tongue but stared at him until Zora had smacked her.

She took a drink of her orange juice and smiled at the sly grin Chance sent her while he conversed with her sister.

“Well, I like him, Z,” Kenya said. “A bit quiet and a bit uptight, but I think that given time with you, you’ll loosen him up.”

Zora sent her sister a half-gratitude, half-irritated look. “I keep telling him, he’s a bit uptight.”

“Is it common for sisters to talk about someone as if they weren’t even around?” Chance asked, amusement lining his tone.

“Sisters privilege,” Kenya teased.

“I see,” he muttered. “I shouldn’t complain when I’m in the company of such beautiful women.”

“Charmer.” Zora and Kenya said at the same time.

He smiled and Zora’s heart sped up. There was a small crinkle that appeared by the corners of his eyes when he did that melted her insides.

Zora returned his smile and stuck her tongue out at her sister's gagging noise. The rest of breakfast was lighthearted as Chance shared himself with her sister. He didn't seem to hold anything back. He answered all her questions about his family and what he had done in the Marine Corps.

As she loaded the dishwasher, Kenya left the room to make some phone calls and left her alone with Chance. "Thank you for putting up with my sister," she said.

He slid his arms around her waist. "She isn't bad, just being protective of you."

"When'd you realize it wasn't me?" Zora asked.

His lips nuzzled her neck. "The moment my arms went around her waist." Zora stiffened. "You are identical twins, Zora. You didn't exactly tell me your sister was your twin, just that you had a sister."

She relaxed against him. That was true. "And if she hadn't pushed you away?"

Chance spun her in his arms so they were face to face. His eyes smoldered with emotion. "I would have stopped." He gently placed his forehead on hers. "I don't want anyone other than you, no matter how beautiful your sister is."

That appeased her and she sank against him. Their mouths met in a passionate joining, tongues sliding across one another.

“Oh gross, get a room,” Kenya’s voice broke the haze she was in.

“We were in a room, you let yourself in uninvited this morning,” Zora returned snappily.

“I have to run,” Kenya said. “Chance, it was wonderful to meet you. Take good care of my sister, so I don’t have to hurt you.”

“It was a pleasure, Ms. Nicolette,” Chance replied. “I hope to see you again.”

“Well, perhaps you’ll be around for Christmas,” she hinted.

“No, Ma’am. I’ve promised my mother I’d be home for the holidays this year.”

“Well, can’t go back on that, can you now?” Kenya punched him in the shoulder and kissed her sister. “Call you later, sis. He’s a hottie.”

Zora walked her to the door and waved goodbye to her. Snow had begun to fall and she shivered as she shut the door on the outside world.

As she turned around her gaze fell on the man who stood against the wall and watched her. “What?” she asked.

Chance didn’t answer, just walked toward her all silent, dangerous, and sexy looking. He pulled her against his rock-solid chest and just held her. After a bit, he asked, “Do you have to work today?”

“No,” she mumbled against the fabric of his shirt. “This is my day off.”

Her lip curled. Her one stinkin’ day off. Inhaling sharply, her body relaxed as the masculine scent of Chance embedded into her soul.

“Do you have plans?” He rested his chin on the top of her head.

“Nope. I wasn’t planning on anything except checking on your house, but since you are home now, that is off the list.”

“Doesn’t have to be.”

Zora tipped her head back and met his gaze. “What are you talking about?”

“Come to my house with me. Spend the day with me. I want to love you in my house as well. Plus I want to show you something.”

His words warmed her. She nodded. “I’ll be over in a few.”

“No. I want you to come with me now. I don’t want you to change, I want to take you to my bed and strip all these clothes off you.”

She cocked a brow at him. “Are you sure?”

“Of course.” He sounded offended.

“Okay, let’s go.” Zora wasn’t sure how long she had with him and was going to willingly take what she could.

If his smile had the ability to bring sunlight to the world then as far as she was concerned there was no snow falling from the sky at that moment in Trescott Cove.

Zora rubbed against him, wanting him to know she wanted him. Her body was on fire for him. Chance looked down at her and smiled.

“We can make it to my house later,” he whispered as he lowered her onto the couch and covered her with his powerful body.

Chapter 6

Zora shut the door of the oven and glanced around the kitchen. All her coworkers were busy, scampering around and making sure the boss man was pleased.

She wasn't pleased. The first week of last month, her boss had decided that Zora needed to start working between twelve and sixteen hours a day. And that would be including Thanksgiving. One of the other chef's was going through a "personal crisis" and so now it fell upon Zora to pick up her slack. It was almost December, Christmas closing fast and she wasn't about to give up her family tradition with her sister.

Not that the damn woman did anything anyway. Personal crisis my ass, probably got tired of getting up early.

"Stop sneering, Zora," her friend Mandee whispered as she walked by.
"Craig's watching you."

Craig Towery, the big boss.

“Good,” she snapped. “I’m exhausted. It’s not my fault his slut is having a bad month. He shouldn’t keep her up all night fucking her then. Or hire another chef to take her place, not double my workload.”

“Is there a problem, Ms. Nicolette?” Craig’s nasally voice reached her.

Ignoring the silent plea in her friend’s eyes, Zora nodded. “Yes.”

“And that would be?” His eyes narrowed in challenge.

She put her hands on her waist. “I’m exhausted.”

“Get more sleep. You have to work Thanksgiving you know. And if it goes well we will remain open for Christmas as well.”

Oh hells nawh! I’ll be damned if I’m giving up both holidays. I can’t take this anymore.

“And when exactly do you propose I do that? When I’m here cleaning up after the woman who needed a *break*, or when I’m tailing the other members of her crew that aren’t pulling their weight around here? And don’t even *get* me started on Christmas.”

“Be careful, Ms. Nicolette,” he warned.

“Or what? I am here excessively late daily and then I come in early to do what I normally do. If your afternoon crew was better I wouldn’t have to work so hard to keep up some sort of standard for your restaurant.” She waved him silent. “They are lazy, dirty, and half of them don’t give a damn if the orders are right. That’s the reason they are all coming in when my crew is in. We’re just better.”

“Some of them are my family.” He stepped closer to her.

“And I’m sure that’s what got them the job,” she sneered. “When they shouldn’t even be washing the damn dishes. Probably couldn’t get that right either. You wanted me to cover the supervisor position on her shift until she got over her thing. Well I’ll be damned if I’m putting up with that shift until she pops out your bastard and gets her ass back to work.”

“Watch your mouth!”

Zora untied her apron. “I’m done. I’m not covering for your whore anymore. Tell her to suck it up and just accept that people like my cooking better than hers. Tell your wife you are having an affair, tell her your dick is the reason her family restaurant is going to fail. I don’t care. I’m done. I quit. You can mail me my final check.” She tossed her apron in his face, shrugged apologetically at Mande and walked out.

She sat in her car and shook for a while. Zora drove home in a daze, which considering the massive amounts of snow they had, wasn’t a brilliant thing to do. She wasn’t seeing as she entered her home. Kicking the door shut behind her, she dropped her items wherever and headed to her liquor cabinet.

Pulling out a bottle of Black Label she looked at it and began to shake.

“What the hell did I just do?”

Placing the bottle on the top of the cabinet she sank to the floor and covered her face with her hands. Then the sobbing began.

She sat there for a while until her tears subsided and wiped her eyes. “Well, guess I just got that kick to start my own business.” Zora chuckled humorlessly.

A knock came on her front door. With a groan, she pushed up from her position on the tiled floor. Weary steps took her over to the door and she opened it.

Chance stood there with a crooked smile on his face. “Hey.” His expression sobered as he looked at her face. “Is everything okay?”

“Peachy,” Zora said, trying hard to be as cheerful and upbeat as she normally was.

It didn’t work.

“What’s wrong, Zora?” he asked, entering her home and closing the door on the cold winter afternoon.

“Why should anything be wrong? I’m fine. Yelled at my boss, quit my job, and drove home like an idiot. But sure...I’m just peachy.”

He pulled her into his embrace and Zora inhaled the sharp crisp smell of a winter day along with the heady scent of Chance Jameson. For a moment she allowed herself to let someone else hold her up and offer support. She didn’t try to be chipper and upbeat, she just took his silently offered strength.

Chance swept her off her feet, tucking her head against his shoulder and carried her back to her room. She was almost nonresponsive as he undressed her.

“Lie here for a minute,” he commanded as he placed her naked body on the bed sheet.

Zora closed her eyes and battled the fatigue that swamped her body. Minutes later, Sade played softly and the curtains were drawn. The bed dipped as he joined her on the bed.

A low groan of approval slipped past her lips as his hands began massaging her. Strong fingers worked out the tension in her shoulders and back before moving on. Surrendering to the exhaustion she fell into a much needed sleep.

The ring of her cell phone jarred her awake. Zora fumbled for it in the dark and answered it on the third ring.

“Hello?”

The words on the other end jerked her upright. Could she be hearing right?

“I’m on my way over, Cami. I’ll be right there.” Zora hung up and scrambled out of bed, shoving into the closest clothing she could grab.

