

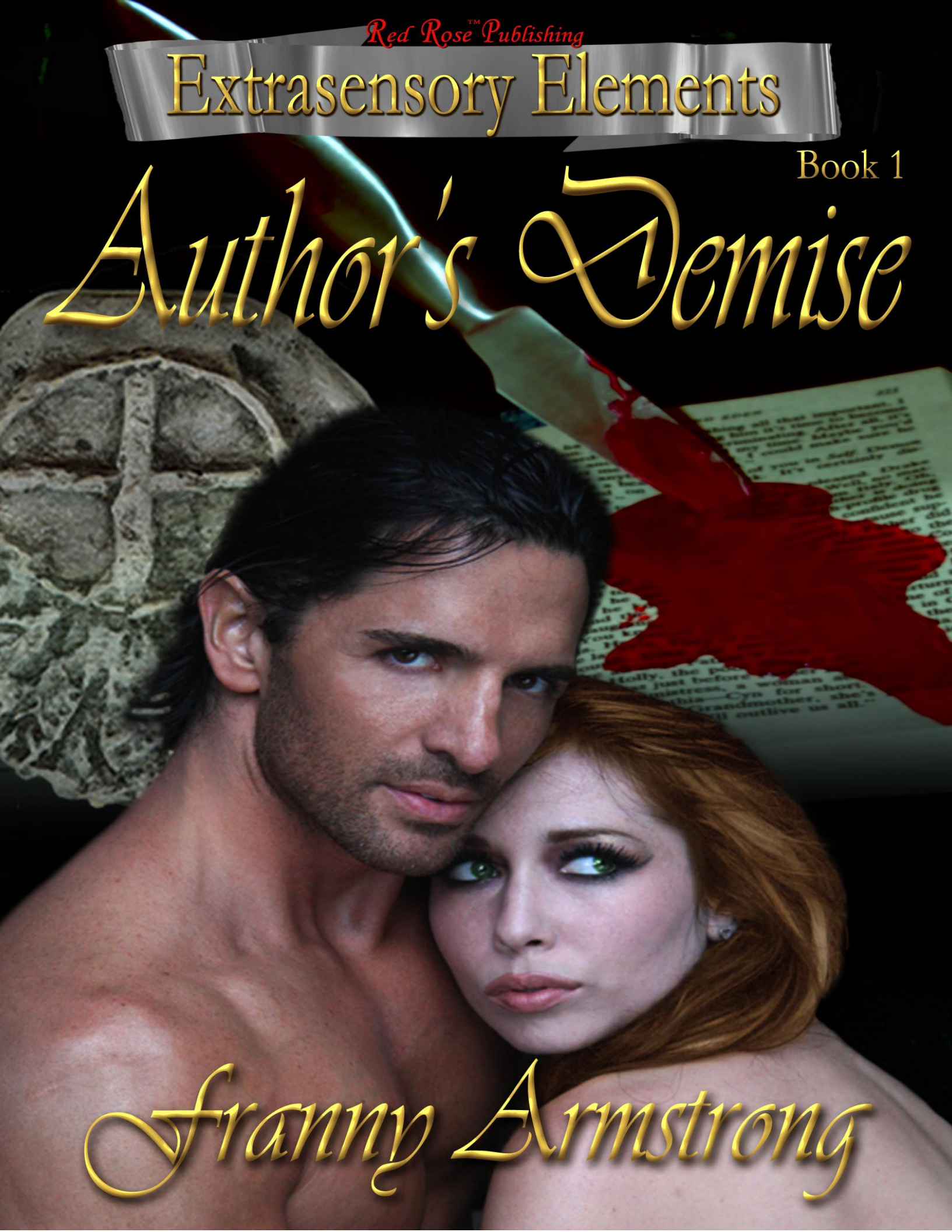
Red Rose™ Publishing

Extrasensory Elements

Book 1

Author's Demise

Franny Armstrong



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By

Franny Armstrong

Dedication

*To my husband, Dan, who is now
and always has been my hero.
To Red Rose Publishing—Wendi,
Dee, Shirley, and the staff—for
giving me a chance and guiding me
on the path towards success. Thank
you for helping me to make my
dreams become reality!*



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Author's Demise by Franny Armstrong

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Chapter One

Killing the Character

The lights were low. Susie Williams trembled as she sat alone on her sofa eating popcorn while watching a horror movie. The volume was loud enough that she didn't hear the back door window shatter, nor did she see the black clad arm reach in and turn the handle to slowly open the door.

On the TV screen a killer, dressed head-to-toe in black was slowly sneaking up behind a cheerleader. Suzie tensed as she watched the girl sob after just having broken up with her boyfriend, left on the roadside without a ride home. As though sensing her stalker, she took a look around her but saw no one. Eerie music began to get louder as she walked down the barren country road, tears flowing down her flushed cheeks.

Throwing more popcorn in her mouth, Suzie watched as the dark figure slowly approached the girl, his arms reaching up toward her neck. The music grew louder yet as light glinted off a silver wire held in the stalker's hands.

Just as the killer attacked the cheerleader, Suzie screamed, knocking over her bowl of popcorn. Giggling at her own cowardly reaction to the TV stalker, she left the popcorn where it

had spilled and watched as the boyfriend drove back into the scene.

He left his headlights on and got out of his car as he began searching for his girlfriend, shouting into the darkness to apologize for the fight he'd had with her. Moments later, the murderer snuck up behind him too! Just as he was about to attack the boyfriend, Suzie choked!

"That's it! That is just what I was hoping for!"

Jacqueline Brandson sat at her computer, her fingers flying in a blur over the keys sounding like a staccato symphony as the words just poured out of her brain. Writing a book was exciting and exhausting. Ideas either flowed like water or crawled like molasses in winter. Tonight everything was moving swiftly. Her murder scene exciting, riveting!

A top-selling author of numerous romance novels published by the firm Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing, Jacqueline was a full time writer and recluse. She was just finishing the last chapter of her novel, *Kill Her With Cruelty*, working on the scene where the killer claimed his victim, a young waitress sitting home alone on a Saturday night watching a horror flick. She didn't have her killer's motive completely set up, but she knew that it would come to her eventually.

Thrilled at how the story was coming together, Jacqueline took a drink of her blood-red wine and sat back to mull over the scene while she waited for her muse to kick in.

Suddenly she sat forward. "Ah, that's it!" she cried, a thought flashing

through her active mind. Setting her wine back on the desk, she leaned in closer to the monitor and read a portion of the scene aloud, her tone filled with eerie suspense.

“A wire slipped around her own throat, pulled tight to hold her in place. As she struggled, her fingers tearing at her neck, she kicked out scattering more popcorn and her drink as well as knocking over the coffee table. Eyes widening in horror, her face turned a dark shade of purple, blood seeping from her throat where the garrote cut into her tender skin until she finally fell limp and silent.”

Satisfied with her work, she stretched her aching fingers and began to type the next scene. Leaning forward in her chair, she once again immersed herself in the story, fingers tapping rapidly on the keyboard.

“Yes, that’s it,” she murmured.

Her eyes were glued to the screen as she added the last paragraph, and cried out in joy, “Done! The scene is finally done!” Taking a deep breath, she picked up her wine and stared at her baby—her manuscript. For days she’d struggled to make the murder scene work, writing and rewriting it over and over again.

She had just finished the final touches and was proofreading her work when she heard a noise behind her. Before she could turn around, something slipped around her throat, choking her. She grabbed at her neck, fighting for air.

The wine glass smashed to the floor, splashing crimson red like a pool of

blood across the carpet. Jacqueline's hands flailed out trying to find something, anything to protect herself. Black spots danced before her eyes as she tried to get free of the wire. Papers flew off the desk as she struggled, yanking at the keyboard, her last hope as a weapon, until it hung over the side of the desk by its cable. She tried to stand, to use her feet, but her legs wouldn't hold her. Gasping, she knew that it was over; she couldn't stop the murderer.

Finally she fell to her knees, staring up at her killer in confusion and terror. The mad look of satisfaction was the last thing she saw as her body went slack, dropping to the floor as the life drained from her.

The killer's hands followed her down to keep the garrote tight another minute longer.

Her last breath had been drawn; her final chapter ended. She lay sprawled on the floor, her sightless eyes glued to the ceiling. There was no movement, no breathing, as the blood dripped onto the carpet to mingle with the wine. Jacqueline Brandson was dead.

A sheet of paper was placed beside her body, then her killer left in silence.



Lana Anderson turned on the morning news as she prepared to go to work. Life in Toronto as the CEO of a large publishing corporation kept her extremely busy, but she loved every minute of it. Each day she left her downtown home eager

to start her day.

It had been a long time since she'd been interested in a man, having little time to spare for a relationship anyway. Her entire life centered around work.

Pouring milk into her coffee, she sat down to eat her cereal and watch the morning news. She was completely shocked to see one of her clients on the small TV in the kitchen. Gasping, she turned the sound up with a suddenly shaky hand.

"Best-selling author, Jacqueline Brandson, was found murdered last night in her home. The details have not been released as yet. In sports today..."

Ignoring the crash that came from the table beside her, Lana turned the TV off and sat back in stunned silence. Eyes shimmering with tears, she put trembling fingers to her lips, horror washing over her.

For the past three months, ever since the first murder of one of the firm's best-selling authors, Lana had been getting prank phone calls. Each evening, she had to take the phone off the hook to relieve some of the stress from the calls. There was no sound, no voice, just silence, but with three murders now, the fear was building.

With an unsteady hand, she picked up the phone and called Roger Brinkman, president of Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing, her boss and close friend.

"Roger, have you heard?" she asked, her voice unsteady.

"Yes, I just saw it. That's the third author to die. The other two authors were

murdered in the same way—exactly as they described their own characters’ deaths in their novels. If this is the same thing, then we have a serial killer on the loose and we’re in big trouble, Lana. Each author was one of our clients.” Sighing in frustration, Roger cleared his throat. “What if our other authors pull out? If that happens, we could be bankrupt within weeks.” Roger sounded frantic.

“Whatever happens, we have to find out who’s doing this. Do the police have any leads?”

“Not that I know of. If they do know something, they aren’t telling me about it. The killer hasn’t left a trace of evidence for the police to follow except for the notes.”

“Do you think it might be one of our staff members?” Lana asked. She couldn’t believe that one of the people she worked with could commit murder. It just wasn’t possible, yet who else would know where the authors lived?

“I honestly don’t know.” Roger sounded desperate. “Look, I’m going to go into work early today to see if I can find out anything.”

“Okay, I’ll be there early too. Bye.” Lana hung the phone up and sat staring into space. Shaking her head, she cleaned up the breakfast dishes and the broken coffee cup off the floor. Once that was done, she went to her room to get ready for work. It was going to be a long day.



At Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing, an emergency meeting was held in the conference room that afternoon for all the staff members.

Roger spoke to the room full of employees. “Some of you may have heard that Jacqueline Brandson, one of our star authors, was murdered last night.” Lacing his fingers together behind his back, he cleared his throat before continuing.

“Since only authors have been killed, I think it’s safe to say that none of the staff is being targeted. Measures have been taken by our security team to protect those who work in this building, particularly on this floor. I ask that you all bear with us and don’t panic.”

Roger spoke about unity and sticking together. He did his best to reassure the anxious staff members. Stress showed in the tightened skin around his eyes and mouth, as well as in his strained voice.

Watching the reactions of the staff, Lana became even more concerned about Roger. They were putting undue pressure on him with their fear-riddled reactions. She looked back up at him, noticing the way his eyes darted around the room, avoiding everyone else’s. She wanted to do something to help him, but what?

Everyone in the room jumped when out of nowhere the glass coffee pot that was sitting in the center of the table suddenly shattered, spilling coffee over papers and staff members alike. Lana cringed, quickly getting paper towels to wipe up the

mess.

His frustration with the group showed as Roger put his fingers on either side of the bridge of his nose. Taking a few deep breaths, he tried to calm the group. Unfortunately, the staff members were shaken up so badly that many of them were ready to walk out the door. Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing was definitely in danger of closing down for good!



Lana sat in Roger's office with him after the meeting, brainstorming to figure out what they could do to salvage the lost revenue. Ten authors had called in already that day, unwilling to stay with the firm. Lana had spoken with them and was able to retain all but three. Four staff members had also quit and the rest were uncertain about remaining.

"I'm not sure we can weather this storm, Lana. I have an appointment with a police detective. We're going to discuss the cases and see if we can find a link in our company. The only thing the authors have in common besides writing is that all of the victims were signed up with our firm. That's not good for us at all."

Roger ran his quivering fingers roughly over his baldhead, clearly at a loss as to what he should do.

Lana placed her hand on his arm and tried to comfort him. "Roger, we'll figure something out. I'll do everything in my power to help you with this disaster.

Please try not to worry too much.” She was concerned about his heart. He had a history of heart problems, having had one heart attack already.

Through the years Lana had been by his side, becoming a close friend and confidante. She also helped run the publishing firm, regardless of Vice President Allan Hansen’s negative support.

Taking a deep breath, Roger stood up and turned to look out the window. As he shook his head, his shoulders drooped. He looked old for the first time since Lana met him. Now she was truly getting scared. He seemed to have lost all hope of keeping the company going.

“Lana I need some time to think. I don’t mean to offend you, but would you mind...”

“Absolutely, Roger! You know where I’ll be if you need me. Please, call me. Whatever you need, I’m ready to help.” Lana patted his shoulder, smiled at him then left his office.



Once the door closed behind Lana, Roger stared out the window at the streets below for a long time. Finally turning, he picked up the phone and called a good friend. It was time to call for reinforcements.



“Good morning, George,” Lana spoke to the security guard on her way to the elevators.

“Mornin’, Ms. Anderson. Beautiful day, isn’t it?” George said, smiling at her. George was in his sixties. From the look of his red eyes and bulbous nose he was a drinker, yet he faithfully showed up for work each day and was always polite.

“It’s absolutely wonderful, George. You have a great day, okay?” She gave him a winning smile as she met his gaze. The last thing Lana wanted to do was let people know how upset she was.

“Sure thing, ma’am.”

Having a lot on her mind, Lana was in no hurry to reach her office, even though she’d arrived early. Stepping back from the crowd while waiting for the elevator, she was pushed up against a large potted fern by the group of people rushing to use them. Happy to wait for a less crowded one, she used the time to go over her plans for the day in her mind.

Her reflection in the mirrored wall showed high cheekbones, a straight nose, and a narrow, heart-shaped face. A delicate mole rested below her right eye, just to the right. Strawberry-blond hair fell in gentle waves halfway down her back.