Dashing up to her living room, she turned on the porch light, grabbed her keys, and stuffed them into her pocket as she left the house. Cami may not live far, still, Zora shivered in the night air as she jogged and slid her way to Cami’s house.

Chance had been loath to leave Zora alone in her bed. He longed to crawl in beside her and experience the bliss he found in her arms. He knew how exhausted she had become lately. It started in October, her hours at work grew long and the times they shared she was more tired than normal. Still, her outward cheer had remained the same.

Until today.

There was nothing on her face aside from exhaustion, pain, and confusion when he saw her. So he had shoved his own desire to the side and offered her comfort the best way he believed would help her.

After the room was filled with her deep breathing, he brushed a kiss over her cheek and left her alone. He went to his house and began working in his garage again.

The methodical motion of sanding relaxed him. He let his mind wander to his latest trip back to the base and what the general had offered him.

If he took this job what would it mean for him and Zora? Would she want a long distance relationship? Did he?

Truth be told he was bored. Retirement wasn't what he thought it was going to be. After all those years of being busy all the time, he was unsure of what to do. Sure he got to build things and he didn't have to wear a uniform every day, but something was missing and he wasn't sure what exactly.

Work?

Zora?

What?

Chance reached for his beer and took a drink. He walked over to his old radio and turned on some music.

Focused again on the task at hand, he was surprised when a voice reached him from the doorway.

"Hey, Chance," the man said.

Chance looked over and grinned. It was his best friend, Taylor McQueen.

"Taylor!" He placed the sandpaper down on his worktable, wiped his hands on his pants and went to meet his friend. "Damn, it's good to see you." Taylor was normally off in some remote country doing things that he couldn't discuss so it was great to see him alive and well. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Figured I'd come see your new digs. Kipper and Shaw spoke highly of it."

Chance hugged Taylor. "Got time for a beer? Here to catch up?"

“Hell yeah. You’ve got a guest. I took a wrong turn and ended up in a place called Savoy Valley. I want to be in daylight before I venture again. Snowy roads, mountains...I’m here for the night.”

Chance chuckled. “You really got lost.” He opened the fridge he had in the garage and tossed Taylor a beer.

Snatching it out of the air effortlessly, Taylor nodded. “I did. I don’t have that GPS in my vehicle.” He opened his drink.

“Could’ve called for directions.” Chance returned to working on his project.

“I was hoping to surprise you. Kipper gave me directions. Last time I’m listening to a man who has people drive him around for a living.” Taylor took a drink.

Chance burst out laughing. “Not to mention you find your way for a living. That’s got to be embarrassing for you. And you did surprise me.” He arched a brow. “You didn’t ruin my lock by picking it, did you?”

A pained expression crossed his friend’s face. “Ouch. I’ve never hurt a lock.”

It was true. Taylor hadn’t met a lock he couldn’t best. And for that reason, Chance remained silent. Just shook his head in amusement.

“I see you’re finally making your boat.”

Chance smiled, his fingers trailing over the smooth wood of the frame. “Yes. Why not? I’m retired and I live here. There’s a beautiful bay just outside waiting for us.”

Taylor moved closer and touched it as well. “What’s her name?”

“Not sure, she hasn’t told me yet.” His friend nodded with understanding.

Jumping up to sit on his workbench, Chance gestured with his beer. “Fill me in on what’s up with you, man.”

It was after ten and Chance sat with Taylor in his living room watching the news. It seemed they were in for another storm and the story that caught Chance’s attention was the top story that told of Jem Maxwell being injured in her store and how it had burned. He recalled Zora telling him that her friend Cami’s sister was named Jem and owned a collectibles shop called, *Jem’s Collectibles*. That was the store being mentioned.

“Shit!” he swore.

“You know her?” Taylor asked.

“I’ve met her sister, she’s very good friends with...” he trailed off. His mind zoomed onto Zora. Did she know? Was she awake? Did she need him?

“With?” Taylor leaned forward and waited. “With this woman that I heard about, Ms. Nicolette? Who bakes things for you?”

“Zora,” he said, her image appearing before him.

“Zora,” Taylor’s deep voice reached him. “Beautiful name. When do I get to meet her?”

Chance snapped his eyes over to his friend. His lip curled instinctively at the thought of Taylor meeting Zora. He knew his friend was handsome. His darkly tanned skin, jet black hair and mysterious green eyes were a catch to numerous women. Taylor McQueen was a huge flirt.

“Never,” Chance growled.

“Hey, I’m not like that. I know from that expression you already think she’s yours. I just think that as best friend I have to give my approval. So come on, dish. Give me stats.” His hands outlined a figure in the air.

Chance threw a pillow at him, hitting him in the head. “Don’t make me hurt you,” he warned. And he didn’t think she was, he knew it.

* * * * *

Zora opened the door of her house. It had been an interesting night. After Cami got through telling her what had happened with Jem, she told her she wanted in on the catering business. She had just been faced with the reality that your life could be taken away without a moment’s notice, so why do something you didn’t love.

They had spent the remainder of the evening working on names and looking over the final three locations Delinda had emailed to her. Cami's decision had been instantaneous the second she looked them over. The shop a few doors down from her sister's place, three actually.

Delicious Surrenders had been decided upon for the name of their business. Zora left Cami getting ready to head back to the hospital, calmer than she had been before.

Closing the door, Zora leaned against it. She turned on a light and sank to the floor. Unlike the first time she did this today, this was a relief slide as opposed to a freaked out one.

It was going to happen. There was no reason for her to panic about quitting her job. No fear existed in her about not making Delicious Surrenders a huge success. With the two of them, she knew it would be fine. They would be fine. Hell, they would excel.

Climbing up from where she sat, Zora sat down on her couch and turned on her stereo. Since she didn't have a television, she had a wide swath of music to choose from. She pressed the random button and settled against the cushions.

Seconds after she had gotten comfortable, shoes kicked off, totally relaxed a loud pounding came on her door.

“Damn it all!” she swore as she swung her legs off the couch, shoved her feet into slippers and padded to the door. It had been an emotional day for her and she wasn’t sure what was waiting for her on the other side of the door.

Opening the door she stared disbelievingly at Craig Towery.

“What do you want?” she demanded.

“We need to talk.” He pointed behind her. “Can I come in?”

She narrowed her eyes, understanding the man wasn’t going anywhere until she talked to him. “No.” Reaching for her jacket, she tugged it on and stepped out onto the porch. Arms crossed she waited. “Well?”

“You can’t quit. I’ll forget what you said, just come back.”

Zora shook his head. “Nope. I’m done.”

His eyes flashed with anger and Zora began to wonder about the wisdom of having stepped out onto the porch. “You can’t do that.”

“Actually I can. Case and point, I did.”

“You bitch!” he hissed.

“Get off my porch, Craig,” she commanded with more bravado than she felt.

“Not until you say you are coming back to work.” He stepped closer and from the darkness stepped two of his family, they moved slowly up the steps.

“Forget it.” Her heart pounded loudly but she refused to show fear.

“Don’t make a decision you will regret.”

“I don’t plan on it. And I am through with you and your damn restaurant. Should’ve paid attention to how your wife ran it before she got sick,” Zora snapped.

“There is no way I’m telling my wife that I lost you as a chef. So you tell me you are coming back to work or—”

“Or what? You’re gonna beat me to prove a point? Well hell, that’s smart, because after you beat me up, I still won’t be working for you and after I get out of the hospital that situation won’t have changed.” Her hands landed on her hips.

“Let me make this clear for you. I. Will. Never. Work. For. You. Again. *Ever.*”

“Not words you want to say to me,” he growled low.

“And what words exactly were you hoping for Ms. Nicolette to say?” A deep voice asked from the edge of her porch.

Zora turned her head and groaned with relief as Chance strode out of the dark.

“This ain’t none of your business,” Craig bit out. He waved his hand to encompass his relatives behind him. “Our numbers say so.”

He never slowed, walked up until his body was between hers and theirs. “Wow, what a man. Picking on a woman with two men as your backup. Scared of her?” Chance’s tone scathed.

“Keep interfering and you’ll be hurting.”

Zora placed a hand on Chance's arm. She didn't want him getting hurt. He reached back and squeezed her hand but never took his eyes off the three in front of him.

"Even though I doubt he will need it, he didn't come alone," another voice broke in.

Shocked, Zora and the others, except for Chance, looked in the direction of the unknown tone, trying to see who it was that belonged to the voice.

Coming around the corner of the other side of her porch was a man she hadn't ever seen before. Zora's breath caught as she took a look at the man who walked into view. Flowed would be a better word. He was poetry in motion, deadly looking poetry.

Tall, powerfully built, handsome. She gulped and blinked a few times to make sure she wasn't dreaming. The man striding toward them smoked a cigarette and looked totally dangerous. He didn't have weapons on him, but there was no doubt in Zora's mind he could inflict some serious damage should he want to.

Apparently, Craig and his two idiot family members thought so as well. "Think on what I said, Zora. Come back to work."

"I believe the lady said she wasn't ever coming back to work for you. Craig Towery." Chance put extra emphasis on his name.

The message was received as Craig and his relatives slunk off her porch. The stranger leaned against a post and calmly finished his smoke, one eye on her and keeping one down the path.

Chance spun around and gripped her arms. "Are you okay?"

"Fine, Chance. I'm fine. He just wanted to scare me."

"He's lucky I didn't kill him." He shook her a little bit. "What the hell were you thinking coming out and confronting him like that?"

She was shocked. That was not what she had expected him to say. "Is that what you came over her to do? Yell at me? Cause if it was, then take your ass back home and keep it there."

Her gaze flickered over to the silent man watching. His expression betrayed nothing but she would have sworn he was amused. He merely cocked a brow and blew a thin stream of smoke into the cold night air.

"I'm not going back home. Do you have any idea how scared I was for you when I saw those three facing off with you?"

"No!" she shouted right back. "How the hell would I *ever* know what you feel? You keep yourself so god damn rigid I don't truly know what you're feeling." Her chest heaved and she shoved him away from her.

Yanking open her door she stepped inside and looked back at the last second. "And you, whoever you are, thank you for your help. If you can put up

with this man for the night, I'd like to invite you to breakfast in the morning. Seven." She shot one last glare at Chance and slammed the door in his face before locking it.

Zora headed straight for her bedroom and fell on her bed. The emotions from her encounter flowed over her and she just shook until sleep overtook her.

* * * * *

Chance knocked on Zora's door. He had wanted to kill Taylor for eliciting such a reaction from Zora. He had heard the groan of approval from her when he had strolled into view.

Taylor had just laughed and said, "That is one hell of a woman you got there. She's right you know. You are uptight."

His night had been spent tossing and turning. Finally he gave up and went to work on his boat. He remained out there until Taylor came to get him saying it was close to seven and he was going over to Zora's house.

He wasn't about to let Taylor around her without him. So with a quick shower he got dressed and now stood outside her door in the cold morning. Chance knocked again.

“Maybe she knows you’re with me and doesn’t want you around,” Taylor teased.

“Shut it, McQueen,” he growled just as the door opened.

Zora stood there. Her big doe eyes looked at him and then past him to land on Taylor. That’s when a smile crossed her face. “Oh wonderful, you made it. Please come in.” her expression smoothed out a bit as she looked back at him. “Chance,” she said.

“Good morning, Zora.” Chance waited for Taylor to enter before he shut the door behind them. “This is my friend Colonel Taylor McQueen. Taylor, Zora Nicolette.”

Taylor took her hand, bowed over it and brushed a kiss over the back. “It is a pleasure to meet you, my dear.”

Chance growled low in his throat. The twinkle in Taylor’s eye told him his friend had heard him.

“And a pleasure to meet you as well. I’m sorry for my outburst last night. It was just a very trying day. Please come in and we’ll talk over breakfast.”

Chance stood there alone as Zora took his friend into the kitchen with her. Smothering a groan, he hung up his jacket and turned in time to catch the one Taylor launched back at him. Biting back his response, Chance hung his as well.

He looked around Zora's house as he tried to calm himself down. There were boxes of magazines on the floor and he noticed that in her big window were a few new plants. Small trees and some cacti displays.

He glanced in the kitchen and took in the blue jeans and grayish-pink sweater she wore. On her feet was a pair of moccasin slippers. Her braids moved freely and seductively with each motion she made.

Chance felt his cock stir to life. Two minutes in her presence and he was as randy as a teen. His eyes were glued to her ass as she bent over and got something out of a lower cupboard. He licked his lips and groaned. Tugging on his jeans he tried to find a more comfortable position for his hard cock. Breakfast was going to be hell.

When she smiled at Taylor, Chance realized just how pure her spirit truly was. How generous her heart was. True beauty was across the room from him and it scared him senseless.

He strode into the kitchen and walked right up to Zora, uncaring that she was in the middle of a conversation with Taylor, hauled her up against his chest and kissed her. His tongue swept through her mouth like a raging river, stopping for no one and touching everything in its path.

She struggled for a second before her entire body sank into his. Her hands gripped his arms, kneading into his biceps and she responded to the kiss as if kindling had just been lit.

Hearing Taylor chuckle behind him, Chance ended the kiss. He drew out her lower lip and released it before placing a brief kiss on the tip of her nose.

“Morning, Zora,” he murmured.

She blinked back at him, a dazed look on her face. “Mo...morning,” she replied.

He held her gaze for a bit longer and then let go of her. Zora shook her head slightly and tugged on her sweater before walking around him and going to the stove, avoiding looking at Taylor.

“Smells wonderful in here, thanks for inviting me, Ms. Nicolette,” Taylor said.

“Please, call me Zora.” She faced him and sent him a smile that once again made Chance entertain the thought of murdering his friend. “And thank you, for last night.”

Even though he knew exactly what happened, those words painted a picture he didn’t want to envision. Shoving back his initial reaction, Chance asked, “Anything I can do to help?”

“Nope, everything’s ready. Just grab a seat and Colonel McQueen can take one as well.”

“If I am to call you Zora, you have to call me Taylor.”

She laughed. “Will do, Taylor. Now sit down.”

Taylor did and looked at him. “Your woman is bossy.”

His woman. Chance nodded, “Yes. Yes she is.”

Chance and Taylor entertained Zora with stories of their childhood and time in the Corps together. He loved how she got along with Taylor and even more, loved how no matter how much charm he turned on, her eyes only got soft when they looked at him. Not Taylor.

They helped her clean up and when they said goodbye, Chance kissed her long and thoroughly until Taylor cleared his throat, separating them.

“See you later?” Chance asked, his thumbs tracing along her full bottom lip.

“I’d like that,” she said.

“So would I.” He kissed her briefly and left her house, Taylor in tow.

Chapter 7

When Chance stopped by later that week, he was somber as he kissed her lightly.

“What’s wrong, Chance?” Zora asked.

“I’m leaving. Tomorrow.”

Her heart sank and a bad feeling emerged in the pit of her belly. “Just a short trip or are you talking something a bit more permanent?”

“A bit more permanent. I see you starting your dream and that’s amazing. I’m so proud of you.” He kissed her head, tucking her closer to him. “But I’m having a hard time. I don’t know what to do with all this time, and they offered me a job again, so I’m going to go back to the Corps.”

Zora closed her eyes and willed the tears to stay contained. “I understand.” She unwrapped herself from his arms. “We all must do what makes us happy.”

Chance grabbed her wrist and kept her from leaving the sofa. “Wait a minute; I don’t want to leave you.”

“Well, you are.” Her tone was sharp. “You always did need rigidity and discipline in your life. Couldn’t just ride it out and see what came next.” Zora smiled, knowing full well it was strained and he could tell.

“Zora, this isn’t easy for me,” he implored, “I just don’t know what else to do. The Corps was my life.”

“Seems like it still is. Good luck to you.” She stood and wiped her hands on her pants. “Now if you’ll excuse me I have to get to work.”

“Wait; don’t let it end like this.”

“Like what? We were neighbors who fucked. Don’t kid yourself it was anything other than that.”

Her stomach twisted at the flash of pain on his face. Then his face closed and he nodded.

“Guess so.” He stood. “Well, goodbye, Ms. Nicolette.”

The tears threatened again. Zora wanted to throw herself in his arms and beg him to stay. To take her with him. She didn’t know, all she knew was she didn’t want him to go. But through the pain she smiled.

“Goodbye, Mr. Jameson.” Zora walked him to her front door. She kept the smile on her face until she shut the door behind him, then her expression crumpled. Biting her lower lip, she turned around and froze at the sound of her door slamming open.

“God damn it!” Chance thundered. “Not like this.”

She looked at him and in that second she saw the warrior he had been trained to be. Two powerful strides brought him right back into her personal space.

One hand grabbed her arm and yanked their bodies flush against one another. His free hand wrapped itself up in her braids and pulled her head back so he had easy access to her mouth. Her pussy flooded with moisture and her belly pitched and heaved with desire.

His mouth covered hers in a demanding kiss. He dominated her; bending her back and making her hold onto him to remain standing. Her fingers dug into the cold leather of his jacket as she poured everything in her into that kiss.

Chance took the hand holding her arm and shoved it down the front of her pants, slipping two thick fingers deep inside her. Zora moaned into his mouth as her body clamped its muscles around him. He thrust his fingers deep within her, alternating between slow and fast. Just when she thought she couldn't take any more, he added another finger and flicked his thumb over her clit, sending her spiraling off the cliff she'd been teetering on.

He ate her scream but never relented. Zora rode his hand, craving more of him. "Please," she begged as his fingers gave her another explosive orgasm.

"What?" he asked. "I need to hear it. Tell me what you want."

“I want you,” she cried, fighting to open her eyes and look at him. His face was a mask of concentration, his amazing eyes swirled with passion and powerful emotions she wasn’t ready to face.

“Again,” he commanded, his fingers sliding within her.