At five feet, ten inches tall, Lana was taller than most women. She carried herself with a natural grace, her back always straight, her chin held up with pride. The extra thirty pounds she carried was distributed evenly, giving her a

voluptuous “Mae West” look.

When the next elevator light came on with a “ding”, the waiting group of riders moved into the car. Lana decided to wait a few more minutes until the main rush of early morning workers was over. Wrinkling her nose at the thought of sharing the small space with fresh clouds of mixed perfume and cologne, she went back to her mental list of jobs.



Brett had a tail. He had been trying to shake the guy for a few blocks but the man was persistent. Entering the lobby of Belleview towers, he looked around and saw an attractive woman waiting for the elevators near the back wall. She stood out from the others around her, drawing him toward her like a magnet. He had an idea of how to elude his tail and hoped she would go along with it.

She's really hot! Looks like a fun-loving girl, I hope she's game.

Taking another look outside, he saw the man coming up to the revolving doors. Moving quickly over to where the woman stood, he gave his plan a shot.

Nodding politely to her, he stripped off his jacket, rolled it into a ball and threw it on the floor beside the potted fern.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but I’m in trouble and I was wondering if you could help me out?” He pulled his baseball hat from his back pocket and put it on backwards.

Curiosity filled her gaze before she nodded. “Well, sure. If I can—”

Before she could finish her reply, he swept her up in his arms and kissed her passionately. The woman was so stunned that she didn’t react to his audacity, melting into his arms instead. Her hands rested on his chest, fingers tangled in his shirt

Distracted by the sexy woman in his arms, Brett found it hard to keep a close eye on his stalker. He was amazed at the passion the woman returned, nearly knocking him off his feet. *Boy, she can light my fire anytime!* Minutes may have ticked by but he lost count, losing himself in her sensual mouth.

After the tail finally gave up and left, Brett continued the kiss, unable to stop. His pants were uncomfortably tight. Pulling her closer into his embrace, he nearly groaned as her body brushed up against him. She’d turned to liquid in his arms, sending shivers of desire up his spine.

Finally, slowly, he lifted his head and stared into her eyes. Her expression was dazed; her emerald green eyes met his with a bemused expression.

The elevator doors opened with a loud ‘ding’. Regretfully he let her go.

“Thank you, ma’am. You were very helpful.” His voice was low and husky. Bending down, he picked up his jacket.

“Well, goodbye...” He started to say his farewell but looking at her swollen, damp lips, he changed his mind.

“Ah, what the hell,” he said, and kissed her again. It was a short, lip-smacking kiss. Then, nodding, he stepped into the elevator and the doors closed on his grinning face.

Chapter Two

Stranger's Kiss

Staring at the closed elevator doors with her mouth wide open, Lana trembled, stunned at his nerve—and at her own for letting him kiss her. What was she thinking? The kiss had sent off rockets in her stomach. His hot, wet lips sent shivers of desire up her spine, and his probing tongue had explored her mouth thoroughly while sparks of electricity zapped through her, deep in her belly.

Shaking her head, she pressed the button for the elevator, wondering where he was going in the large office building, secretly disappointed that she would never see him again.

The elevator doors slid open and she stepped inside, touching her lips as she stared into the mirrored wall. What a kiss. The man could make millions with those lips!

Lana was beginning to get angry by the time she reached the thirtieth floor. “The nerve of him! Who does he think he is anyway? Coming up to a complete stranger and just kissing the daylights out of her! Ohhh—if I ever see him again, I’m going to...I’m...Damn it! I don’t even know *what* I’m going to do!” she fumed.

When the lights on the elevator all lit up at once and the doors opened wide

while the elevator was still six inches below the floor, Lana groaned, realizing that she'd better get a hold of herself or she'd be walking down thirty flights of stairs at the end of the day. Her temper and electronics didn't mix.

As she passed people in the hall, she barely noticed them. Walking by her secretary's desk in a daze with images of his lips and his handsome face flitting through her mind, she almost passed right by her administrative assistant until the woman spoke to her.

"Ah, Ms. Anderson? Ms. Anderson?" Deanna had to touch her arm before Lana snapped out of it and stopped walking.

"Wha—Oh, sorry, Deanna, I was lost in space. I've got way too many things on my mind. What did you want?" Lana smiled gently at the young woman, trying desperately to pull herself together.

"Mr. Brinkman wants to see you right away in the conference room. That new author is here and Mr. Brinkman wanted you to meet him." Deanna was a shy, quiet woman who was excellent at her job.

Lana nodded. "Fine, I'll be in there shortly. Oh, I would appreciate it if you could call maintenance and have someone look at the elevator. It's acting up again." At Deanna's nod she continued, "Thank you, Deanna. I'll be out in just a few minutes."

Lana was distracted as she closed her office door behind her. Leaning

against the back of the door, she sucked in a deep breath, trying to shake off what had happened to her in the lobby and move on to the day's business.

Moving over to the mirror on the wall, she fixed her hair, putting on more lipstick. She didn't need a lot of makeup but liked to wear a subtle hint of it. Her lipstick was a pale dusty rose and her cheeks still held the blush from—No! She was *not* going to think about him again! Gorgeous blue eyes and thick wavy black hair that fell over his brows flashed into her mind. She pushed the image away.

Lana took a cleansing breath. Finally ready to face the wolves, she gathered her notebook and pen and left her office.



In the conference room Roger Brinkman sat with his vice-president; Allan Hansen, editor; Adam Brewster, the in-house literary lawyer; Linda Winters; and the company publicist, Anna Warrington. Their new client sat quietly in his chair, waiting for the CEO to arrive.

"I apologize for my CEO's tardiness. She's usually on time, if not early. Would you care for more coffee?" Roger asked.

The client just smiled. "Not a problem, Mr. Brinkman. I know what it's like to be busy. One last phone call can put a monkey wrench into your whole schedule. I'm okay for coffee, thanks."

The door opening suddenly brought everyone's eyes up to greet the CEO.



Rushing down the hallway, Lana fumbled with her notepad, praying there was a fresh cup of coffee available in the conference room. She was never late for a meeting but what had happened to her in the lobby sent her internal clock spinning out of control, losing precious time. Opening the door, she stepped inside taking a deep breath of relief.

“I’m sorry, Roger. I had a difficult time getting an elevator, if you can believe that.” Lana quickly took her seat giving her full attention to Roger.

“That’s fine, Lana. Our client was gracious about your being late,” Roger said kindly then turned to the client. “I’d like you to meet Lana Anderson, our CEO. Lana, this is Brett Colton, our newest author.”

Lana turned with a smile to offer her hand and gasped. The client was none other than the *mad kisser* from the lobby! Her mouth dropped open, her cheeks flushing with heat.

Grinning, Brett reached out and took her hand in his firm, warm grip.

“Pleased to meet you, Ms. Anderson.” He tilted his head slightly and gave her a wicked smile. “I have the strangest feeling that we’ve met somewhere before.”

Avoiding his gaze, Lana abruptly shut her mouth, speechless for once.

Pulling herself together, she tried to tug her hand free. “I think I would remember meeting you, sir, if we had.” Her sarcasm went over the heads of the

staff and Roger.

The coffee cup beside her suddenly shattered! Since there was no coffee in it, Lana was quick to pull her hand away to pick up the pieces and dispose of them. After he'd reluctantly released her, Lana moved back to her chair and focused on her notes, ignoring his wide grin.

The rest of the staff and Roger were used to strange things happening when Lana was present—sudden electrical shortages, exploding cups, things falling off tables and more. They'd stopped questioning why, just accepting that it was something that just couldn't be explained.

Seeing Roger look over at Brett with a question in his eyes about her odd behavior, she ground her teeth. Brett shrugged, acting innocent.

Clearing his throat, Roger continued with the meeting, shooting inquiring glances at Lana.

Lana glared at Brett when he snickered, catching her looking at him. *He's the most infuriating man I've ever met. And what an egotistic creep!* Steaming with anger, Lana avoided Brett's gaze for the next thirty minutes until Roger closed the meeting.



"Any questions?" he queried his group. Since there were no questions, he dismissed everyone except Lana and Brett. "Lana, I'd appreciate it if you'd wait a few minutes."

Looking at Roger as if she wanted nothing better than to run screaming from the room, Lana waited in silence, impatiently tapping her pencil on her notepad.

“Lana, I’d like to ask a favor of you. Since Mr. Colton is only here in Toronto for a few days, I’d like you to put him up at your place.”

Glaring at Roger in shock, Lana all but shouted, “What? What do you mean by *my place*? What about a hotel?”

Brett fought back a grin.

“Lana, Mr. Colton is here under special circumstances and I would like you to do this as a favor to me. Okay?”

“But I—He—” Lana gave Roger as though she were drowning, but he just offered an ‘I really need a favor’ look.

“Oh, all right, Roger,” she said grudgingly, shooting a glare up at Brett. Sighing, she leaned in close to her boss, and whispered, “You owe me *big time* for this one!”

Roger laughed. “Go ahead and take the rest of the day off. Show Mr. Colton your place and get him settled.”

Her face was fiery red in either fury or embarrassment, Brett wasn’t sure which, but Lana finally gave in.

Raising her chin, she gave him a scathing glare. “I have some things to clear

up in my office if you wouldn't mind giving me a few minutes?"

"No problem. I have to talk to Roger about something anyway. Take your time," Brett said, hiding a wry grin.

"Fine." She left the room in a huff followed by Brett's deep chuckle.

Pleased, Brett turned to speak with Roger.

"Thank you, Roger. I promise to be a good boy for her." Brett grinned, mentally crossing his fingers.

"I just want you to keep her safe, Brett. Whatever is going on, I don't want her hurt. Have you got any leads?"

"I have something cooking but it's too soon to say. As soon as I do, you'll be the first to know."

Brett shook Roger's hand just as Lana came back into the room. She was so tense he thought she might fracture her spine. Though he did his best not to laugh, he could tell she was royally pissed.

"I'm ready to go, Mr. Colton, if you'll come with me please? Do you have a bag?"

Lana was fit to be tied and he could tell that she had a hard time not screaming at him. He'd acted outrageously and now she had to keep him in her own home to boot!

Nodding politely, Brett said, "I have my bag stored, and I can pick it up later.

Lead on, and I'll follow." He smiled innocently at her.

"Good day, Roger," she said stiffly before turning to walk toward the elevators.

Brett had a wonderful view of her shapely hips and buttocks on the way down the long hallway. For some reason, he felt like he actually knew what she was thinking and was tickled to death by her strong reaction. *This is going to be fun!* He was glad she couldn't see his mischievous smile.



In his room, whistling a country-western song, Brett prepared to take a shower. He stripped off his shirt and pants, leaving on only his blue satin boxers.

Things were a little *iffy* in the condo between Lana and him. He was confident she would eventually accept that he was there for the week, though Roger had said only a few days, and would let up on her stiff and formal attitude.

Moving down the hall, he noticed the bathroom door was closed but tried the handle anyway just in case Lana had shut the door when she was done with her shower and left the bathroom.

It turned easily in his hand. The bathroom was free. However, once the door was open he stopped dead in his tracks, staring at the vision before him.

Lana was standing with her back to him, drying her body. Water droplets glistened like diamonds on her creamy skin. Her foot was propped up on the edge

of the tub so that she could dry her long, well-shaped leg while she hummed softly. Her rounded hips accented her slender waist. The small mole in the center of her lower back drew his eyes like a magnet. Silky smooth skin made for kissing glowed in the soft bathroom light. He could smell the mild scent of roses. Brett swallowed hard.

Stiffening suddenly at the cold draft, she met his eyes in the mirror and screamed, whirling around and pulling the inadequate towel in front of her, even though it didn't cover much.

"What the hell are you doing?" she shrieked. "Get out of here, now!" She blushed all over. Her eyes sparked with fury as she clutched at the towel.

Brett leaned insolently against the doorframe, crossed his arms over his chest and smiled. "Well, ma'am, it seems to me that most people lock their doors when they shower. It tends to keep out unwanted visitors. That is unless you *planned* to invite me in?"

Biting back laughter in the face of her rage, he remained where he was while Lana shrieked at him. "Why you—Get out...now, or I'll...I'll call the police and have you arrested as a peeping Tom! Get out!"

A shampoo bottle fell off the shelf in the tub making a loud bang but Lana didn't even blink at the noise.

Smiling even wider now, he was about to turn and leave but instead strode

toward her with heated purpose. He placed his finger under her chin looking directly into her eyes.

“Dost thou protest too much?” He lowered his head and kissed her gently. She was buck-naked and she was letting him!

Her eyes widened in alarm as he slipped his arms around her, pulling her close. The intensity of the kiss increased as his boxers became uncomfortably snug. He knew he should let her go but he was drawn to her like a moth to a flame, and couldn't seem to stop himself. Running his hands slowly up and down her back, catching droplets of water on his palms, he swallowed her groan. Her skin felt like satin beneath his fingers.

Deciding that he had pushed her far enough, he stepped back. Once his lips were gone, it seemed her brain started to function again. He knew the moment she caught his knowing grin as her expression turned to fury. The sound of her hand slapping his face was loud in the small room. Her eyes widening in shock, she shook her head, her fingers going to her swollen lips. She appeared to be stunned that she had lost control so completely and quickly ran past him with just her towel.

Rubbing his cheek thoughtfully, Brett smiled as he watched her retreating naked buttocks until they disappeared behind the bedroom door. She slammed it and locked herself safely in her room. She sure was feisty. Thinking about the time

that they would be spending together, he tried to remember that she was a client and he was here to protect her from a killer...but failed.

Unsure of who was more dangerous, the killer or Lana, he shrugged and went about his shower singing a song about “loving you forever,” at the top of his lungs.



Once the door was closed behind her, Lana struggled to catch her breath. She'd never struck another person in her entire life, yet she'd slapped Brett Colton!

Her face flamed as her heart danced to a speedy beat. Holding her hand to her lips, she ached for something elusive. She ached for him, the touch of his lips, his hands and strong arms holding her securely. Her back still tingled from the feel of his fingers as he'd rubbed them gently against her wet skin.

Tears threatened. Running over to the bed she threw herself face down and screamed into her pillow in frustration. She'd only just met the man and he was already killing her with temptation!

Trembling, she lay on her bed and stared into space. He was going to drive her crazy...with lust! She could hear him singing and almost smiled. Unbelievably outrageous, he took liberties without a qualm. But damn, his kisses sure left her wanting more. Sitting up Lana shook her head and her fists knotted.

“Ohhhh...” She growled in frustration then set about getting dressed.



“Mornin’, ma’am.” Brett drawled. Lana was so shocked at his sudden appearance in the kitchen that she knocked over the milk, spinning to face him.