“I want you.” She took one hand and placed it on the side of his face. “I *need* you.”

Her clothes were off almost before the words she had uttered faded from the air. His didn’t take long to join hers on the tiled floor of her living room.

Chance lifted her in his arms, sat down on the couch and lowered her over his straining erection. A hiss of pleasure left them both as they sat there joined together.

Zora leaned forward and began riding him, their mouths met in a fiery duel for control. Chance won and mastered over the kiss as she found a speed and angle she liked. His fingers dug into the flesh of her ass as she picked up her pace.

With a low growl, he began lifting her and rising up to meet her as she came down. The room filled with low grunts, mewls, and moans.

Zora tossed her head back in time with the approaching orgasm. She screamed in ecstasy when his mouth latched onto a sensitive breast and rolled the nipple around, grazing it with his teeth. That sent her over the edge and she whimpered incoherently as his come filled her.

Chance wasn't done with her. He made love to her in the kitchen, on her table, the counters, in her rooms, on the rug in the living room, an act that gave her rug burn. He took her from behind with her breasts up against a cold window; the contrasting heat from his body gave her a new level of pleasure as he drove home inside her. There was a desperation in their time together, each knew it, but neither spoke of it. There was very little verbal communication between them, just a few here and there.

He took, he demanded and when she gave he demanded even more.

Zora woke alone. The house was dark except for one light and she was tucked into her bed, naked, well loved, sore, and yet, alone.

Knowing she should get out of bed, Zora instead rolled over and buried her face into the pillow that still had a bit of Chance's smell on it. She now allowed the tears to fall and cried herself to sleep, hoping that in her dreams, he would still be with her.

The next few weeks were extremely busy. She and Cami busted their butts getting the building ready. Amazingly, things had moved along very smoothly once they had decided on the building. Since Delinda had her paperwork already, the only thing was to add Cami's name to it. So the place was theirs in no time. They even hired others to help.

Her friend from culinary school, Aliana Deen, who had been pulled in as another chef. Kalen Irvine, who interestingly enough was Cami's half-brother, had been hired to be the party planner.

They had been open only a short time and she sat on the chocolate couch by the entrance and looked around. Cami plopped down beside her.

"Ready?"

Cami nodded, a sparkle in her dark brown eyes rarely seen before. "That I am." She reached out and tugged on Zora's hair. "I see you changed your hair color again. Must be ready as well, huh?"

Zora smiled. She loved changing her hair color. Before they had gotten their first contract, it had been honey blonde. Now it was red. "I'm ready. Nervous, but in a good way. I can't believe we're actually doing this."

Their opening night had been a huge success and both women knew they had been a hit. Delicious Surrenders had been contracted for smaller jobs but this upcoming one was to be the largest event yet. Five hundred people.

Cami took her hand. "How are *you* doing?"

This time her smile was forced. She had told Cami that Chance was no longer a part of her life. And it still hurt; she missed him every single day. She was holding out hope that he would come back, since there was no 'for sale' sign in front of his home.

“I’m fine, Cami. Just fine.”

Her perfect brow arched in disbelief. “Since when? I see you trying to hide your pain. I’m here if you want to talk.”

Zora squeezed her hand. “I’m good, really. But thanks, Cami...for everything.”

In a rare display of restraint, Cami merely nodded. “I’m going to get back to work.”

Reclining on the comfy sofa, Zora asked, “Can you believe our first big gig is going to take place at the Star Crystal Hotel? Whoever owns this Artisan Architectural & Design is all good in my book.”

Cami voiced her approval as well.

Zora jumped up filled with new life. “Okay. I have to stop by and see my sister and then I will be back later on.” She grabbed her coat. “Can I bring you anything?” with a wave she left the shop and headed to her Durango.

* * * * *

Chance threw down the stack of papers he was supposed to be going through. He couldn’t concentrate. All he saw in his mind was Zora.

“Damn it!”

This was supposed to have fixed his wandering mind. He fallen easily back into the routine of being in the Corps and part of him reveled in it. Yet, all his free time his thoughts centered on Zora. And how she was doing.

Did she miss him?

Did her thoughts linger on him?

Did she dream of him as he did her?

His cock stiffened in his uniform pants as her image formed in his mind. Her big expressive eyes, full pouty lips, thick lashes, and that damn dimple when she smiled.

He shifted on his seat, trying to find a more comfortable position. It wasn't working. He stroked his hand along the ridge of his erection. Knowing full well he wouldn't be able to concentrate until he found some relief he shoved away from his desk, strode to the door, and hesitated with his hand over the lock.

No! He spun away and stomped back to his desk. She had his cell phone, she could have called him. He checked the thing so many times just to ensure he hadn't missed a call from her and each time it came up with nothing from her he felt worse.

Was she mad because he left her there after their last round of making love. His hand slid over the hardness in his pants again. He could see her, lying there, riding him, and screaming out his name.

If he was going to jack himself off he wasn't about to have his office smell like sex. Running a hand over his head in frustration he headed for his private bathroom. Shutting the door, he leaned against it and lowered the zipper on his pants.

A small groan of pleasure escaped him as he closed his hand around his throbbing erection. He imagined it was Zora's soft hand. Stroking him. Chance closed his eyes and focused his attention on her mental image as his hand moved faster over his hard length.

Her lips were parted and her eyes so damn sultry as she watched him. The likeness he had of her in his mind pushed him over the edge. He came with a low groan and sagged back against the door, energy spent.

Washing up, he made sure the bathroom and his uniform were spotless. His body much more relaxed, Chance headed back to his desk and tried to focus on the papers before him.

"Colonel, General Mitchy is here to see you," his yeoman told him.

Sliding the papers to the side he answered, "Send them in, Yates."

The door opened seconds later. General Mitchy walked in.

Chance stood. "Good afternoon, General."

"Afternoon Jameson." The man headed for the side bar in the office and poured himself a drink.

“What can I do for you, Sir?”

“I need you to do something for me.” He sat down, drink in hand and stared directly into Chance’s eyes.

Chance sat as well.

* * * * *

Zora gave out last minute instructions to Kalen for the wait staff. She cast a glance over to where Cami stood talking to Robert. If only her friend knew what the night was going to be like for her.

She knew that Cami believed she was going to be right there for the whole night, but she knew better than that. Robert had already cleared his intentions with her. So instead of being in the kitchens for the night, as she had intended, Zora was going to take over Cami’s job. Kalen would help to handle the wait staff. But Zora was truly interested in seeing what happened when Robert Chadwick proposed Cami assist him as hostess tonight. She knew part of her night would be watching the sparks that always seemed to fly between those two.

She tucked a red braid behind her ear and sent nods of encouragement to the crew. The only thing that could make this night any better would be if Chance were waiting for her at home.

The night went beautifully. She sent supporting nods to Cami so she didn't feel bad about not being at her side, their first big bash. When the evening was over she cleaned up with the crew and drove back to the shop, alone. Cami stayed behind with Robert.

Sitting inside the store, she wiped down the last counter and jumped up on it, swinging her feet. Her tired, sore feet.

It was over. Tipping her head back, she let out a scream of pure joy.

"Yeeaaaaahhhhh!"

They had pulled it off. Hoisting her bottled water to the air, Zora silently saluted Cami. "Here's to us, Cami, wherever you may be." A sly grin crossed her face. "And here's to whatever you *may* be doing. At least one of us got a man."

As she locked up the shop and headed for her vehicle, Zora smiled at the sight of her sister's Jeep Compass pulling up beside her. Waiting for her, she pressed the automatic start for her Durango.

"Hey, sis," Zora said when she could see the outline of her sibling in the gentle interior lights.

"Hey. Thought I'd check to see how the first event went."

Zora laughed. "Thought you'd check to see if there was any leftover is more like it."

"Well that, too," Kenya agreed.

“I’ll meet you at my house.” Zora nodded her head at her vehicle. “The extra is already in there.”

“Good. I’m starving and we are long overdue for a sisterly chat.” Kenya raised her window.

Zora sighed. She knew what this talk was going to include. Chance. She climbed in and turned the heat up. Kenya was still waiting for her, and Zora knew her sister was not going anywhere until she left.

Putting her vehicle in gear, she headed for home, her sister following close behind. Kenya parked outside her garage in the driveway but was inside to help her unload the extra food from the back.

“Wow, this smells great,” Kenya said as she grabbed a few containers.

“You’re always hungry, Ken,” Zora teased as she took the remainder of them, shutting the back and the garage as she entered the house.

“Well, I work hard keeping up with Rafe and the rest of those guys.”

“I’m going to change into something comfortable. Dig in, I’ll be right back,” Zora said as she walked to her bedroom.

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” Kenya hollered down after her.

Zora sat down on her bed and rolled her head on her shoulders. It was well after midnight and she was sitting down with her sister to dinner. She really

longed to crawl in-between the sheets and enter a world where Chance was still a part of her life.

Instead, she stripped out of her suit and pulled on a favorite pair of sweats, shoved her feet into her slippers, and tugged a warm sweatshirt over her head. Padding back up to the kitchen, she saw Kenya had set two places and filled their glasses.