Just look at him! He acts as though nothing happened between us. He isn’t showing one inch of remorse either, the bugger! His smug look had her grinding her teeth.

“Damn it! Look what you made me do!” As she bent down to wipe the floor he was there, taking the cloth from her, giving her an incredibly sexy smile. A thick strand of wayward hair dropped into his eyes, and she had the urge to push it aside. That made her even more flustered.

“Been like that all my life,” Brett said.

Lana’s eyes widened. “Pardon?”

“My hair, it’s always been wild and untamable.” He had that insolent grin again.

Flustered even more, Lana wondered how the man knew just what she was thinking. She remained silent and stood up, moving toward the coffee pot. Tapping her nails on the counter, she impatiently waited for it to finish percolating.

Warmth met her back. She knew he was standing close behind her, which didn’t help a bit. She trembled as shivers of awareness raced up and down her spine.

Sucking in a deep breath, she struggled for control. There was a crash behind them and Brett spun around. A cereal bowl lay smashed on the floor.

“Now how did that happen?” He wondered aloud. “Where do you keep your broom?”

With her back still to him she pointed to the small closet in the hall, keeping her silence. She didn’t turn around as he cleaned up the mess.

Lana smiled, still facing the coffee pot. When she was upset, things seemed to break unexpectedly. It had been that way since she was a child. Her parents had finally discovered that she was a telekinetic, having the ability to move objects with her mind. She’d been able to do it since before she could walk. Strange things happened when she was emotionally distraught or had some other strong emotion...like lust.

No! I refuse to be attracted to him. He’s a creep! Just look at the way he stares at me. He’s a lout! I can’t stand the man.

Now that she’d reassured herself that he was not the man for her, she felt calmer and able to face him.

Finally the coffee was ready. Lana poured two cups and turned to hand him one, stopping when she met his eyes. He was leaning against the table with his arms crossed, his biceps bulging beneath his black T-shirt sleeves. He was sporting a cocky grin. Moving past him, she placed the cups on the kitchen table

and cleared her throat, wanting to put him in his place.

“Mr. Colton—” she began.

Holding up his hand, palm facing her, he interrupted. “Ms. Anderson, say no more, I know you didn’t mean to throw yourself at me, and it’s all right, I forgive you.”

Her mouth dropped open, “You forgi—Why you miserable—You come into my home and just—” Her face burned as blinding fury raced through her veins, leaving her speechless.

Brett put both of his hands up. “Now hold on a minute, ma’am, I’m not angry with you.”

“Angry with *me*? You have a lot of nerve, mister! You—” she began shaking as her fury rose, her heart racing as she fought to catch her breath. “Ohhhh!” Throwing her hands up in defeat, she ran from the room, headed down the hall and slammed her bedroom door behind her.



His coffee cup flew off the table and smashed on the floor, spilling the hot brew everywhere. Looking at the unexplained mess, Brett shook his head. He tried wiggling the table to see if it had a faulty leg, but it was solid. Shrugging, he bent over and cleaned it up. Why bother even trying to figure out how that had happened?

Thinking about Lana, Brett laughed. He was enchanted with her. There was nothing like a feisty woman to get you going in the morning. Once the mess was taken care of, he sat down and had cereal and coffee, in a new cup, and thoroughly enjoyed his breakfast.



Lana called Roger. It was nine o'clock on a Saturday morning so she knew he'd be awake. "I'm sorry to call you so early but we have a big problem! Your client is impossible! He's rude, and nosy, and...and just plain irritating. I can't put up with this all weekend. I just can't."

"Now, Lana, Brett is a very important client and we need to pamper him. Why don't you see if he likes to work out and take him to the gym, maybe wear him out a little? I'm sorry but you must keep him with you. It means big money to the company. You know we're hurting for revenue since the murders started. Please say you'll do it, Lana. I'm counting on you."

Roger seldom asked her for anything, so reluctantly she agreed. "All right. I'll try to keep him out of trouble. Bye, Roger." She hung up the phone gently, feeling deflated.

Staring at the phone for a minute, Lana let out a deep sigh. Since she was obligated to keep her *guest* she decided she *would* wear him out. She'd make him go to the gym, shopping, dinner, dancing, anything to keep him busy and out of

trouble. She dressed in her tracksuit and packed her gym bag. Straightening her shoulders, she took a deep breath. She was ready for the next round.

When Lana entered the empty kitchen, she noticed that he'd done the dishes and put them away.

Hmmm... Maybe he is trainable.

Once she finished her breakfast, she sat back and listened for a moment, wondering why it was so quiet in the condo. After cleaning up, she went to investigate. Brett was talking quietly on the phone in the living room. Looking up as soon as she entered the room, he quickly finished his conversation and ended the call, his expression guarded as he attempted to look innocent.

"Hi, again. Sorry about the phone call. It wasn't long distance. Would you like to go jogging? And tonight, I have two tickets to the game at the Skydome. The Toronto Blue Jays face the Boston Red Sox. Would you like to go?"

Her eyes narrowed. Suddenly he was acting sweet and innocent, but she didn't trust him as far as she could throw him. He was trying to distract her from asking about the call.

"Well, I was going to suggest going to the gym but jogging will do. As for a soccer game, I'm not really a fan of—"

"It's baseball. I love the Jays and I've never been to the dome. Won't you come?" His puppy-dog eyes pleaded with her.

Since Lana just wanted to keep the peace, she finally gave in. “All right, Mr. Colton, I’ll go to the game with you.”

“Please, call me Brett? I’d like to call you Lana, if you don’t mind.”

Now, how was a girl to say no to the sincere, endearing side of him? Ignoring the flapping of butterflies in her stomach, she said, “Fine...Brett. Let’s try getting off to a better start than we have already, shall we? I’ll just grab my water bottle and we can go.” As Lana turned to leave the room the doorbell sounded.

When she answered it she was thrilled to see a delivery boy with a box of flowers for her. She tipped him after signing for them and closed the door. Taking them into the kitchen, she placed the box on the table.

Lana thought that they were from Roger, out of guilt for putting her in the position of babysitter, but when she opened the lid, she screamed.



Brett was instantly at her side, looking down into the box. It held a dozen long-stemmed, ruby-red roses covered with grub worms. He used his sleeve to open the card and read it.

“*‘Foul deeds will rise, Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.’* Lana, you want to tell me what’s going on?” Brett asked. He put the card back on the box and turned to her.

She was staring at it in shock and didn’t answer him.

Placing the lid back on, he pulled her into his arms and held her close, rubbing his hands in small circles over her back until she stopped shaking. It was difficult to be detached when he could smell her fragrant hair and feel her luscious curves pressed close to him.

Speaking in a quiet, soothing tone, he asked, “Do you know who sent the roses, Lana?” She kept her silence. Pulling back to see her face he asked her once more. “Do you?”

When she just shook her head, he cupped her cheek. “Lana, if there is something wrong, tell me about it. Why not let me help you? I know a few cops who could—”

“I don’t know what’s going on! Please don’t worry about it. It’s nothing to be concerned about,” she said quickly, pulling away from him. “I need to dispose of the box and then we can go jogging,” Lana swallowed with difficulty, her hand cupping her stomach as she stared at the box with unmasked fear in her eyes.

Brett put his hand on her arm. “I’ll take care of it. Give me five minutes then we’ll go for our jog, okay?”

Staring at him as though she couldn’t believe he was being so nice, she finally nodded and left the room.



Brett took the flowers outside and used his cell phone to make a call before

returning to the condo. He had placed the box where it could be found by his contact but not by the neighbors.

Since she was ready, he followed her outside and together they warmed up then began their jog.

Brett's eyes scanned the area wherever they ran, but Lana was so deep in thought she didn't notice. He didn't think she realized just how much danger she was really in, but he would be there to protect her no matter what happened. His gun was hidden in the harness beneath his sweatshirt.

Halfway through their run, Brett caught sight of the man who'd been stalking him when he first met Lana in the lobby, and pulled her with him onto a different path out of sight.

When she looked up at him with a question in her eyes, he shrugged. "This way looks more interesting." They continued the run in silence.



After a shower and change of clothes at the condo, Brett took Lana to a small coffee shop downtown. She had relaxed enough to ask him questions.

"So, what is your book about, Mr...ah, Brett?"

Brett leaned back in his seat and was quiet for a moment. "Well, it's about a baseball player and his life."

"A biography or fiction?" she asked.

“Fiction, Lana. It’s a lot more fun to write about an interesting life if you have creative freedom.” Brett wouldn’t look at her, guarding his gaze while playing with his spoon.

“I agree. When will you be finished?” Lana wondered why he was so evasive. Most writers loved to talk about their books, the characters, and the storyline. Brett looked like he could care less about it and she had to practically yank the info out of him.

“Well, it’s difficult to say really.”

Lana was about to ask another question when the waitress came over and Brett asked for the check.

“Brett, I’ll pay the check. It’s what we do for our clients.”

“My mother raised me to pay for my date. Sorry, Lana, but I invited you out so I’ll pay.” His eyes never met hers.

Her eyes narrowed, her suspicions rising. She didn’t buy his story. Taking a client out for lunch or dinner was standard procedure.

Brett pulled out her chair. With his hand resting on her lower back, they left the restaurant and headed for the Skydome.



Taking the subway, Lana and Brett arrived at the Skydome in plenty of time before the game started. She was surprised when he took her to a restaurant that

overlooked the baseball field. It was very narrow and curved around the top of the stadium, providing an excellent view of the field far below. Fans could see the game no matter which dinner table they sat at.

Once seated, Brett ordered their drinks. Lana was stunned when he ordered her a whiskey with ice and water.

“How did you know what kind of drink I like?”

“A little bird told me.” Brett grinned and gave her a wink.

Somehow he just knew what she liked, as though he’d read her mind. They seemed to have a weird connection and Lana thought it was getting freaky.

Quiet for a moment, she smiled. “Roger?”

He winked but didn’t give her an answer before their drinks arrived. “He told me to get you wasted and take advantage of you,” he teased, grinning at the bald-faced lie.

She threw her head back and laughed. “I seriously doubt that, Brett. He’s like a father to me and is rather protective. When my girlfriend, Tina, tries to set me up on blind dates, he gets all worked up. If he could, he’d have each and every man who looked sideways at me checked out by the police.”

Brett smiled. “I seriously doubt that you’d have a hard time finding a date, Lana. You’re beautiful, intelligent, and have an excellent sense of humor.” With a slow grin, he continued, tongue-in-cheek, “The temper might be a bit hard to

take, though.”

Lana couldn’t lose her temper now, not when they were finally getting along, so she just laughed with him.

“You might be surprised by this, Brett, but I don’t care for the singles scene. My idea of a great Saturday night would be curling up on the sofa with a good book, or movie and some popcorn.”

“I’m not interested in the bar scene either. I like to get to know a woman before I take her out.” His eyes spoke volumes as he studied her.

Now Lana was uncomfortable, but fortunately they were interrupted before she could figure out what his unspoken message was.

“Well, I’ll be. Hi, Brett! What brings you to town?”

Looking up at the man who’d spoken, Lana saw that he was Asian. Chinese, she thought. He had a wiry, muscular physique and stood about six-feet tall, with mysterious, dark-brown eyes and black hair that shone blue in the lights. A very handsome man! Lana was grateful her best friend Tina wasn’t with them or she’d jump his bones without blinking.

Brett stood and shook the man’s hand before introducing them. “Lana Anderson, I’d like you to meet my best friend, Jessie Chan.”

Raising her eyebrows, Lana questioned, “As in related to Jackie Chan, the actor and martial arts expert?”

Laughing in delight, Jessie shook his head. “No relation, unfortunately, but he is my hero. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Anderson.” He shook her hand with a firm grip.

“Please, call me Lana.” She looked askance at Brett. “Could we ask Jessie to join us?”

Nodding, Brett agreed, and Jessie sat down and ordered a drink.

“So, how do you two know each other, Jessie?” Lana asked.

Jessie gave his friend a quick glance. “Oh, well, I used to live in Boston and moved here a few years ago. Brett and I shared an apartment while we were in college.”

“Really? What courses did you take?” Lana was enchanted with Jessie. He had a warm, gentle air about him.

“Well, we—” he began.

The server brought their drinks, promising Jessie that his would be along right away. Lana noticed that he was uncomfortable with the line of questioning and let the matter drop.

Spending the evening with the two men was wonderful for Lana. She was able to relax and forget, for a short while, the nightmare of the serial killings. Though she wondered about it, she never questioned why Jessie was alone at the game or how he had located them in the large throng of people.

“How many goals have they scored?” Lana asked, offering an innocent expression.

Brett and Jessie looked at each other and laughed.

“Lana, in baseball it’s homeruns, not goals. And the score is twelve-to-ten for the Jays.” Brett’s warm gaze filled with laughter.

Dropping her eyes, Lana said, “Sorry.”

Jessie jumped in. “Don’t worry about it. If you hang around him long enough, you’ll know every sport going.”

“Gee, that sounds like great fun.” Her warm smile made her sarcasm light.

The men joked and teased her regarding her lack of knowledge about baseball. Lana took it all in good measure, relaxed and happy.



Brett watched Lana laughing and joking with Jessie and became even more intrigued with her. Her stiff and formal air was gone after three drinks. She’d loosened up and was calm. Having a night out had been good for her. It was as though she was a completely different person.

Once the game ended, with the Jays winning seventeen-to-fifteen, the friends reluctantly parted. Brett took Lana home by cab.

Arriving at the condo, he made her wait outside while he searched the rooms and closets. Taking her shoes off, she waited by the door. Lana was so

relaxed that she didn't even ask why he was playing cop. She stood in the doorway with a silly grin on her face while holding her shoes in her hand.

Confident that all was well, Brett took her other hand and led her inside, closing the door and locking it behind them. He tried not to grin when he saw her lose her balance and right herself, giggling. She was tipsy. She began to hum softly.

Lana didn't tense when Brett pulled her close and kissed her. She put her arms around his neck and leaned into him, her shoes dangling from a finger.

"Mmmm—" She moaned into his mouth before breaking the kiss. Tipping her head back she looked into his eyes. "Thank you, Brett. That was the most wonderful day I've had in a very...long...time."

To his dismay, she moved out of his arms and began to walk toward her room. Before she reached the door the phone rang. She walked in a dreamy state to answer it.

"Hello? Hello?" she queried, her voice hardening. Dropping her shoes, she tensed. "Look, stop calling here. I've got my phone line tapped and the police will track you down if you don't stop it!"

Lana slammed the handset down then took it off the hook, frowning at the phone.

Brett came up behind her and slid his arms around her waist. "Talk to me, Lana," he urged.

Sighing aloud and relaxing her shoulders, she murmured, "It's nothing." Pulling away, she headed to her room, closing the door softly behind her. Brett stood in the living room staring after her as she effectively shut him out.

What she didn't know was that he actually did have her phone tapped and was just waiting for a chance to catch the killer. He shook his head, frustrated that their wonderful day together had been ruined. Tomorrow would come soon enough. He moved to the guest room and prepared for bed.



In a dark phone booth, a figure slowly hung up the receiver then tried the number one more time. The line was busy. She had taken it off the hook again. Clenched hands were the only indication of frustration as the figure silently turned to disappear into the night.

Chapter Three

Enter, Tina the Tiger

Sunday morning was off to a promising start for Lana. Brett behaved himself while drinking his coffee and reading the newspaper. He had just wolfed down an enormous breakfast of bacon and eggs, home fries, toast with jam, with a large glass of orange juice.

Lana wasn't a big eater in the mornings and had settled for her usual cereal and orange juice. She, too, read a portion of the morning paper, automatically scanning the headlines for murder. Relief filled her when she found there were none referring to the death of an author.

She studied Brett over the top of her portion of the newspaper. His hair was still damp from his shower and fell into his eyes.

His eyes! She nearly sighed aloud, dropping her gaze back down at her paper to hide her expression. Their vibrant blue color drew her like nothing else. It was difficult not to stare into them when they held untold, smoldering secrets of promises unfulfilled. Scrunching her eyes closed, Lana shivered as sensations rocketed through her abdomen. Damn, but he was distracting!

Both early risers had been sitting in companionable silence while they read

until the doorbell sounded. Lana rose to her feet but was surprised when Brett jumped up first.

“I’ll get it.”

He moved off quickly down the hall.

Man! This guy is really getting pushy! Shaking her head in frustration, she followed him. *Now he’s answering my door! Soon he’ll be jumping into my—No! I’m not even going to think that way!*



Looking out the peephole, Brett saw a beautiful woman with big brown eyes and platinum hair with a streak of violet through it. She looked to be around thirty years old and was eyeing her perfectly sculpted manicure. Grinning, he opened the door.



The look of stunned admiration on Tina Johnson’s face as she stared back at Brett annoyed Lana.

Tina’s eyebrows arched even as she offered him a sensual grin. “Well hellllllooo, Mr. Universe!”

Rolling her eyes when Tina began practically purring, Lana pushed Brett aside in exasperation and grabbed her hand. “Come on in, Tina. This is Brett

Colton, a...client of mine.”

Lana stepped back, letting Tina move past her. She gave Brett a scathing glance before following her friend to the living room. The air practically crackled around her.

Knowing by the look in his eyes that Brett held back a wicked smile as he closed and locked the door, Lana shot him a glare. He shrugged, releasing a sexy grin before following them to the living room.

As Tina had passed Brett, she'd all but drooled on him, Lana noted, nearly groaning as irritation set in. Tina loved men. No matter what nationality or color, she was game. The more the merrier was her motto. She constantly tried to set up Lana with blind dates, much to Lana's annoyance.

Lana much preferred to spend her evenings at home alone rather than be out on a date with Mr. Hands-all-over-your-body or Mr. Hey-look-at-me-I'm-wonderful! Many of the dates had ended up with strange mishaps. A glass of beer somehow spilled in a lap, or an elbow landing in soup.

Lana had the distinct benefit of being gifted so was able to end her dates quickly if they were bombs. They usually were since Tina wasn't fussy about the character of the man. He just had to have an exceptional physique and an interest in sexual pleasures. In Lana's experience it wasn't what was on the outside that mattered, though Brett seemed to have it all.

Ever since they were teens, Tina dyed her hair different colors on a regular basis. Even she didn't know what her true color was. She lived in the same condo complex as Lana, worked in graphic design, was a computer junky, and was definitely the most fun-loving person Lana had ever met, even with her shallow attitude about men.

Lana led the way to the living room, unexpectedly feeling apprehensive about Tina being around Brett. "Tina, would you like some coffee?" she asked.

Her friend was still eating "eye candy," giving Brett the once over, or twice over, so it appeared. "Coffee? Sure, that'd be nice." Her eyes never left Brett's face.

Brett smiled at her, completely comfortable in his role as the morning dessert. "I'd be happy to pour you a coffee, beautiful. What do you take in it?"

"Oh, I usually take it regular, but you can fix it *any way you like*," Tina flirted outrageously while Brett soaked it up like a sponge. Lana was amazed to find herself gritting her teeth in frustration. How could these two shallow people showing interest in each other cause her to be so unsettled?

As soon as Brett left the room, Tina swung around to Lana. "You've been holding back, Lana-banana. He's gorgeous! Is he fantastic in bed?" Tina looked hopeful.

Lana laughed but she felt like screaming. "I wouldn't know, Tina. He's a client. I'm just putting him up for a few days as a favor to Roger."

With a wicked grin, Tina purred, “I’d like to put him ‘up’ any time, any where—You skanky-pants, you! I can’t believe you didn’t jump his bones the minute he walked in.”

“I can’t believe it either, beautiful.” Brett stood in the doorway with two coffee cups in hand, sporting a very sexy grin. Lana ground her teeth, her temper beginning to rise.

Giggling in delight, completely at ease at having been caught talking about Brett in such an inappropriate manner, Tina accepted the cup from him, deliberately letting her fingers trail over his hand.

Since Brett hadn’t asked Lana if she wanted a coffee, she got up stiffly and left the room to get one.



Brett smiled at Tina. “Is she always so uptight?”

Tina laughed. “You betcha! She tends to put a damper on things if you don’t get her drunk.”

Eyebrows raised at the thought of loosening Lana up, he asked, “Drunk? Maybe I should get started right away. It’s noon somewhere in the world, right?” He recalled the night before at the game. She’d definitely loosened up, but remained in control no matter how relaxed she was.

“Oh, now I’m disappointed! I thought maybe you and I could have some wild

and crazy sex until we dropped.”

Brett almost laughed aloud when Lana nearly dropped her cup as she entered the room. She appeared to be shocked with Tina’s blatant move in such a short time.



The two sat side-by-side on the sofa with Tina practically draped over Brett’s lap. Lana was trembling with fury when he answered the siren’s call, expecting him to gently let Tina down at her sexual overture yet stunned that he gobbled it up instead.

“Well, ma’am, that is quite an invitation. I might just take you up on that. You never know.”

The charming smile he offered Tina was Lana’s undoing, however, the shock on his face when he found himself wearing his hot coffee was a cool balm for her frustration with him. The cup had *somehow* tipped all over his shirt and pants!

With a yelp, Brett jumped to his feet.

“Sorry, ladies, I’m not usually so clumsy. I’ll go have a shower and change, if you’ll excuse me.”

Tina was pouting as he moved to leave the room, then she turned and shot daggers at Lana before calling out, “Don’t be long, handsome. We’ll have to continue this conversation.”

Watching Brett's butt until he had left the room, Tina turned on her friend. "Lana, why'd you go and ruin my fun?" she hissed.

Calmly sitting in the chair Lana sipped her coffee and didn't speak for a minute, ensuring that Brett was out of earshot.

Since she'd watched his every move, Tina got a good look at his well-shaped butt. She licked her lips. "Man, he's sweeter than a box of chocolates. I'd sure love to get him into bed."

As though suddenly remembering her friend, Tina snapped out of her sexual fantasy daze. "Unless of course you have him pegged for yourself. And what's the deal with tipping the cup on him? I wanted to play some more," she whined.

Besides her family, only Tina knew about Lana's ability to move things with her mind. Suddenly blushing and unsure of herself, Lana stuttered, "Oh...ah, I don't...that is...I'm not interested in him, Tina. He's...just a client."

Lana was mortified when he walked past the room with no shirt on, muscles bulging and twitching, his eyes filled with amusement. He'd obviously heard her comment. Her face changed from blush to scarlet at the sight of his naked chest.

Brett just grinned in his sexy, "I know you love me" way and went down the hall for his shower.

"What a bod!" Tina drooled.

“Would you like a bib?” Lana snapped, annoyed with her friend.

Tina’s eyes swung back to her. “You *do* want him! Why you little devil! How long is he staying? You could get him in bed by tonight. All you have to do is...”

Lana put up her hand. “Do *not* go there, Tina. I’m not like you. Making moves on a guy is foreign to me. And I’m not interested in him, honestly. He’s just a client.”

Laughing in delight, Tina teased, “Right, *just* a client. So you’ve said three or four times already. Aren’t you protesting a little too much, my friend? Listen,” Tina put her cup down and stood. “I’m going to get out of here. Why don’t you go hop in the shower with him? He’ll love it. See you later, darling. Let me know how fantastic he is. On second thought, maybe you’d better not. I don’t want to be green with envy when you tell me what a great lay he is, and he will be. Trust me, I can spot a good one a mile away. Oh, and don’t forget to use a condom. You know...safe sex and all that crap. Chat later, bye-bye.”

Tina left the room before Lana could protest, leaving her sitting there with wicked thoughts about her guest and a bar of soap. She pictured the water cascading off his chest, her lips picking up the drops, burning across his skin. Her hand would run slowly down his naked body until it reached his—

Giving herself a mental shake, Lana took a gulp of her coffee, nearly scalding her throat. What on Earth was wrong with her? She was fantasizing about the *mad*

kisser of all people! He was annoying, and frustrating, and...so incredibly sexy. Irritated, Lana stood to find something, *anything*, to do to keep her hands and mind busy.



“Penny for your thoughts.” His deep, sensual voice came from the hallway. He was leaning on the doorframe, damp hair falling into his eyes, his chest bare. Droplets of water still glistened on his naked chest and—

Snapping her mouth closed, Lana ripped her gaze away from his muscular pecks and six-pack. She felt like she’d just had cold water splashed in her face. Practically leaping off the chair, she picked up the coffee cups and made to push past him to go to the kitchen but he was blocking the doorway. That got her back up. Looking up at him, she practically snarled, “Excuse me!”

He just smiled in that slow sexy way of his then, after a moment’s pause, moved aside just enough to let her squeeze by. Her breasts and pelvis brushed his body, bringing an involuntary gasp as she felt a very obvious package against her lower belly. Practically shoving him aside, she finally moved past him and went into the kitchen, trying to ignore his deep chuckle. Her face was still burning scarlet, her body shaking with reaction to his nearness.

At the sink, Lana could feel him standing behind her so close that his heat made her tremble. She tried to look busy washing the dishes. She was so conscious

of him that she nearly jumped out of her skin when his hand caressed her shoulder.

Brett's voice had dropped to a husky growl. "She's right, you know. You could have joined me in the shower. I wouldn't have objected."

Stiffening like a board, Lana whirled on him, shaking in fury. "You are so shallow, just like Tina! She would sleep with anyone anytime just because he was male and had a—Just because he was male! You two are perfect for each other. Why don't you and Tina—"

His lips captured hers in a burst of heat as his arms pulled her close, trapping her hands between them. The water droplets on his chest tickled her palms.

Lana was lost in the sensation of his lips caressing hers, his hot tongue searching her mouth, tickling, tingling, and dueling with hers in a mad dance. Her hands opened, sliding over his smooth skin. The water drops dried beneath her heated palms. If her mind had meant to push him away, her body had forgotten.

His lips were like wildfire when they left hers, traveling down her neck, along her collarbone, making her lungs beg for air while her mind swam in a fog of passion. Hard, hot hands roved over her back, sliding down to her hips, to her buttocks, cupping them to pull her closer to him. She felt him, hard and ready, pressing against her, and she wanted him. Oh, how she wanted him!

Waves of desire filled her as she panted, breathless. The male scent of his

arousal was making her mad with desire. Freshly washed damp skin, heat, and sex all rolled into one made for a heady aroma.

When she opened her eyes for a brief moment, she saw that behind Brett's back, the sugar bowl, box of cereal and jar of jam floated up into the air and began to circle around.

His lips reclaimed hers. As the kiss escalated, the items rotated above the table faster and faster.

Brett snapped out of the passionate moment, lifting his head and spinning around to see that the sugar bowl and jam jar had smashed on the table, the box of cereal spilled on top of the mess.

"What the—?" Brett's confusion was evident. She tried to hide her smile. "How the hell did that happen? There isn't anyone here but us!"

Nearly bursting out laughing when he stared at the mess scratching his head, Lana turned away to hide her grin.

Panting, she tried to get her breath back. Shudders of desire raked through her body. She forced herself to regain control and stepped away from him.

Looking innocent, Lana shrugged her shoulders and moved to pick up the pieces of broken glass with shaking hands, cutting her finger. "Owww!" She put her finger to her lips.

"Here, let me see that." He took her hand in his and lifted it close to

investigate the small wound.

When he pulled her finger to his lips and laved it with his hot tongue, her knees turned to jelly. Lana's knees nearly buckled in reaction. She thought that was the sexiest, most erotic sensation she'd ever felt. His tongue stroked over her finger, making her weak with need as her heart sped up and her breathing accelerated.

Brett didn't look at her but concentrated on her cut. Removing her finger from his lips, he asked, "Do you have a first aid kit?"

Staring at his mouth, her own lips parted as she watched his move, Lana didn't hear the question and shuddered instead.

"Lana? Do you have a first aid kit?" Brett smiled, reading her reaction and liking it.

"Wha—?" Lana struggled to remember what he had asked. "Oh, ah, yes, under the sink."

After he found the kit and pulled out a bandage, he wrapped it carefully around her finger. "There you go. Good as new. I'll clean up this mess. You go sit in the living room and I'll join you there soon."

He was being so sweet that she almost did what he asked, but suddenly snapped out of her sex-driven daze.

Sucking in a deep breath, she shook her head. "No, Brett. Thank you anyway

but it's my mess and I'll clean it up. Excuse me."

Lana gathered up the dustpan and broom and started cleaning up the broken dish and cereal, leaving the jam for the moment.

Instead of leaving the kitchen, he leaned against the doorframe watching her as she moved efficiently around the table. She could feel his gaze burning into her back and it was making her very uncomfortable. Using the dustpan and a large, wide knife, Lana scraped the jam and broken glass into the pan, placing the shards in the garbage. After she washed the dustpan and knife, then the table, she looked up to see he was still there, smiling.

"Why are you staring at me?" Lana squirmed beneath his suspicious eyes.

"I'm just wondering why strange things happen only when you're present. What's going on?" Brett had his arms crossed, waiting in silence for her to answer his question.

"I don't know what you mean." She felt her face begin to burn.