“Thanks, Kenya.” Zora pressed a quick kiss to her cheek before claiming a chair. She looked down at the prime rib on her plate. It looked delicious. She picked up her fork and dug into it.

For a few moments there was silence as the sisters ate. But it didn’t last long and Kenya was leaning back in her seat, swirling her wine, and staring at her.

“Come on, Z, when you gonna come clean on what happened with that handsome white neighbor man of yours?”

“Can you let it go, Ken?” Zora looked at her and implored.

“Nope. This thing is eating you up inside,” she waved a hand, “don’t bother trying to deny it. We’re twins; I know when you are in pain.” Kenya drained her wine. “So tell me where he is so I can kick the shit out of him for hurting you, or get over it.”

“He was bored here. He wanted to go back to work.” Zora tried for a smile. “I am following my dream, how could I ask him to give up what made him happy to stay with me?”

“You telling me he picked the Corps over you?” Kenya frowned.

“I’m telling you to let it go. He picked his happiness and I guess I wasn’t the most important thing.” Zora sighed. “And before you say it, Kenya, I could have asked to go with him. I honestly don’t think we were ready for that kind of commitment.”

“You were, weren’t you, Zora?” Kenya asked, compassion lining her tone.

“Yes,” she said on a sigh. “I don’t think I realized it until he was gone.” Zora fought for a smile and failed miserably. “Now I think it’s just too late.”

Kenya pushed away from the table. “Go to bed, I’ll clean up. I’m going to crash in your guest room, okay?”

Zora nodded. Kenya stayed over often but the offer of her cleaning up was one she wasn’t going to fight. She was exhausted. “Night, Kenya.”

“Sleep in, Zora. Sleep in.”

Zora waved as she walked down the hall. It didn’t take her long to brush her teeth and in moments she was slipping into bed, the light from the front of her house filtered down toward her room. She shut her eyes and waited almost impatiently for the sandman to whisk her away.

* * * * *

Chance stood in his office and looked out at the night sky. It was perfectly clear and he could see all the stars. The moon was barely a sliver.

He knew he should be going home, it was two in the morning but he was still at work. He was running the request of his CO over in his head. Could he do it?

Rolling his shoulders, Chance picked up on the red glow of a cigarette heading toward the office. He never moved from his spot, just waited. Soon his door opened and in walked Taylor.

“Figures you’d be here.”

“Hello to you, too, McQueen,” Chance retorted, not moving from his spot.

“Have you called her?” he asked.

That got him to turn. Taylor sat facing him. His feet propped up on his desk.

“What would I say to her? Want to get together for a fuck?” Chance demanded.

“You could. I wouldn’t advise that approach, but you always did things your own way. Maybe you could simply tell her the truth.”

Chance arched a brow. “And what would that be, oh wise one?”

“That you miss her. That you think about her all the damn time. I don’t know, how about that you need her and love her.”

“I don’t—”

“Forget it, Jameson. I know you just as well as you know yourself. But in this case, better, because my emotions aren’t cloudy. You know you love her. Tell her. Just quit being so damn miserable.”

Taylor stood and headed for the door. He opened it and looked back over his shoulder. “Don’t tell me you don’t love her, Chance.” Taylor sighed, shut the door, and leaned against it. “I know the signs.”

Chance walked to his desk and sat down. There was an odd look in his friend’s face he didn’t recognize. So he decided to really listen to what he had to say.

“Whatever you and Zora share is not something that comes along everyday. It’s more than that.” Taylor shifted and moved back to his chair. “Don’t brush it away. You can come to terms with your career, but let her be a part of it.”

“How can you be so sure? Maybe she’s in bed with someone else.”

Taylor sat back and nodded. “Hmmm. You’re right. Probably in bed with him now. Crying out in pleasure at his touch. Screaming his name to the—”

“Enough! Damn it, Taylor, enough!” Chance thundered, slamming his hand on his desk. “Enough.” Just hearing those words come out of his mouth made him furious.

Taylor hooked an ankle over his opposite knee and stared blandly back at him. “Good thing you’re over her.”

Chance ran a frustrated hand down his face. “What do I have to offer her? I’m an older, white man who loves things squared away. And she...is anything but.”

And I don’t want to give her up.

“Don’t go overseas, Chance. At least not without closing the door one way or another on the Zora issue.”

“When’d you get so smart about holding onto your woman?”

A somber look filled Taylor’s darker face. “When I lost the one who meant the world to me.”

“Taylor?” Chance leaned forward.

“I met her in a small village on an op. We were there only for a short time but I had gone early to get established.” He shook his head and released a bark of humorless laughter.

“What happened?” Chance asked.

“I had asked her to marry me. I know it was fast but it felt so right. She was murdered in my arms the day before the wedding.” His voice lost all emotion.

“Time came and we did our job.”

Chance didn’t know what to say. This was the first he had ever heard of this.

“I looked at her the way I saw you and Zora look at one another. I know it’s none of my business what you do, but it just seems that for a woman on your mind so much you’d want to talk to her one last time.” He walked to the door. “Think about it, Chance. I would sell my soul for the opportunity to just hold her in my arms and smell her hair one last time. You have that and are blowing it off.”

Taylor left without another word.

Chance sat there in silence. He thought about what Taylor had said and it made perfect sense. He had the opportunity to see her and wasn’t taking it. How would he manage overseas without any way of knowing how Zora truly felt about him? It was hard enough now.

Grabbing his coat, Chance headed out into the coldness. Christmas stand down started tomorrow and he was going to see his folks. But, just maybe he could swing by Trescott Cove first and see Zora. The thought of seeing her again put a smile on his face as he headed for his quarters.

Chapter 8

Zora smiled as she watched the people at the dinner party enjoy the food. Meeting Cami's eyes from where she stood, positioned on the other side of the room, she winked at her. She also sent Kalen and Aliana a happy grin.

They were swamped with orders. Zora had had no idea people would come out of the woodwork as fast as they had. And it wasn't only in Trescott Cove; they had also gotten requests to cater events in Savoy Valley.

Like the one they were at tonight.

Zora nodded at the tuxedo dressed wait staff. They too, were doing an amazing job.

"You must be very proud. This evening is a huge success." A low voice purred in her ear.

"I'm sorry?" she said confused, turning her head toward the speaker.

Her breath left her in a whoosh. The one who had spoken to her was mouthwatering. In fact, most of the people she'd seen here were extremely attractive, but this one, he sent shivers through her.

He stared at her with highly intelligent eyes that were a mixture of tawny and green-gold.

Oh damn! Those eyes are amazing.

“Just that you are watching everything with a proud look on your face. Your party?” His eyes moved over her suit before meeting her gaze again.

“If by mine you mean catering, then yes.”

A low chuckle escaped from him. “Cute. So you are part of Delicious Surrenders.”

It wasn’t a question.

“Co-owner,” she said, taking in the powerful musculature of her companion.

“Well, my compliments to the chef.” He bowed slightly. “Both of them.”

Zora was amazed this man didn’t have women fawning all over him. He was tall. *Like Chance*, her mind teased. Hair was jet black and hung to his shoulders. He had thick lashes framing those amazing eyes. His face was sharp and covered by golden tan skin.

“Thank you. I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

“Hadn’t thought I would.” He leaned in closer. “Until I saw you.”

She shivered, she couldn’t help it. His voice was a warm purr flowing over her. Placing her attention on something across the room, she said, “Wow. That was good. Use that line a lot?” Zora hooked her hands behind her back. “Do I at least get to know the name of the shameless flirt?”

A rich chuckle traveled over her. "Please don't tell me you think of me as a dog now."

Turning her head, Zora met his gaze straight-on. "Dog? No. you remind me of a cat. And not a housecat. A big cat."

His tongue ran over the bottom of his top teeth. "Well, that's not so bad. I like cats. I could be a housecat. Will you scratch my belly?"

Zora shook her head. "So, you got a name or do I make one up?"

He winked one mesmerizing eye. "What would you call me?"

"Aside from incorrigible? Just tell me your name."

He sighed, an act he made totally sexy. "And here I was looking forward to finding out what you'd really call me." Another masculine sigh before he said, "My name is Dane."

Damn, this man has a lethal voice.

"Nice to meet you, Dane, I'm Zora."

"Zora," he repeated, making her name sound like a sexual act. "It's a pleasure."

"Oh, trust me. The pleasure is all mine." She caught Cami's eye. "But if you'll excuse me, I really have to get back to work."

"Promise you won't leave without saying goodbye."

She smiled. Dane was a charmer. “Well, I’ll do my best, but if you are busy I may just leave.”

His eyes shifted to more tawny before returning how she recalled them to be the first time she saw them. “I won’t be busy,” he said in a low voice.

“Have a good evening, Dane.” Zora walked off to talk with Cami. She was more than amused by the attention bestowed upon her by the handsome man who called himself Dane.

“I think you have an admirer,” Cami said with a wink.