"Lana, there's something weird going on and I think you know what it is. Do you have a poltergeist?" Brett asked.

Staring at him for a moment, Lana realized that he had just given her a perfect explanation, so she went with it. "I...I didn't want you to think I was crazy. I mean, most people don't believe in poltergeists. I'm sure there is one, but how can you tell, call a ghost-buster and ask them?" Lana shrugged, beginning to babble in

her nervousness.

Brett just stared at her until Lana became very uncomfortable. She made an excuse and left the kitchen, brushing past him in the doorway. She tried not to groan when her breasts brushed across his chest. For some reason, they were extremely sensitive.

Practically running down the hallway to her bedroom, she closed the door behind her. *Hiding like a little coward.* She paced back and forth with her hands clenched into fists. Brett had kissed her again. His passion was calling to her and she ached with need. Her nipples tingled. She felt an answering pull low down in her womb.

“What am I going to do? The man is driving me to distraction. Oh, God! I wish I had even a tenth of Tina’s courage. I’d jump him in an instant.” Putting her palms over her eyes, she tried desperately to pull herself together.

Hearing the doorbell, she stopped pacing, staring at the bedroom door. He would answer it, she knew, but it was probably Tina again coming back for seconds. *Not if I can help it, damn it!*

Lana ran to the bedroom door and yanked it open just as Brett answered the door, accepting a package from a delivery boy. Lana flew out of her room to take it from him, annoyed at his over-handed attitude. Biting back a smile, he silently offered her the package.

“I’m not expecting anything to be delivered. I didn’t even know they had deliveries on Sundays.” Lana stared at the box, confused.

Suddenly his expression closed, caution tensing his muscular arms as he took the box back, moving to place it on the kitchen table. Carefully taking the note off, he read it to himself. Instead of opening the package, he put his ear down to listen. Jumping back in alarm, he grabbed her hand and pulled her from the room, taking her outside to the parking lot before bringing out his cell phone and dialing 911.

“Wait, what—” Before she could finish her questions, he pulled her quickly away from the building.

Brett spoke into the phone. “Yes, operator, I believe it’s a bomb. We’re out of the building.” Every muscle in his body was taut. He was all business. There was no sign of the sexy playboy, just Mr. Taking-care-of-business.

“Absolutely,” he said into the phone. “Thank you, I’ll hold on until they get here.”

Holding the phone away from him, he asked her, “Lana, do you have any idea who would want to hurt you?”

Lana heard the word “kill” instead of hurt and tried to think. She shook her head.

“No. Brett, the only thing I can think of is the strange phone calls I’ve been

getting for the past few months, and the roses with the worms. But I can't for the life of me figure out who'd want to do such a thing, unless it's connected to the author murders."

Forgetting the fact that she'd been trying to keep Brett unaware of the murders since he was an author, she let that tidbit of information slip out.

"Can you think of anyone at the publishing house who could be a suspect?" Brett was acting like a cop now.

Alarm bells went off in her head. Her curiosity was beginning to get the better of her. "Brett, are you sure you aren't a cop? You don't sound like an author to me."

Suddenly he avoided her gaze, searching the crowds around them. "I do a lot of research for my characters, Lana. It helps to know the character's particular traits when you write." He turned his head, sighing with apparent relief at the sound of a siren.

Lana studied him. It was as though he had many different personalities and you never knew which one you were going to deal with at any given moment. Earlier he had been mischievous, then cocky, sexy, tender, sweet, and now he was like a cop, efficient and stern. What a confusing man!

A police car pulled up with lights flashing and sirens bellowing. A crowd began to gather out of curiosity.

“Stay here for a minute, Lana. I’m going to see if I can get any information. I’ll be right back.” The command brooked no argument as he moved off, leaving her alone as he went over to the officers. Lana wondered why they hadn’t come to speak with her since it was her home, the package addressed to her, but Brett took care of everything. She was too startled to think about taking over like she’d normally do.

Looking back at the condo, she shivered. Would her home blow up? Tears formed in her eyes, but she wiped them away as resentment filled her. Sudden cold chills raced up her spine. Feeling like she was being watched, Lana began to search through the crowd for any familiar faces, but saw no one. Still she had the eerie feeling of someone’s malicious eyes on her.

Brett finally came back, slipping his arms around her. “Are you okay?” His voice was deep with concern.

“I’m confused, frustrated, angry, and I feel eyes boring a hole in my spine. I’m absolutely perfect, Brett, just perfect!” she cried, sarcasm lacing her words. Her body was shaking now in reaction as tears threatened. He pulled her tighter into his embrace.

“The bomb squad is just pulling up. We should have some answers soon.” Brett placed his finger under her chin to look into her eyes. “It’s going to be fine, Lana. I’ll make sure of it.”

The elusive tears finally overflowed, falling down her cheeks. Brett kissed them away. He pulled her closer and just held her while his palms made small soothing circles over her back.

The fear of an explosion at any minute had them on edge. When an officer came up quietly behind them and spoke, they both jumped.

“Ms. Anderson, may I speak with you for a few minutes?” At Lana’s nod, he continued. “I’m Detective Mason. I’d like you to provide a statement and answer some questions to see if we can track down the person who is threatening you. Mr. Colton explained about the phone calls and the box of roses, which are potential signs of a stalker, but a bomb threat leans toward an attempt at murder. Luckily, he got you out of the building before the box was opened.”

Lana fought to control her building anger. “Officer, I have no idea about who would do this, but I believe it could be linked to the author murders. I’m the CEO of Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing. However, I don’t understand why I would be targeted by the killer since I’m not an author.”

Detective Mason wrote in his notebook and nodded. “Do you have anything to do with the authors, ma’am?”

Shaking her head, Lana said, “Not exactly. I don’t usually deal with them personally, but I am the only one who approves the manuscripts. I guess basically, the books don’t get published unless I say they do.”

Brett looked thoughtful. There was a commotion coming from some of the bomb squad crew. Lana turned to watch along with Brett and the detective.

Two officers in the squad were talking animatedly and gesturing with their hands.

“Excuse me. I need to confer with my men. I’ll be back to speak with you shortly,” Detective Mason said. “Please stay close by.” He moved over to speak with the bomb squad officers.

Brett kept an arm around Lana while they waited for what seemed like hours. It had been twenty minutes since Brett called 911 and the bomb hadn’t exploded yet.

Detective Mason soon came back with another officer from the squad and introduced the man.

“Officer Jenkins was in your home and will explain his findings.”

“Ma’am.” Jenkins nodded. “The bomb was a fake. The note Mr. Colton found on the box said, *‘The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind, A savageness in unreclaimed blood.’* Do you have any idea what that means?”

Lana looked at Brett then explained to the officer what she’d told Detective Mason.

“The note is a Shakespearean quote. It’s a threat, apparently just like the ones left at the murder scenes of the authors,” she said, her voice hoarse with

emotion as she stared off into space.

The windshield on the car nearest where they stood suddenly shattered in a loud crash. Brett dove for the ground, taking Lana down with him and covering her with his strong body. They lay like that for the next ten minutes while the cops scanned the area, guns aimed and ready.

Gasping, Lana did her best to ignore the way Brett muscular body melted into hers, his hard bulge pressing into her abdomen. He didn't seem to notice as his eyes focused on the people, vehicles, and buildings around them, looking for a shooter.

There was no sign of danger when fifteen minutes later he was given the all clear. Brett finally let Lana up. Now she *was* terrified and so angry she felt like *she* would explode. Someone was trying to kill her!



Letting out a fake yell and racing down the street with the other panicked people, the stalker snickered. It was working out better than planned. Lana's car window exploding was the perfect end to the situation to build up her fear. Since the worms hadn't deterred the woman, perhaps the fake bomb and shattering window would. All would come out in the morning. If Lana didn't stop what she was doing to the world, she'd pay, and pay with her life, if necessary.

Chapter Four

Office Stalking

Monday morning dawned bright and clear. There was a heat wave and Lana fanned a business folder near her face to stay cool in the cab until she and Brett reached the office. He planned to work on his “book” and stay close to her. The game was getting more intense as the danger grew.

Lana still refused to acknowledge how serious the threat was to her, going to work as she did every day to show courage. Brett could tell that she quaked inside by her unconscious nervous gestures, her fingers twirling a strand of hair, nibbling on her lip, and the way her eyes moved around her as she walked as though seeking her enemy.

Brett met with Roger first thing after they arrived. Explaining what had happened over the weekend, he made plans with Roger to increase Lana’s protection. He also told Roger about her suspicions of his integrity as a novelist.

“She’s always been smart as a whip, Brett. Just keep doing what you’re doing and if she clues in, be honest with her. Lana admires honesty above all else.” Roger looked at his wristwatch. “I have a meeting with the crew in a few minutes. I’ll talk to you later this afternoon, okay?”

“Sure, Roger, I’ll keep myself busy. I have a few phone calls to make.” Brett paused. “You know, Roger, come to think of it, it wouldn’t hurt if I was in on your meeting. I could meet all the players and get some backgrounds. We could say it would help my writing to take part in a corporate meeting—you know, for the book and all.”

With a pleased smile, Brett all but rubbed his hands together with enthusiasm.



When Roger stood at the head of the large conference table and explained Brett’s attendance at the meeting, Lana studied her ‘house guest’ with intent. She was even more confused at Brett’s constant presence and wasn’t reassured when he winked at her, sporting a cocky grin.

“It’s still vital that we stick together in this very tense time and I appreciate your support. Now, on to business. I have a new author whose work we need to discuss. Fiona Gregory is a murder–mystery author who has already released her first book, *The Death of Desire*. I would like each of you to read her new novel, *The Birth of Vengeance*.”

Roger stopped to take a sip of water. Brett noticed his hands shook slightly. “This story is about a woman who seeks a murderer who kills people using fire. Fiona has one victim tied to a bed, then the killer sets fire to the room, burning him

alive.”

Roger shuddered and continued. “What a horrendous way to die. The author’s first book is flying off the shelves so we need to get this baby moving.”

His gaze moved over to Anna Warrington. “Anna, Fiona has asked for you to be her publicist. I expect you’ll call her and make arrangements to meet and go over the details?”

Anna nodded in her brusque way. “Yes, sir, I’ll get right on it.”

“Thank you, Anna.” He turned to Linda Winters. “Linda, could you please look over the manuscript and check it for liabilities. I’d like a report on it A.S.A.P., please. Jeffrey, can you proof the work right away? I’d like this manuscript to be your top priority.”

Lana had always been impressed with Jeffrey Reed, a twenty-six-year-old African-Canadian. He was able to pick a needle out of a haystack when it came to errors and grammar.

Jeffrey nodded. “Sure, Roger, I’ll have it done in the next two days.”

Roger smiled and adjourned the meeting, asking Lana to stay, including Brett.

Lana nodded, returning her gaze to Brett. Something wasn’t right with this picture. She wanted to know what, and she was going to find out! Studying him, she decided that he was way too cocky and confident. There was just

something...off about him.

“Lana, I would like you and Brett to join me for lunch at the café downstairs.” Roger was edgy. Lana noticed the dark circles under his eyes. She was quick to agree for Roger’s sake, *not* because she wanted to be near Brett. *Right!*



Lunch was tense for the three of them. Brett tried to lighten the mood by teasing Lana, while Roger remained tense.

“There’s a Jay’s game on TV tonight, Lana. Maybe we can count goals together,” he joked.

Not biting, Lana said, “We’ve already covered the fact that they don’t have goals. They have bases, Brett.”

Chuckling, he corrected her. “Home runs.”

Rolling her eyes, she said, “Whatever.”

Roger smiled.

“Tell me about what happened on the weekend, Lana. I hear an attempt was made on your life; first a fake bomb then a possible shooting.” Roger’s skin was pasty white, his eyes bruised from lack of sleep.

“Roger, it was nothing serious, just a prank. Some kids must have thrown a rock, and there was only a clock inside the package. Everything is fine. Please don’t worry about me.” She did her best to appear unaffected by the event.

She could tell by his expression he knew that she'd been shaken by her ordeal and it was not as simple as she made out. Lana was relieved, only for a brief moment, when he changed the subject and finally came to the reason he had asked them to lunch.

Pulling out a folded sheet of paper, Roger handed the note to Brett with shaky hands. "I found this stuck to my front door with a small penknife." His eyes revealed his fear, although he hid it fairly well.

Brett read aloud the brief message. "*All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.*" He quickly looked over at Roger. "Have you shown the police this, Roger?"

His expression fearful, he shook his head. "No, I didn't want to add more fuel to the fire. I thought I'd run it by you—and Lana, of course," Roger amended.

Lana's suspicion flags began to wave like mad. "Roger, you're keeping something from me. Why would you show Brett the message and not the police? He *is* an author after all...*isn't he?*"

Her long pause and sarcasm told the tale even better than when she sat back in the chair and crossed her arms over her chest. She knew Brett wasn't what he appeared to be.

Roger ran his hands over his bare head and sighed. "Brett, Lana needs to know the truth. We can be sure she won't tip our hands."

Brett nodded. “Lana, you’re right, I’m not an author. Roger hired me to protect you. I’m an undercover detective for the Toronto Police Force. You’re in serious danger, and it seems that Roger is now, too.”

Lana was building steam as she confronted Roger. “You made me put up our ‘client’,” she snapped in a scathing snarl, “in my home, and now you’re telling me he’s a *cop*? What is the matter with you? I thought you trusted me!” Hurt and anger brought heat to her face as she tensed head-to-toe.

She moved to stand up and leave but Brett grabbed her wrist and made her sit back down. The cups rattled on the table but the men barely noticed.

“Hear us out, Lana. Put your temper to bed for a minute and listen to what we have to say.” Brett’s grip was firm, giving her no chance to refuse.

“Lana, I was worried about you and those phone calls. Now with the flowers, the fake bomb threat, the windshield, and this note on top of it, I’m terrified—for both of us. I called in a favor and had Brett shadow you with the cover of being an author from out of town.” Roger smiled wryly for a moment. “I knew I couldn’t fool you for long.”

Dropping her chin to her chest for a moment, Lana struggled for control. It was a few minutes before she felt she could talk reasonably and the cups stopped rattling against their saucers. Taking a deep breath, she lifted her eyes to Roger’s.

“Okay, Roger, I understand why you did it but the game is over. Brett is

leaving my place and he can move in with you. *Your* note is definitely a threat.”

Lana leaned back in her chair.

Both men shook their heads. Brett was the first to speak. “Sorry, kitten, this threat is to both of you and it’s deadly serious. I’ll have some cops stake out Roger’s house but I’m staying with you whether you like it or not.”

“But I—” She never finished her protest because Brett jumped in quickly and cut her off.

“No *buts* about it, Lana! Roger hired me and I plan on doing my job.” Brett was firm.

“Lana, please see reason. I have enough to deal with without having to worry about you, too. Brett’s here to help. Please, Lana.” Roger was so adamant that Brett protect her that she reluctantly gave in.

“Fine, Roger. I’m only doing this for you, *not* because I’m being forced into it. I have work to do. I’ll see you later.” She jumped up and moved away from the table quickly before Brett could stop her, leaving the two men to finish their lunch.



Roger shook his head in admiration. “She is something, isn’t she? Feisty, strong, smart, and beautiful. What an amazing woman!”

Brett had to agree. He wanted to run after her, concerned for her safety, but he also needed to talk to Roger about his own threat.

“Roger, I’m going to call in my friend, Jessie. He can shadow you and arrange for surveillance tonight.” Pulling out his cell phone, Brett called him and explained the situation. After he ended the call, Brett let Roger know what was going to happen next.

“We need to get you down to the station and get a statement from you. Unfortunately, we have our fingerprints on the letter. But since none of the others had prints, I seriously doubt that this one has any either.” Brett studied the note again. “*Macbeth*.”

“You know your literature, Brett.”

Brett smiled, a little embarrassed. “I took a literary course in college. It was supposed to be a good way to get chicks.”

Chuckling, Roger leaned back in his chair. “Let’s get back upstairs and finish the day. I’ll leave early and we can go to the station, but I want Lana with us every minute.”

There’s a saying about the best-laid plans...



Without knocking, Vice-President Allan Hansen entered Lana’s office, sauntering over to her desk. Hansen was the only fly in the ointment at the firm. He had “the hots” for Lana and wouldn’t take no for an answer when it came to hitting on her. The fact that he was married seemed to mean nothing to him, any

more than getting fired for sexual harassment did. The man's self-important attitude annoyed her to no end.

"Hi, Lana." He smiled confidently. "Scared?" Allan had the annoying habit of clicking his pen over and over again.

She wanted desperately to take him and his arrogant attitude down a few pegs. "I imagine everyone is a little scared, Allan." Her calm, dry tone expressed anything but fear. "What was it you came to see me about?"

Knowing that he didn't want anything more than to antagonize her, she sat back and waited for him to speak, folding her hands together. Arrogant and self-centered, Allan acted as if he *were* the last man on Earth.

"Well, being single and living alone, Lana, I figured you might want to take me up on my offer...for my...ah, services. You know, in case you needed a strong man around to protect you."

His smile was a leer. Lana felt nauseous. He continued to click his pen repeatedly.

"Well, Allan. I'm sure if I *do* need a strong man, or any *kind* of man, I can definitely find one on my own. And when I *do* find one, I'll make sure that you're the *first* to know. Now I have a lot of work to do so—" Lana nodded towards the door in a blunt request for him to get lost.

Allan stood in silence for a moment, eyes narrowed, his face flushed in

barely disguised contempt. Click, click, click went the pen. He just waited there as if he had more to say. His slightly pudgy chest rose and fell faster as his breathing quickened in frustration.

As Lana's irritation with the man grew, his pen suddenly exploded all over his hand. He looked down in shock at the mess. Shooting a venomous look at Lana for witnessing his predicament, he snarled, "I can make your life a whole lot easier, or much, much harder. It's your choice, Lana. You think about that for a while. I'm not just any man. Women are begging to go to bed with me."

"Poor misguided things. I can only imagine how desperate they must be. Don't slam the door on your way out, Allan. Oh, and try not to get ink all over the place."

Holding back a smile, she went back to work on the computer, ignoring his furious growl.

Without another word, he turned and left the office, slamming the door behind him. Lana sighed when she saw the ink on the door. The poor janitor would have quite a job on his hands.

The wry grin on her face disappeared. Lana sobered when she considered that Allan was definitely a potential suspect. Yet, even though he was an absolute jerk, she didn't get any malevolent feelings from him so remained undecided as to whether he could be the killer.

An hour later, Linda Winters entered Lana's office. Once seated, the woman couldn't sit still on her chair.

"Lana, I don't know what to say. I'm so afraid!" She was very edgy, pulling at her skirt and fidgeting in the seat as she spoke. Her back was stiff as a board, her eyes darting back and forth as though seeking an unknown attacker.

Doing her best to reassure Linda's frantic mind, Lana spoke in a calm and quiet voice. "Linda, please don't worry. You're a lawyer, not an author and I seriously doubt that you would be a target. Just make sure you're careful when you leave work. Check the back seat of your car before you get in. Make sure you have someone in sight at all times in the parking lot, and keep your doors at home locked."

"But, Lana, aren't you frightened? This is real, not fiction, and we are *just* women. We don't stand a chance if the killer decides that we're next!" The poor thing was shaking now.

It was difficult for Lana to hold herself back from smacking Linda on the side of the head to shake her up enough to bring her into this millennium. The woman was about a hundred years behind in her thinking. *Just women indeed!*

"Listen to me, Linda," Lana said firmly. "You *must* pull yourself together. We're all scared, but if we run around hiding and shaking in our boots, then the killer wins without even murdering us. Please, go easy on yourself. Use

precautions, like the buddy system, and walk with someone to your car. Simple things like that can make it safe. I'm here if you need me, okay?"

"Thank you, Lana, I do feel a little better now."

After a few more assurances, Lana finally got Linda out of the office. Mentally crossing Linda off her list of suspects, she sighed. Leaning against the back of the door, Lana felt drained. Keeping people confident about their safety was exhausting.

She was just about to head back to her desk when there was another knock on the door. Rolling her eyes and sighing, she opened the door.

Anna Warrington entered with a confident stride. Anna was the publicist. An embittered divorcee, she was into weight lifting and bodybuilding. She had a brisk manner and showed no fear today.

"Hello, Lana, I figured that since everyone else had popped in to see you, I'd better do so, too. Any idea if the cops found evidence at the murder scene?"

Admiring her forthright attitude, Lana said, "No, I'm afraid not, Anna. If I do find out anything, I'll be sure and let you know. Are you planning on staying with us?"

"I'm not an author, so I figure I'm as safe as I can get in this day and age. I have no time to waste over ridiculous threats." Anna nodded her head and stood up to leave. "You don't seem too scared yourself, Lana."

“Oh, I’m scared enough, but like you, I won’t waste time on useless fears. Time spent worrying about something that might or might not happen is time I can spend on more important things. I am pleased to see you are of a like mind.” Lana smiled.

Nodding her head again, Anna said, “Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help you, Lana.” She left the office.

Finally! There was one person who meant business. Anna was definitely a sturdy woman, good to have on your side in a crisis. Yet the woman was as strong as a bull and tough-natured. She could be a candidate for a murderer. Shaking her head, Lana sighed. She was unwilling to put her on the list. Anna was a hardy, competent woman.

Lana finally got down to work before anyone else decided to come in for a *‘therapy session’*. She soon found herself staring into space as she thought about the employees one at a time. There must be some way to figure out if it was one of them. The signs all pointed to someone on her staff being a murderer and they had to be stopped.

Her empty coffee cup flew off the desk, crashing to the carpeted floor.

“Oh, bloody hell!” Lana muttered and went to clean it up.



Later that afternoon, Lana threw a monkey wrench in Roger and Brett’s

plans to keep her with them when they went to the police station.

“I am staying here and getting my work done. The approvals are way behind schedule and with all this confusion, I’ve spent more time soothing nerves than approving manuscripts.”

Seeing that Brett was about to protest, she put up her hand to stop him. “I’m not taking no for an answer! The office is full of people and there are security guards downstairs. I’ll be fine.” Shoving back the thought that one of her own staff members might be the murderer, she put on a brave face.

Running his fingers through his hair, Brett eventually gave in. “Fine, you can stay here, but don’t leave this floor without me. I’ll take Roger downtown, and after we get his statement, I’ll be back to get you. Do you understand me, Lana? Do not leave the floor!”

Rolling her eyes, she snapped, “I’m not a child, Brett! I...under...stand...every...thing...you...are...say...ing!” Her sarcasm was brutal.

Smirking, Brett crossed his arms over his chest, leaned in close, and threw it right back at her. “I...am...glad...that...you...under...stand...Lan...a.”

Fighting back a smile, she scrunched up a piece of paper and threw it at him, releasing an unwilling chuckle. “Get out of here, you idiot. I have a ton of work to do.”

She squirmed in her chair as she watched the way his muscles bulged

beneath his T-shirt sleeves. *Is it getting hot in here?* Lana felt her face flushing with heat.

Nodding briefly, he left the room with a knowing smirk.



Brett met with police detective Taylor MacIntosh that afternoon.

“What do we have, Mac? So far I know that with all three murders, a sheet of plain inkjet paper was left with a quote from either *Hamlet* or *MacBeth*. It appears that we have someone who likes the classics,” Brett reasoned.

Mac nodded. “Yes, Brett, our police psychologist seems to think that each of the quotes was left to taunt the remaining authors into not writing murder scenes, possibly to prevent the publication of any more novels that contain death by violence. The killer got away without any witnesses and there were no other pieces of evidence. It appears he isn’t interested in making it look like a suicide or an accident, but *wants* us to find the victims. This is the classic MO of many serial killers.”

“What were the other quotes?” Brett hoped he could find a clue or a hint at potential murders to come so they could catch the killer before he continued his rampage.

“Well, the first murder was a few months ago. Roberta Charlotte was like the other victims in that she wrote romantic murder mysteries. Her characters

were from a regency romance novel in which the murderer used a sword to kill his victim. Her demise was identical as she was run through the chest with a sword.”

“Makes sense,” Brett said studying the photographs of the victim at the scene of the crime.

“I believe she knew her assailant since he would have had to get pretty close to her, take the sword down from the wall then stab her. She kept the sword on display above the computer as inspiration for her story.” Mac pulled out a piece of paper sealed in a clear plastic bag.

“Here’s the first quote. This one is by *Hamlet*. ‘*And where the offence is let the great axe fall*’. Our psychologist thinks that the suspect appears to be enraged by the murder scenes in the novels. Do you agree?”

Nodding, Brett picked up the sheet to study the quotes. “Yes, Mac, I think we can assume that it’s a vendetta or an attempt to stop authors from writing about violence. Where’s the next one?”

Mac showed him the next page from the second murder of world-renowned author, Katie King. “This murder was done by hanging the woman in the garage. The note said, ‘*Speak no more; Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul*’. It was another warning to stop writing about murders, this one referring to speech. Her mouth had been bound with duct tape. The character in the novel was hung for speaking out against crime in the Old West.”

“Jacqueline Brandson, the third author, was garroted to death. The note said, ‘*Give thy thoughts no tongue*’. This is a similar demand. Brandson was writing about garroting when she was killed in the same manner,” Mac said.

“So, where do we go from here? I’ve been racking my brain trying to figure out what to do. The publishing house seems to be the main link. There are plenty of people there who could have access to not only the published novels, but also the unpublished ones. You can’t murder someone the way it’s written in the book if you haven’t already read it, and this is definitely premeditated murder.”

He handed the sheet back to Mac. “The only people who’d have access to all of the authors’ unpublished books are the staff at Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing.”

A sudden a chill came over Brett. He had a gut feeling that something bad was happening at the publishing office, and leapt to his feet. Lana was in trouble!

“Thanks, Mac. Keep in touch if you get anything new.” At that he raced out the door.



Working right through to five–thirty without a thought to the time, Lana had put a good dent in her work pile. Wondering why Brett wasn’t back yet, she stood up and stretched, about to go to the cafeteria for a bottle of water when the phone rang.

“Hello, Lana Anderson here.”

There was no noise on the line. No one answered her. She stared at the phone then slowly placed it in its cradle. Shivering, she began to pack up her work for the day.

The phone rang again, stirring her anger. "Hello? Listen, whoever you are, stop calling me! Enough is enough, and you don't scare me at all, so bugger off!" Lana was about to slam the phone down when she heard Brett's voice.

"Lana? What's going on?" He sounded concerned.

"Oh, sorry Brett. It was just another prank call. What's going on with you and Roger?" She hoped that the quick change of subject would deter him from asking questions, acting like the prankster hadn't bothered her in the least.

"It wasn't *just another call*, Lana. This is serious. I'm on my way back to pick you up. Roger is all set up with a surveillance team for tonight. I should be there within the next half-hour, okay?" Brett's voice was tense and she knew he was worried.

"Fine, I still have a lot of work left to do. I'll see you soon." After hanging up the phone, Lana left her office, jumping when she ran into the janitor in the hall.

"Oh, Donald, you startled me." Lana smiled at the kind man. He was in his late fifties. He often proudly showed off the latest pictures of his grandchildren to Lana. She loved chatting with him.

"I'm sorry, Lana. You working late tonight?" he asked.

“Yes, for a while. I’m just going to grab a bottle of water and finish a few more files before I leave for the night. Did everyone go home already?” Lana noticed that the lights were down low, and the hallway was deserted.

Donald frowned in concern. “It appears so, Lana. Maybe you shouldn’t stay late with all the trouble going on with those authors.”

Smiling, she patted his shoulder to reassure him. “Don’t worry about me, Donald. I’m just fine. I’ve never written a book in my life, let alone a murder scene.” With a confidence she didn’t truly feel, she waved and left him, walking quietly down the hallway in the eerie, dim light. The cafeteria was at the far end of the office.

Humming softly to herself a few minutes later, Lana was headed back to her office when she noticed that the cleaning cart was still sitting in the corridor, but Donald was nowhere to be seen.

“Donald?” she called. “Donald?” Lana’s heart sped up as she moved toward the cart. She raised her voice a little and called out again, “Donald, where are you?” Lana tripped on something. As she righted herself, she looked down to see a foot sticking out from under her secretary’s desk.

“Oh, my God—Donald!” Lana bent down to feel for a pulse, suddenly sensing that she wasn’t alone. Still crouched, she spun her head around to see what appeared to be a man dressed head-to-toe in black, wearing a balaclava

mask.

Lana froze, a scream lodged in her throat. She watched in horror as he pulled out a large hunting knife, the kind she'd seen in a *Rambo* movie. As the knife was raised to strike, a toilet brush flew off the cart to hit the killer's face, knocking him off balance in surprise.

Released from her immobility, Lana jumped up, racing down the long corridor and zigzagging through the cubicles.

Lana could feel the killer's presence right behind her, stalking her in silence but for the sound of his rasping breath. Staplers, cups, and papers flew up in the air as Lana ran.