“Right,” Zora chuckled as she switched out an empty plate and put down a full one. “Probably drank a bit too much.”

“I don’t think so, he’s still watching you.”

Zora snuck a glance to where she’d stood with Dane. Sure enough, he leaned against the wall, watching her with those amazing eyes.

“Told ya,” Cami told her victoriously.

He looked like a predator.

“Damn,” Zora muttered. “He’s hot.”

A smirk filled Dane’s face as if he’d heard her words. He raised his glass in silent salute.

Cami laughed and moved down the table to make sure everything was full.

Zora kept her comment to herself. As mouthwatering as Dane was, she hadn't gotten over Chance. Getting another man was just out of the question.

With a snap, Zora closed a lid on the container before her. The night was winding down. She had begun to pack up while Cami remained in the main room.

"Weren't sneaking out were you?"

Zora recognized Dane's voice. It was hard not to. "I'm still working."

He seemed to materialize next to her. His hands stacked a few things in a container as well.

"Why are you here as opposed to being out there?" Zora wondered.

"Would you believe I find your companionship much more interesting than anything going on out there?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't know me." Zora kept her attention on the job before her.

"I'm trying to change that."

Chance's face flashed before her. Zora faced the man beside her. "Look, I have to be honest. I'm not looking for a relationship. So please don't waste your time."

He grinned. "Thank you for your candor, but I know I am *not* wasting my time. I want to be your friend, Zora. I know your heart belongs to someone else. All I want is friendship."

She furrowed her brows. "What do you mean you know my heart belongs to someone else?"

"I just do." He lifted his head as if hearing something. "I must go now." He grimaced when two drunken men walked through the swinging door and waved at him. "I will see you soon, Zora. Drive safe."

Zora stood in silence as he left with the others. Shaking her head she muttered, "My life is very strange at times."

That was the last time that evening she saw Dane. Although, his presence was felt, she never saw his physical form.

* * * * *

Chance was fighting down the butterflies holding an uprising in his belly as he jogged up the steps to Zora's porch. She hadn't been home on his way to his parents' house, so he was trying again. He hadn't left her any note that he'd even been there previously. He did know she received his Christmas gift, because he'd called her on Christmas day.

He rang the bell a second time and smiled slightly at the muffled, “I’m comin’, I’m comin’,” through the door.

It was yanked open and her, “Hold your horses,” died on her lips as she looked at him.

Chance was frozen. Until that very second he hadn’t realized how much he’d truly missed her. Everything about her. The major thing he noticed right now, however, was the sparkle in her eye wasn’t as bright as he recalled.

Her surprise at seeing him was obvious. She wiped her hands on her jeans and waved him in silently. Zora rested against the door, watching him warily.

“Zora,” he said, taking a step toward her.

She sighed. “What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to see you.”

Her eyes narrowed and she crossed her arms. “Mission accomplished.”

“Please don’t be like this.” He wrapped his fingers around one firmly muscled arm and pulled her to him. “I have to tell you...” he hesitated.

Chance searched her eyes and expression for some feeling and all he found was sadness and uncertainty. He ran his hand down the side of her face, thrilled when she burrowed against his palm. Her eyes fell shut and he heard her combination whimper-sigh.

His heart wept. He gathered her close, placing her ear over his beating heart. Her hands slid around him, under his jacket and she just held him as well.

“Just hold me, Chance. Don’t talk, just hold me.”

Her shuddering body seemed to melt into his, seeking whatever he gave.

“I’m sorry, beautiful. I never meant to hurt you.”

“You’re talking,” she mumbled against his shirt.

“Sorry.” He smiled into her hair.

After a few moments, he felt her shift back. Chance looked at her and raised a brow. She stared back at him unblinkingly.

“I missed you.” Zora’s admission was soft, yet he heard it without any trouble.

“I missed you, too.”

He lowered his mouth to hers. He kept the kiss gentle. Exploring her mouth with tender strokes of his tongue, he reacquainted himself with her unique taste. He’d never met a woman who tasted like a mint julep. Every time he kissed her that was how she tasted to him.

As her body sank into his more and more, he swept her off the ground and walked them back to her bedroom. Chance went to her bed and moved himself and Zora onto the mattress. Lying down, he gathered her as close as he could.

Limbs intertwined, he pressed one hand against the back of her head, keeping it against his heart.

A while later, Chance stirred as he heard a voice in the house. Zora was sound asleep in his arms, her breaths coming deep and even.

He opened his eyes fully, feeling watched, and noticed someone leaning against the doorframe. It was Kenya. She looked very serious in her suit, badge showing on her belt from where her thumbs were hooked into her pockets and a glower on her face.

Chance understood why she felt that way but he was not about to explain himself to her. Even if they were twins, what went on between him and Zora was just that. Between him and Zora.

He raised an eyebrow in silence. She narrowed her gaze in return and motioned “I’m watching you.” Then she put her eyes to the still resting Zora, her entire expression softened only to harden seconds later when Kenya looked back at him.

Kenya glared a bit longer before she did an about-face and vanished up the hall.

Chance looked down upon the woman in his arms. This felt so right to him. He didn’t know what to do.

The vixen in his arms mumbled in her sleep.

“Chance.”

He kissed her temple. “Right here, beautiful. I’m right here.”

She stirred, glanced up at him with surprise in her eyes. “I thought it was a dream. I thought you were just a dream.”

“No dream. I’m here.”

“When are you leaving?” Her question was asked in a low tone.

“That’s what we need to talk about.”

“So talk.”

Chance was pleased she didn’t pull away from him, but he wished there was more feeling in her voice. “I missed you.”

“Couldn’t call?” she sniped.

He felt the sting in her words and sighed. He deserved it. “I wasn’t sure you’d want me to.”

This time she did push away. Her big eyes looked up at him, framed by her thick lashes. “Tell me when you’re leaving.”

“I’ve been offered a job overseas.”

He was witness to emotion in her eyes. Sadness and pain. She blinked and when their eyes met again, hers were shuttered.

“Are you selling your house?” she asked.

Chance ran the back of his hand down her side of her face. “No.” He hadn’t known that for sure until he heard her question. “I want a home to come back to.”

* * * * *

Zora couldn’t believe that she was experiencing his touch again. When he had been the face on the other side of her door, she was flooded with a myriad of emotions. Part of her wanted to scream and yell at him for leaving and not calling, but the other half wanted to feel his strong arms around her again.

Hearing his admission about a home, made tears gather in her eyes. She snuggled against him, so he wouldn’t know. Inhaling deeply, she allowed his intoxicating scent to flow over her.

“So what,” she questioned, “you want me to look after your house while you’re gone?”

His fingers trailed up and down her exposed arm. “No. Well, yes, that would be wonderful, but that isn’t what I wanted to ask you.”

“What are you asking?”

“I want to know if you want a relationship with me.”

Did she? *Hell* yes!

“I do, but...”

“I’m not going overseas yet. It wouldn’t be until later, they told me to see if I wanted to take it. But, I need to keep working. So, I guess I’m asking if you would be willing to do a long distance relationship with me for now.”

Zora took one hand and moved it across his chest. She could feel the slight bump of his ribs with her fingertips. “Have you been eating?”

He cupped her face with his hand, tipping it up toward his. “Not what I longed to eat.” His mouth lowered over hers without further hesitation.

Her body hummed to life, flames licking up and down her skin. There had been enough heat in his gaze to melt the arctic. She arched into his touch, sliding her tongue against his, and whimpered as her insides quivered with longing.

“Zora,” he murmured into her mouth.

“Talk later,” she commanded, moving her hand under his shirt and groaning as she found his warm skin.

He rolled them over on the bed so her body was positioned beneath his. His hands wrapped around her braids and gripped them. “Much later,” he agreed.

She hooked her legs around his waist as his mouth plundered hers. In a slow deliberate motion he began moving his hips, enticing her, mimicking the action she so desperately craved.

Zora couldn't move, couldn't protest the fact he wasn't actually inside her. Chance had her immobile. She sucked hard on his tongue as her hips undulated against him, rubbing hard along the stiff erection she could feel in his pants.

He moaned deep in his throat. She drew on his tongue again, running her hands up his back, nails scraping lightly across his shirt.

It didn't take long before Chance had removed all their clothes and was sliding inside of her.

She gasped with the intense pleasure spreading through her as he filled her full. He moved slowly as if savoring every last second he could spend deep within her depths. His lips were beside her ear, murmuring gentle words as he stroked her both inside and out.

The feeling of euphoria washed over her. Zora closed her eyes and gave herself over to the passionate and extreme sensations that moved throughout her body. Chance treated her body like it was the most delicate thing in the world, a prized possession. And she loved it.

When she came it was so powerful it overwhelmed her for a moment. The sound of his low roar filled her ears as he came deep within her. His large body collapsed on top of hers pressing her further into the mattress.

"Are you okay?" he asked in a gravelly voice.

"Oh yeah," she drawled. Zora was feeling good.

He moved off her and tugged the folded bedspread at the foot of her bed up over their naked bodies. Zora sighed with contentment as his lips caressed the top of her forehead.