Soon she had come full circle to the front of the office, unsure of where to run next. Out of breath, she looked around frantically, searching for a place to hide, then saw the ladies room door. Since the door locked on the inside it would buy her time until Brett arrived.

Slamming the door behind her and securing it, Lana stepped backwards until she was stopped by the cool wall. There was silence for a moment, then a loud bang as a body slammed against the door. Lana bit back a scream, her hand covering her mouth. Once again the door rocked with the impact of the killer's body.

Remembering the janitor's cart was right outside the door, Lana

concentrated for a moment, hearing a yell as cleaning products and tools hit their target.

When she heard the “ding” from the elevator, she nearly cried out in relief. Brett had arrived! “Thank heaven,” Lana whispered.

Now her concern was for Brett. At least she hoped it was Brett and that he was prepared in case the killer attacked him. Silence reigned, her heart racing as she held her breath in fear.

Oh, Brett, please don't die!



Rushing to the office so he could get Lana home safely, Brett's gut was churning with nerves. He felt that Lana was in trouble, big trouble. When the elevator doors opened on the thirtieth floor, he saw the mess lying in the hall and immediately went into cop mode, pulling out his gun, adrenaline pumping full-steam ahead.

With a great deal of caution he began to scan the area on silent feet, watching for any movement. He didn't call out to Lana, not wanting the killer to know his location, but he did pull out his cell phone and called for backup.

When he found the man's body on the floor, Brett slowly leaned down to feel for a pulse, his eyes scanning the office area. It looked as though he was the janitor. Thankfully he was alive with a strong pulse. Not seeing any blood, Brett

left him to search for Lana. He took a quick look in her office, but she wasn't there. It was neat as a pin. Fear for her clutched at his chest.

Moving down the hall, Brett scanned the cubicles and corridors but didn't see or hear anything except for the mess of papers and office supplies scattered in the aisles. When he was farthest away from the elevators, he heard what sounded like a door closing. *The emergency escape!* The stalker had fled. Now he had to find Lana, he prayed she was alive.

Pulling out his cell phone, he requested an ambulance with a brief explanation of what had happened then continued to scan the office. "Where could she be?" he whispered. He hadn't found her body to his relief, but that wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Moving back to where the cleaning supplies lay scattered on the floor, he noticed the ladies room sign and wondered if Lana had taken refuge in there.

He turned the handle, letting out a sigh when he found it was locked.

"Lana?" he called softly.

"Brett? Is that you?" Her shaky voice came from the other side of the door. He felt a wave of joy flood through him.

"Yes, kitten. Open the door. You're safe now," he said gently.

Yanking open the door, Lana launched herself into his arms. "Oh, my God, Brett! I was so scared. He had a knife—I ran—Oh, Donald!" she cried and turned to

where the man lay on the floor. “Is he dead?” Though fear had her trembling from head to toe, her main concern was for the man still lying on the floor.

“No, I have an ambulance coming any minute. Come over here and sit down.” He led her to a chair, making her sit. He moved back over to Donald’s prone body. The groan from the man told Bret that he was coming around now.

“Ohhhh...” Donald held his head with both hands. “What the hell hit me, a bus?”

Brett grinned wryly. If the man was able to joke, he should be okay. “Just lay still, Donald. I’m Detective Colton of the Toronto Police Department. Help is on the way.

“Lana Anderson! She was alone here,” Donald said in a panic. Brett had to hold his shoulders down to keep him from getting up to go look for her.

“She’s just fine, sir. Please, lay still.”

“I’m all right, Donald. Please, just rest until help arrives.” Lana moved over to sit on the floor beside him, rubbing his shoulder.

Jumping with a start when the elevator opened, Lana blew out a sigh of relief when more police officers entered with weapons drawn, nodding to Brett before scattering around the office. Behind them were the paramedics with a gurney. Donald was quickly taken care of.

“Can you give a statement about what happened, Donald?” Brett asked.

“Sure, I’ll give a statement, but I never saw who hit me,” Donald said as he was lifted onto the gurney.

“We’d appreciate it anyway, thanks.”

Moving in closer, Lana picked up Donald’s hand.

“I hope you’re okay. I feel terrible about this.”

The man smiled gently up at her. “It wasn’t your fault. I wish I had seen the creep before he hit me. I’d have given him a rough time of it to protect you.”

Shaking her head, she let out a slow breath. “I’m just happy to see that you’re all right, Donald. This place wouldn’t be the same without you. I’m going to make sure you get a hefty bonus for your devotion.”

“That’s not necessary. Just keep safe. I’ll be just fine.

The paramedics took the janitor away as Brett spoke with two other detectives.

“The perp took off out the emergency escape shortly after I left the elevator. From the looks of things, Lana gave him a run for his money.” Brett nodded at the disaster in the hallway.

“Lana, we should take you to the hospital to make sure you’re all right.”

“I’m a bit shaky but I’m not hurt in any way, honestly. I just want to go home, Brett.”

“Fine, after we stop by the precinct so you can provide a full statement, I’ll

take you home.”



Driving away into rush-hour traffic, the killer looked like any other office executive heading home after a long day at the office. The difference was this executive was fuming mad.

“That damn man is always in the way. Lana is never alone for a minute and the one time she is, he has to show up!” A fist slammed down on the dashboard, cracking the old vinyl.

“If I’d only had a few more minutes, the washroom door would have given under the pressure of my attack, and Lana would be dead now! It might be more difficult to catch her than I had originally thought. It’s time to reassess the situation and make better plans.”

Honking at a slow car in front, the killer growled in frustration.

“Lana is going to die one way or another. Maybe a little distraction is needed to push her to the edge since she isn’t caving under the pressure as I expected.”

As the car moved past a theater sign, the killer noticed that the movies playing were action-adventures and thrillers. Suddenly a thought came to mind of just how to separate her from Brett Colton.

“Brett is the only author whose books I haven’t read. I’ll have to see if he uses murder in them, but there’ll be time for that later. For now it’s time to focus

on Lana Anderson.”

Chapter Five

Magnetic Personality

After Brett searched the condo and allowed Lana to come inside, he ordered Chinese food and had it delivered.

Seating her in the living room, he pulled out a bottle of whiskey from the bar and poured her a stiff drink with water and ice cubes, which she gratefully accepted. When the doorbell rang, he kept his gun ready, peeking out the peephole. It was the food delivery. After slipping the gun into the back of his belt, he paid the man and closed the door, locking it with the deadbolt before taking the food to the kitchen. Once he'd placed it on the table, he went back to check on Lana.

"Are you hungry, Lana?" he asked her gently.

Shaking her head, she held onto the glass, visibly trembling.

Brett sat beside her on the sofa. Taking the tumbler from her, he set it on the coffee table then pulled her into his arms, holding her tight for a long time. When her shudders finally subsided, she pulled back, staring into his eyes in silence.

Open invitation burned in her gaze, giving him pause. Watching her eyes, he saw that she was in shock. It was a natural reaction for her to want to reaffirm life

by having him make love to her, yet he didn't want her to regret it in the morning, so he spoke to her.

"Lana, people tend to let go of their inhibitions when they're in shock and even though I want to make love to you so badly it hurts, I want you to think about what you're doing. There can't be any regrets in the morning. Okay?" Brett gently ran his fingers down her silken cheek.

Still not having said a word, Lana reached up and tangled her fingers in his hair, pulling his face close to hers for a kiss. It started out gentle and sweet but soon she was kissing him like tomorrow would never come.

Her hands ripped at his shirt, her lips begging his for more. Once his shirt was undone, she ran her hands over his chest, kneading and pinching his nipples with urgency. Soft, demanding lips seduced his, yet Brett held back, wanting to make sure this was what she wanted.

When Lana pulled away, her heart in her eyes, she stood pulling him up with her as she led the way to the bedroom. Closing the door behind them, she held his gaze as she slowly peeled her clothing off one piece at a time, her hips swaying in a dance of desire.

First the business jacket landed on the floor to her left, revealing her curvy figure. Next, she undid her blouse one button at a time. It slid sensually over her shoulders and down her arms, dropping to her right.

Barely breathing, Brett couldn't move for fear of breaking the spell. Lana's eyes never left his as she unzipped her skirt at the side, letting it slither down her legs followed by the slip. She stood in her lacy pink bra and very brief matching panties with, to his pleasant surprise, pink garters and black silk stockings that rose to her thighs.

Swallowing with difficulty, Brett whistled long and slow, bringing a blush to her fair skin. She moved over to him and removed his shoulder holster, dropping it onto a chair. He took his gun out from his belt and carefully placed it on top.

Her hands began working on his belt until he grasped her wrist, stopping her. Her eyes met and held his gaze.

"This is the point of no return, kitten. No regrets in the morning, right?" His voice was husky and deep with restrained desire.

Nodding, she went back to removing his belt then returned his heated gaze as she slowly unzipped his pants, letting them drop around his ankles. He wore blue satin boxers with Bugs Bunny on them. The rabbit ears rose as he hardened, making Bugs' ears tilt slightly in question.

Grinning when he saw amusement in her gaze, he chuckled. "I grew up with Bugs. He always rises to the occasion."

Giggling, Lana caressed the silky ears with the tip of her finger, her shoulders shaking with laughter when the bulge jumped in response.

Brett put his finger beneath her chin and looked into her eyes, assured that she truly wanted him to make love with her. His lips claimed hers as he pulled her tight against his body, his hot, throbbing member pressed against her lower belly.

Moving back, he stepped out of his pants, walking her backward to the bed, then lowering her onto the floral, rose satin comforter. For a moment, he just stood there looking at her until she started to squirm with unfulfilled desire.

“You are so beautiful, kitten,” he breathed.

Lifting her leg, he placed her heel on his hip and slowly removed her shoe, dropping it on the floor behind him. Sliding his hand leisurely up her leg, he undid the garter. Caressing her with his fingertips, nails gently scoring her creamy thighs, he moved inch-by-inch down her leg, pulling the stocking off at a snail's pace. He repeated the process on her other leg. They were both shuddering with need by the time he'd bared her legs.

Taking a deep breath, Brett sat on the edge of the mattress to swiftly remove his shoes and socks, then went back to unwrapping Lana.

Straddling her hips, Brett placed his hands on her waist and moved them leisurely up her torso, stopping only when they met with her pink lacy bra. His thumbs rubbed in circles over her nipples through the lace, making Lana catch her breath. Leaning down he kissed her tenderly, his hands unlatching the front clasp to release her breasts.

Lana moaned into his mouth as his hands cupped the soft mounds. His thumbs moved over her nipples causing her hips to rise in need. Replacing his thumbs with his lips he worshiped her breasts, pulling and sucking on her nipples.

Brett moved down her body with his lips, leaving not an inch of her satiny skin untouched. His hands slowly trailed down her torso, lips dropping burning hot, wet kisses on her quivering body. Caressing, kneading, he stopped at her navel to circle it with his tongue, grinning when she moaned and shifted her hips. Soon he found himself staring down at her lace panties. His senses were filled by her fresh fragrant scent. So subtle, he wondered if it was a perfume or just the wonder of her body's essence.

Moving to her side he urged her to lift her hips then slowly peeled them down her thighs and past her knees. His fingers brushed over her calves, whispering over her feet, until finally the lace fell to the floor, forgotten.

Staring down at her, Brett breath caught. She was magnificent. Not too skinny, not plump, she was right in the middle. He groaned as a shudder of burning desire roared through his groin.

Lana's hands came up and pulled at his boxers frantically, indicating her need to have him naked. He obliged, smiling when he saw her pleased grin.

Now they were both bare. It was time to increase the tempo. Lana pulled him down to her. Sliding her fingers through his hair, she kissed him with soaring

passion. His chest burned against the heat of her breasts, meeting the rise of her hips as they brushed against his hardness.

With his large hands roving over her body, he wanted to explore her more but Lana had other ideas.

“Now, Brett, please.” Her voice frantic with desire, she urged him to begin the final round.

Quaking, as need set him ablaze, Brett grabbed for his wallet and put a condom on, moving to cover her body once more with his. Their eyes met as he slowly slid just the tip of his staff into her tight heat then pulled out, sucking in a quick breath at the incredible sensations.

He teased her until she gasped and drew him closer, deeper, with her hands on his buttocks. Chuckling, he thrust forward hard and strong, filling her completely. His laughter turned to a loud groan as her folds enclosed his staff in a hot, moist sheath, tightening around him.

Arching her neck, she cried out. Seizing her mouth with his, he ravaged her lips, his tongue dueling along with hers. Shifting his hips, he picked up the pace, pumping harder as he felt powerful sensations roaring through his groin, blinding him as they grew until he ached for release.

Releasing a shout of his own, he increased his speed, moaning as she met his pace, thrust for thrust.



Lana gasped as lightning rocketed through her body, afire with the ecstasy of their strange connection as Brett moved faster and faster. She dug her nails lightly into his back, moaning with the ache of wanting more. Never had she felt such raging desire with another man.

Her body was on fire with yearning, trembling with need as Brett moved faster yet. Lana met his every plunge, moaning now as she neared fulfillment. They both were panting for air, sweat beading their bodies.

She sensed that Brett was close now. He reached between them and used his thumb to manipulate her clitoris, increasing her pleasure. Lana went wild as her first orgasm struck. Grabbing at the sheets, she arched her neck and screamed.



He was close...so incredibly close as she throbbed around his member. He began rubbing her nub with frenzy. Just as she reached another peak he exploded, shuddering with the power of his release while she pulsated around him. Seconds later they flew up together in sweet relief.

Catching his breath, Brett collapsed on top of Lana, careful not to crush her. His cheek rested against hers while his heart pounded like a drum in a parade. Sweat rolled from their bodies.

Suddenly there was a loud crash. He raised his head, ready to jump out of bed for his gun. On the floor lay everything that had been sitting on the dresser; a mirror, jars of cream, candles with holders, photographs, and books.

Looking at Lana in confusion, he raised an eyebrow when he saw her holding back laughter. “What the hell is going on, Lana?” He still rested inside her, feeling her channel flexing with her silent laughter.



Lana burst out laughing. “That’s never happened before, but I’ve never had such incredible—well, you know.”

She decided it was time to come clean since he looked like he wasn’t going to accept the poltergeist theory. Though she was hesitant to tell him the truth in case he thought she was crazy, she figured she might as well get it over with rather than wait to see if they ended up in a relationship. She wasn’t interested in setting herself up for a fall if they got serious.

“I’m a telekinetic.” This was the point where he would either run hell-bent-for-leather out the door or prove that he was the right man and stay, accepting her unusual gift.

Brett raised his damp brow again. “You move things with your mind? I thought that was only something that happened in the movies.”