This was what she wanted. She snuggled closer and shut her eyes as his strong arms wrapped around her, holding her near. Zora drifted off to sleep with the pounding of his heart in her ear.

When she woke the first thing she realized was that she was alone. “Of course,” she complained. Pushing out of bed, she tugged on her strewn clothing, and noticed Chance’s clothes were gone.

Heart heavy, Zora opened her bedroom door and stopped. Masculine voices reached her ears. Walking up toward them, she froze at the entrance to her living room where standing toe to toe, stood Chance and Dane.

“What’s going on?” she questioned.

Chance looked at her and she could read the anger in his eyes. Dane met her eyes next, and winked.

“This man says he is a friend of yours,” Chance bit out.

“As did you,” Dane countered.

Zora took in the two men. Same height but that was where the similarities ended. Chance’s short cut blondish-brown hair compared to Dane’s shoulder length black. Chance’s gray-blue eyes and Dane’s tawny-green-gold ones.

Both men were muscular but even as she gazed upon them, there was more of a wildness in Dane than she saw in Chance.

“Chance, this is my friend Dane Sidorov. Dane, this is Chance Jameson. Chance is my neighbor.”

Zora strode closer to where they stood. Chance reached out and tugged her up to his side. Dane smiled.

“I see this is the man who holds your heart.” Dane reached for her hand, and bowed over it. “I will stop by later on. Have a good evening.” He flowed out the door without another word.

Zora never got over how effortless he made everything appear. When the door closed silently behind him, Chance’s voice filled the room.

“Who is that?” he demanded.

Pushing away from him, she answered. “I told you. He’s my friend.”

“Zora,” he growled.

Pinning her eyes on him she arched a brow. “Don’t go thinking that I am going to not be friends with men.”

He held up his hands. “I know, I’m sorry. But...I just...damn it, Zora, I don’t know where I stand with you. I don’t know if you want me in your life and then I see that huge behemoth and what do you expect me to do? I’m a man. I get jealous.”

Zora couldn't help it. She laughed.

"What's so funny?" he demanded, closing the distance between them.

"You. You are, Chance." She wiped her eyes. "You've been back in my life for all of half a day and you think that even though you've ignored me for a few months I had put my life on hold. I just told you who he was. He's a friend. I met him at a function we catered and he's been a wonderful friend."

His fingers tightened around her upper arms. "Just a friend?"

She understood why he was asking and didn't take offense for that reason.

"There hasn't been anyone since you left, Chance."

Relief filled his features. "The same for me. It's only been you, Zora." He kissed her and let go of her arms.

"We still need to talk," she said, heading to the kitchen.

"I know. Can you give me a few minutes to run next door and change?"

"I'll be here."

He gathered her into his arms and grabbed her ass. "And I will be right back." He nipped the sensitive skin on her neck.

"Good. I'll start dinner." She shuddered as his tongue trailed along the edge of her ear.

His hands squeezed her butt one more time before he turned and practically skipped out the door.

Zora stood on her porch with Chance. He was leaving to head back to base. They stood, arms around each other, in silence. His car was running in her driveway but she didn't care. She didn't want to let go of him. Didn't want to let him drive away.

"I have to go, beautiful." His lips caressed her temple.

"I know." Instead of letting him go, she held onto him tighter.

"I'll be back my first days off."

"Okay. I'll see you then." She dropped her arms from his waist.

"No, not like this. We don't leave things like this. Ever." Chance refused to let her go. "No problems between us, Zora. We get them all out before we part, so there is no room for suspicion or anything like that."

"I just don't want you to be late."

He chuckled and tucked her head under her chin. "I won't be late. Promise."

"Drive safely, Chance," she whispered, wrapping her arms around him again.

"I'll call you when I get there."

"Okay."

He swiped his thumbs across her lower lip and tilted her face toward his.

"I'm going to miss you."

Zora felt the sting of tears coming. Blinking them back, she tried for a smile.

“Me, too. I’m going to miss you.”

He placed his mouth across hers and gave her the gentlest kiss she had ever experienced in her life.

“See you in about a week, beautiful.”

He walked down the stairs and to his car without looking back. Before he got into his car, he blew her a kiss and then was gone from her sight. The darkness eliminated her ability to see into his vehicle.

Even still, she waved, just in case he watched her. Only when she could no longer see his taillights did she go inside her warm house.

Chapter 9

The weeks passed and Zora indulged in every single moment she got to spend with Chance. It was hard and yet extremely worth it to her.

He was still deciding what to do about going overseas. Or if he had decided, he hadn't told her yet. Either way, she wasn't going to press him.

He made the long drive to see her every time he had a weekend. And if she was working when he came to see her, she got nightly massages, her bath drawn, house was cleaned. It was wonderful.

The hard part was knowing he would be leaving in a few days. The goodbyes got longer each time they separated.

Standing under the shower spray, Zora allowed the pulsing water to ease her sore muscles. Chance had tested the limits of her body last night. They had stayed awake until predawn making love.

She loved his shower; he had numerous showerheads that rained down upon her. A low whistle reached her and she turned to see Chance's gorgeous body stepping in to join her.

"Morning," he said with a wink.

“Morning yourself,” she replied, rubbing her soapy body against his. “Oops, you look a bit soaped up.”

“Yes, I do.” He ran his hands over her, sending shivers up her spine. “What do you suppose we do about that?” His erection began prodding her belly.

She blinked innocently. “Get dirtier and then clean up.”

“Oh, I like that idea.” His mouth captured hers in a kiss as he lifted her off the floor of the shower and set her down on his cock. “Wrap your legs around me, beautiful. Yes,” he hissed. “Just like that.”

Zora stared into his eyes as he moved within her. It was a dark, smoky blend of blue-gray that watched her with the same intensity that she did.

“You feel so good around me,” he said in a silvery voice as his soapy hands began to tease her breasts.

“Chance,” she uttered as she slid up and down on his full erection.

“Let me hear it, beautiful. Let me know if you like my touch.” His fingers tweaked her nipples, sending her in a brilliant spiral of light over the cliff.

“Chance!” she screamed.

He grunted and moved faster before spilling himself within her body. One hand tugged her head closer to his for a kiss. Zora felt the flames stir to life again.

Would she ever get enough of his touch?

“We have to get going,” he said with a sigh.

Zora knew that and nodded. He set her back on her feet and picked up the loofa she had used. "Let me clean you." Without waiting for an answer, he soaped it up again and began running it over her body.

"I'll see you in about a week, beautiful," Chance said as they stood by their vehicles.

"Okay," she replied, snuggling closer to his hard frame.

"Zora?"

"Yes, Chance." She didn't look up at him.

"Would you ever consider leaving Trescott Cove?"

Her head jerked up so she could meet his gaze. "What?" she asked unsure if the words she'd heard were true.

"I asked if you'd ever consider leaving Trescott Cove."

"I don't...I have my business, my family. I don't know. I don't think I could."

He nodded solemnly. "I understand. I was just wondering." His eyes turned more blue than gray as he watched her.

"Why, Chance? Did you take that job?" Zora swallowed.

"They need an answer by Valentine's Day."

Well that figures. Take the most romantic day of the year and make it something I'm going to hate for the rest of my life.

“So soon? That’s like less than two weeks away.” Zora blinked once and gathered herself. “Do what’s right for you, Chance. Please. I would never forgive myself if you made a decision that took away your dream.”

Her heart felt like it was shattering into tiny pieces, but she maintained a strong front.

His hands cupped her face and he kissed her softly. “You are one hell of a woman, Ms. Nicolette. Thank you for letting me into your life.”

“Goodbye, Chance.”

“I’ll see you in a week.”

Sure. She nodded and reached up to kiss him. Determined to not make him feel bad. “See you,” she said.

As if he read her expression, he moved his lips against hers and told her, “I will be back, Zora. Don’t doubt that.”

“I don’t.” Her voice was shaky.

“I have to go, beautiful. Kiss me one more time.”

Once isn’t going to be enough. Just tell him how you feel! Get it out in the open. Logically, she knew she should, but Zora didn’t want him staying just for her. If he stayed, she wanted it to be his decision, not because of anything she said.

So she remained silent. Pushing up on her toes, she pressed herself into his lips. His mouth was pliant under her touch. She was in charge of the kiss. With

her tongue she slid along the crack of his mouth, he opened slightly and allowed her entrance.

As it always was with him, the rush of feeling she got from his kiss rocketed through her. He teased her and coaxed her to follow his tongue. Soon they were both lost deep in the kiss.

Zora didn't even realize she was crying until his thumbs wiped away her tears and he begged, "Please don't cry, beautiful. Don't cry."

She smiled through the tears. "You need to get going."

His eyes, now more gray than blue stared back at her. "I know. One more for the road."

He kissed her intensely. It was a branding kiss, the kind that made her knees weak, panties wet, and willing to do anything he asked. Her belly clenched with craving.

Chance jerked away from her and watched her. His eyes darkened by desire, nose flared, he backed away slowly. "One week, Zora."

She waved and stayed quiet as he climbed in his car and drove away with a blown kiss.

* * * * *

Chance called Zora. It was almost eleven o'clock at night, but he had to talk to her.

"Hello?" she'd answered with a husky voice.

"Hey, beautiful."

"How are you?" He heard gentle strands of jazz in the background.

"Good. We've been swamped with orders, so staying very busy." A slight pause before she asked, "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay. Missing you, but we are staying busy on this end, as well. Who knew that so much had to be done in such a short time." He chuckled and then sobered. "Unfortunately, that also means—"

"—you aren't coming," she finished for him.

"I'm sorry, Zora. I would if I could, but..." he trailed off.

"Okay," she said.

He knew she was upset with his announcement, but she never complained. Just said okay and dropped it.

"What are you doing for Valentine's Day?"

"Working, of course," she'd said with a dry laugh.

"All day?"

"No, not all but I do have to make sure some things are delivered on time. Why?"

“Just wondering if you could pencil me in for some time that day.”

Her breath caught. “You think you’d be here for V-day?”

Chance nodded and lay back on his bed. “I’m sure, Zora. If you will spend the time with me, I’ll be there.”

“You know where to find me, Chance. I’m either here or at work.”

“Tell me you miss me,” he pled.

He needed to hear it so much. Wanted to know she missed him like he missed her.

“I miss you, Chance Jameson.” The music shut off. “Now, give me a nice bedtime story, so I can go to sleep.”

Stroking one hand along his lengthening shaft, Chance closed his eyes and told Zora a bedtime story.

Chance stood before the general and waited for the man to look up at him.

“At ease, Jameson. Christ, it’s just us. Don’t be so damn formal.” General Mitchy waved him to a chair. “Get a drink if you want one.”

“I’m fine, sir, thank you.” Chance sat down.

The older man looked up, eyes sharp as a hawk’s as they looked him over. Even after all these years in the Corps, the general had the ability to make Chance feel like a plebe at OCS.

He was proud he didn’t squirm.

Flickering his gaze between him and the papers in his hand, the general was silent for a while. Then he sighed, nodded, and looked up at him. “Seems that all the paperwork is in order. Are you sure this is how you want things?”

“I’ve thought a lot about it, sir, and yes. That is how I want to proceed.”

Chance waited while the general thought it over. This was a difficult decision for him to make. He’d even not gone back to see Zora on his last days off, trying to come to a head on his quest.

Still, he called her everyday at some point, just to hear her voice. He preferred to call her before bed and let her sensual voice be the last thing he heard before falling asleep.

The general stood. “Well, I’ll get your decision processed ASAP, Chance.” He offered him his hand and when Chance took it, he added, “Now, the wife insists that you come for dinner. She won’t take no for an answer, so you’d just best be there at 1800 sharp.”

“Yes, sir,” Chance replied with a smile.

“Good man.” The general returned the grin. “I’ll see you then.”

“Yes, sir.” Standing at attention, Chance waited for General Mitchy’s nod and then spun and walked out.

* * * * *

Zora stood in front of her mirror and looked at her hair. The tips of her braids were colored this time. Red, in honor of Valentine's Day. Tomorrow was the big day and she was sad, aside from his nightly calls, Chance had yet to say anything about what he had planned for them.

All she knew for certain was he'd agreed to her making dinner, he didn't want to share her with anyone. She shivered at the heat carried by his voice with that declaration.

So here it was the night before and she was busy pacing. Shaking her head at her reflection she scoffed, "What the hell is your problem?"

Her image just stared at her, never said a word. Almost mocking her.

"Argh!" she bit off before stomping to the kitchen.

Baking, that's what she needed to do. Bake and relax. Before she started, Zora went back to her living room and turned on some music, pressing shuffle, she turned it up to an acceptable volume for her and got to work.

When she was frosting and decorating cookies and cupcakes she heard her front door open. "Come on in, Kenya," she hollered without looking up.

"Well, I'm not Kenya, but can I still come in?"

She squealed. It was Chance. He wore a charcoal mock crewneck, faded blue jeans with a hole in the knee on one side, and black boots. As she stared at

him, he tossed his black leather jacket onto the coat hook she had by her door and headed toward her.

She dropped what she was doing and ran at him, launching herself into his arms at the last second. He caught her with ease and kissed her like he'd been gone for a year.

"Hello, beautiful," he purred against her cheek.

"Chance," she whispered, her body pulsing and telling her it was ready for anything this man dished out. He smelled divine.

He pushed the door closed and walked them into the kitchen. Zora holding onto him with her arms and legs. Chance glanced around the room and smiled. "Been baking I see."

"You know me. I can't stop."

Zora placed her hands on his cheeks as he set her down on the last clear spot of countertop. "I missed you, Mr. Jameson."

"And I missed you, Ms. Nicolette." His lips brushed hers. Once. Twice. Three times before his tongue sought entrance in her mouth.

"Don't call me that," she complained as her body pressed closer to his, the heels of her feet dug into his firm ass and helped hurry his movement nearer to her.

“What should I call you then?” He pulled back from her and stared down at her with those powerful eyes. When she opened her mouth to speak, he placed a hand over her and shook his head. “How about Mrs. Jameson?”

Her heart stopped for a moment. She stared into his eyes and blinked rapidly a few times before she could find any words. “What?”

With a careful tug, Chance pulled her off the counter so she stood on the floor. He knelt before her and looked up at her. His eyes full of love.

“Zora, you are the best thing that ever happened to me. I never thought I would be a man who wanted a woman by his side. I loved being a bachelor until the day I moved in next door to you and opened my front door to your beautiful face.”

She began to shake. Tears welled up in her eyes. Could this be happening? Or was it another cruel dream?

“I tried my best to keep my distance, thinking it would be best if I did. Despite all my attempts, you got under my skin. And I loved it. Every second we spend together makes the world seem right to me.”

His mouth kissed her knuckles. “Zora, I know this is the right step. I want to be with you, go to bed with you beside me and wake the same way. And if you are willing, I would love to have children with you. Zora Nicolette, will you marry me?”

Zora bit her lower lip as he reached in his pocket and pulled out a silver velvet box. When he opened it, a sharp gasp left her throat. Inside sat a ring. There was a round diamond in the center and two smaller ones on each side of it. All set in platinum or white gold, she wasn't sure. And she didn't care.

He was on his knees before her, holding a ring and she was sweaty from baking, flour streaks on her skin, possibly in her hair and he was staring at her as if he wanted to devour her for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

"What about your job overseas?" she asked, trying hard not to reach for the ring.

"I turned it down. You are my happiness, Zora. I've realized that these past weeks when I didn't see you daily."

"But...but...you said you'd be bored. And I'm not as neat as you."

Chance took the ring out of the box and slid it on her finger. "With you in my life, Zora, I'll never be bored. My life can use some disarray. I will go on occasion and lend some advice to them, but most of what I'll be doing for them now, I can do from a computer at home. And with my other time, I'll work on Ms. *Nicolette*, so one day we can take her out for the day."

He closed her fingers around his hand and continued, "I know this is a lot to ask you. But please give us a chance. Let me be in your life."

She looked at the ring sparkling on her dried frosting and dye covered hand.
“Who’s Ms. Nicolette?”

“Our boat.” He stood in a smooth motion. Taking her newly adorned ring hand in his, he kissed it. “I love you, Zora.”

Her heart tripled in speed at those four words. “I love you, too, Chance.” Her eyes were misty as she realized he had named his boat after her. “I love you, too.”

“So is that a yes on marrying me?” he asked, his lips moving along her jaw line, scrambling her thoughts.

“Yes. Oh God yes!”

“Beautiful, you just made me the happiest man in the world.”

She sent him a smirk as one hand traveled down his chest and to his crotch.
“I think I can make you happier.”

He grinned as his eyes flashed with lust. “That is just a bonus, having you is all I need.”

“So have me then,” she offered.

With one arm he lifted her off the ground so she could wrap her legs around him again. “I plan on it. Oh, do I plan on it, my fiancée.”

As he headed out of the kitchen, he grinned wickedly at her as she grabbed the bowl of buttercream frosting from the island.

She shifted against him and licked his lips before kissing him, passionately. When he kicked the door to her bedroom shut, she brought his eyes back to hers again. His gaze smoldered with barely restrained fervor. He put the frosting on her dresser.

“Zora’s Chance, you’re Zora’s Chance,” she whispered as he placed her on her feet and began removing her clothes. “I think I like that.”

Chance stopped and looked down at her. His hands on her bare skin around her waist. “Me too, beautiful. Me too.”

Her heart was filled with love and her body was being tended by the most amazing man in the world. Zora knew without a doubt that Chance Jameson was her soul mate. He made everything worthwhile. The icing on the cake, so-to-speak.

As he spilled himself deep inside her body, Zora felt the pounding of his heart, the sweat off his brow and knew life didn’t get much better than she had it right then.

He was one hell of a guy, and best of all, he was hers.

He *was* Zora’s Chance.

THE END

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