Contented, she was glad that he remained on top of her, not feeling inclined

to move away from him. “I’ve been doing it since I was about three years old. My parents cautioned me to keep it a secret, so I do. It tends to get the best of me when I’m angry or upset about something. I’ve never done it during sex before.”

Watching his expression shift from curiosity to amazement, she laughed again, yet that small bit of uncertainty filled her stomach with knots.



He was stunned at the strength of the passion between them, even more so at her special abilities. Suddenly things began to make sense. The dishes and jam in the kitchen, the coffee spilled on his shirt when Tina was flirting with him, and even—

Brett looked at her, somehow knowing she was thinking about the car window that shattered when they waited for the bomb squad to finish.

Smiling at him with mischief in her eyes, Lana shrugged. “Sorry about the car window. I couldn’t tell you. They wouldn’t have understood.”

“No wonder they haven’t found a bullet. We thought you’d been shot at, but you were just angry. Very angry apparently. So the cleaning products at the office, the papers and staplers in the corridor, that was you?”

“Yes. I was in the washroom. I just thought about it and the products ‘*attacked*’ the killer.” She became serious now. “Please Brett, you mustn’t—”

He knew immediately what she was going to say and reassured her. “Don’t

worry, kitten. I won't tell anyone. Who in their right mind would believe me? Can you do it when you aren't angry or upset...or..." he chuckled, "having incredible sex?" He was really curious now!

Lana smiled then seemed to zone out for a moment, her eyes staring into space. Watching her closely, Brett was surprised when he felt a book hit his shoulder gently. He grabbed it, staring at it as if it were alive. Lana's laughter brought his gaze back to hers.

"You look like you've never seen a book before." Smiling, she fell silent.

Feeling her concern about his acceptance of her gift, he was humbled. Wanting to reassure her, he said, "You're amazing. You could be famous with a gift like that."

Shaking her head, Lana became very serious. "I can't let anyone know, Brett. It would be dangerous if people knew."

He nodded in understanding, "So they can't exploit you or use you for crimes. I get it." Kissing her on the nose, Brett finally changed the subject. "I'm starving. Let's go get that Chinese food, okay?" He pulled away from her, moaning in regret at the loss of her heat.

She lifted her satin robe up but he caught her hand, stopping her.

"No. I want to watch you eat while you're naked. It seems that since meeting your friend Tina, my mind has warped and I'm getting kinky."

Lana laughed while he led her to the kitchen, his hand trailing fingers down her naked spine, feeling her tremble beneath them.

Suddenly, he stopped them in the hall. “Hey, this is great. I can ask you to pass the remote for the TV and you won’t even have to get out of your chair.”

Laughter filled the hallway.

Chapter Six

The Meeting

When she got into the elevator the next morning, Lana was apprehensive, even though security had been increased after the attempt on her life the night before. There were now four security guards protecting the building, the thirtieth floor especially.

Having called a meeting first thing in the morning, Roger had invited the head of the security company in to answer the many questions from the terrified employees.

While the meeting proceeded, Lana didn't say much, just sat back to watch and study people's expressions. Brett was present also, observing the group from the end of the table. She knew that he searched for clues as to which employee it might be. It had to be an employee. Only a staff member would have the information about the author's stories, yet each employee in the conference room left no clue that would indicate they'd be a murderer.

The books that hadn't been published yet were the ones used as murder guides, well known by the staff who'd read the manuscripts. *I wonder if perhaps there is a leak and someone's sending the manuscripts out of the office for someone to read.*

There were a handful of people who had access to the books, but who could it be? Lana was frustrated and terrified, though outwardly appeared calm and in control. Knowing the killer could be in the very room where they sat was daunting. She pulled her focus back to Roger.



One mind was not on the meeting, remaining focused on Lana. Without looking at her, the killer sat quietly mulling over plans to separate Lana from *him*.

That Brett Colton is practically glued at the hip to Lana. It's nearly impossible to get near her! She's the only one who does the final approvals. The true hero must kill her, stop her, show her that she's wrong.

Moving expressionless eyes over to watch Roger Brinkman, the killer thought about creating a distraction for Brett Colton and Lana Anderson.

If Roger was pushed to the limit, Lana might just let her guard down long enough to get separated from her new boy-toy.

Hiding frustration, features schooled so everyone else saw only concern, the killer quietly leaned toward the next person over to ask, "Are they installing more lighting in the underground parking lot?"

Deadly eyes studied Lana under the guise of concern.

This hero will stop the evil being distributed to innocent people. It is imperative that the

vile words be stopped, that Lana Anderson be stopped. Soon...soon the time will be right to make another move. Lana needs to have a good scare and Roger has already provided the perfect message to make her stand up and take notice. Yes, it's time to give her a message she can't ignore.

The satisfied smile remained hidden as Roger began his speech.

Make it good, Roger. It could be your last. Now it was time to focus on Roger.



Offering a plea to the staff for patience and courage, Roger wiped sweat from his brow with a kerchief. Lana cringed as she noticed the signs of deterioration on his face. Dark circles lay as crescents beneath eyes red from strain. She knew he was on the edge of his control and it was now affecting his health.

“I know how scared you all are. I am, too, but running from this psycho will not change anything. We have to stand up and fight back by using caution and wisdom, not set ourselves up as victims.”

Roger looked exhausted. The longer he talked, the tighter the lines around his mouth became. Though he kept his shaky hands hidden behind his back, Lana saw them reflected in the window.

“Roger, how can we possibly protect ourselves from this maniac? We don't know who it is or who they're targeting unless it's an author. Lana was nearly killed last night and she isn't an author. I, for one, am scared to death.” Linda

Winters spoke up. She trembled dramatically.

“Linda, there are many things that we can do to protect ourselves, as we discussed in the last meeting. By all means, speak with the security force. They will provide you with further tips on how to remain safe.”

Roger ran his hand over his head and sighed. They were going around in circles and this was a sure sign that he was quickly coming to the end of his patience.

Seeing that he was at an impasse, Lana had had enough and stood. The room fell silent. “Listen, everyone. I did have a close call last night, but I shouldn’t have been here alone. It was my own fault. I guarantee it won’t happen again. Roger is right. We have to take our safety seriously and never leave ourselves open for attack. Luckily, Mr. Colton showed up in time and scared him off. Please think about what you’re doing. Protect yourself by being ‘safe smart,’ follow the guidelines that security has set for you.”

Roger shot Lana a look of gratitude. “We have Brian Johnson, our head of security, here to answer any questions you might have. Please, welcome him.”

With a wave, Roger motioned Brian to stand and let him have the floor. For the next hour, the man answered questions and described *most* of the security measures in the building. Brett had already spoken with him and made sure he’d left out some important details about the system in case the killer was among the

staff members.

Lana remained standing, answering questions to back up security. When the meeting finally adjourned, she stayed behind with Brett to speak with Roger, who appeared to be visibly shaken now.

“Thank you, Lana. I don’t know what else to tell them. We all have to do what you said and think before we act. How are you feeling today, anyway?” Roger smiled.

Blushing for reasons only she and Brett knew, she cleared her throat before answering. “I’m just fine. Roger, you look like you’re ready to snap. Please take it easy today and get some rest. Maybe go home early?”

Lana was very concerned about him. He didn’t look well at all.

“I’m fine, Lana. I just didn’t sleep well last night. I started getting the phone calls, too.” He tried to keep it light, but Lana knew he was very upset by the calls.

She placed her hand on his shoulder. “Roger, did you tell the police who were protecting you?”

“Yes, I waved over to them and one came into the house while I talked to him. He said the phone calls are just scare tactics and not a big concern since the phone is tapped. He told me to stay calm and not answer the phone for a few days.” He offered a wry grin. “It really is very intimidating.”

Slipping her arms around Roger, she hugged him for a long time, patting

him on the back. “We’re in this together. Please call me if you need to talk, okay?”

He nodded. “I have some work to do. I’ll see you later.” Turning, he left the room.

Brett’s strong hands fell gently on her shoulders from behind, pulling her back into his arms to kiss her neck.

“It’ll be okay, Lana. We’ll catch the creep, I promise you that. Let’s go back to your office and try to get some work done, okay?”

Sighing, Lana turned and pulled his head down for a kiss.

Groaning, Brett gathered her close and kissed her thoroughly. As his hands rubbed her back, she felt his hardness against her pelvis. Pulling away slightly, he put his forehead to hers. “That is, unless you want to play hooky and go back home for the day?”

Smiling, Lana was about to answer when the door opened. Anna Warrington came into the room, stopping when she realized they were still there and she’d caught them in an intimate moment. She sniffed, saying, “Sorry to interrupt your...meeting. I forgot my journal.” Anna moved to the conference table and picked up her book.

Noticing a bruise on her temple, Lana asked, “What happened to your head, Anna?”

As if just realizing it was there, Anna lifted her hand to touch the spot. “Oh,

I was working out at the gym and hit my head on one of the machines. I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing."

Alarmed, Lana said, "It looks like it hurts. You're okay, aren't you?" The bruise was very colorful and looked like it had been a painful bump.

Nodding, Anna shrugged. "Sure I am. I have no time for petty things like bruises. I'll see you later." Anna left the room.

Turning to look at Brett, Lana asked, "Those chemical bottles from the cleaning cart. Could they have bruised someone like that?"

Understanding came to Brett's eyes. He nodded. "I would imagine they could. It's time to start digging further into your staff's lives to see if anything unusual shows up. Anna will be top priority, I think. Good job, Lana. I'll have one of my guys check out the gym and see if anyone witnessed her hitting her head."

"I only wish it would be that easy to catch the killer." Lana stared off into space for a moment. "I think we'll have to put our fun off for the day and get back to work, Mr. Author, sir." Smiling, she opened the door and he followed her to her office.



Watching Lana's hips sway as she walked ahead of him, he thought it was going to be a very long day. Brett groaned inwardly.



Allan Hansen stopped by Lana's office and appeared surprised to see Brett working on a laptop off the corner of her desk. Brett stopped typing when the door opened, and crossed his arms, staring at Allan as he waited to see what the man wanted. Lana had already told Brett how Allan treated her on a regular basis and he was itching to punch the guy's lights out.

Lana looked up also, her expression guarded. "Something you need, Allan?" She was stiff and formal.

"Ah, yes, Lana, I was wondering how you are after the trouble last night."

"I'm quite fine, Allan. Is there anything else?"

Nearly releasing a snort as he watched the way Allan squirmed in the face of Lana's 'body guard', Brett leaned back in his seat, locking his fingers together over his stomach to watch the show. Lana had her claws out, and the mouse was shaking in his boots.

Then Allan's demeanor suddenly changed, his eyes hardening, he became aggressive with her. "My, aren't you the bitch today?"

Waiting for the fur to fly, Brett just looked over at Lana.

"If you have nothing important to say then you might as well leave my office." Lana turned back to her paperwork, ignoring him.

Biting back a grin, Brett waited.

His face mottled red with fury, Allan spoke again. “No wonder someone tried to kill you. You’re such a cold fish. You stuck up—”

The man stopped mid-sentence when Brett placed his hands on his thighs and slowly stood up. Offering his most intimidating gaze, he stared at Allan, waiting for him to continue his insults.

Still in fighting mode, Lana had it under control. “Oh, I didn’t see you standing there. Are you still here?” She looked bored to tears as she stared at the man, her hands resting on her desk, relaxed.

By the look on his face, Allan was ready to blow. Skin flushed a dark red and veins standing out on his temple, he panted. His fists were clenched as he looked back and forth between Lana and Brett. Without a word, he just turned and left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lana sat quietly for a minute. Taking a deep breath, she asked, “Is it worth putting him on our list? He is pretty worthless.”

With a pleased laugh, Brett took her hand in his, rubbing his thumb over her soft skin. *She is magnificent and so cool under pressure.*

“How come nothing flew into the air with him, but for me everything does?”

Smiling mischievously Lana leaned back in her chair, pressing her fingers together as she rested them under her chin. “Perhaps it’s because he’s just a jerk where you...you’re hot...and sexy...and...”

“...and?” Brett prompted.

“And I want you to take me home now so I can show you what else.” Lana’s sensual siren’s call had him packing up his laptop in record time. They’d put in a long day and only had an hour left to work anyway.

“I would like to stop by Roger’s office first, if you don’t mind.”

The way she smiled at him, he’d give her the world at that point.

“Anything you want, kitten, anything at all.”



Staring out the window at the tiny people thirty stories below, Roger brooded. *This is getting crazy! I’m literally shaking with fear, jumping at every little noise.*

There had been three prank phone calls at the office that day. They had done their job. He was so shaken up he couldn’t get any work done.

A knock at the door startled him. He held his hand over his heart for a moment to still its racing before calling to his visitors to come in.

When Lana and Brett entered the room and closed the door behind them, he blew out a deep breath he’d been holding unintentionally.

“Hi, Roger,” Lana said. “I just wanted to let you know I’m leaving early today.” She looked up at Brett and blushed. “We’re leaving early.”

Seeing that the couple had something brewing in the relationship department, Roger smiled. “That’s just fine, you two. Go right ahead and have a

nice evening. I'm going to head out myself as soon as Jessie comes to escort me." He shook his head. "I feel like a prisoner."

Brett tried to reassure him. "We'll stop him, Roger. Believe me, we will. Just hang in for a while longer, okay?"

"I'm trying, Brett. I think I might have a good stiff drink when I get home. I'm wound up like a clock."

Feeling a strong hand on his shoulder, Roger acknowledged the comfort Brett offered with a nod.

"Good night, Roger. Get some sleep and I'll see you tomorrow," Lana said, kissing his cheek

Roger turned to look out the window again.



Looking over at Brett, she knew he saw her concern. Nodding, Brett led her out of the office.

"I'm worried about him, Brett. He had a heart attack a few years ago and this is really draining him."

"Jessie will make sure he gets home safe and the surveillance team is in place. He'll be fine."

Together they walked in silence to the elevator.



Hatred stirred as the elevator doors slid closed, blocking Brett and Lana from sight. *It's time to make the next move.*



Since they were home early, Lana headed straight for the shower but didn't lock her bathroom door. As she had hoped, Brett slid into the tub behind her, slipping his arms around her waist.

She leaned back and reached up to run her hand through his thick hair, offering her lips to him.

Claiming them in a long, sweet kiss, Brett pulled her closer.

Grabbing a bar of soap, she turned in his arms and began to wash his chest and arms. Her breasts rubbed his skin as she reached around him to soap up his back and buttocks. Her movements were slow and sensuous as she made small circles over his skin with her palms. With her eyes on his, she moved down his body to his hips, passing by his hard, erect staff without a touch, smiling at his look of disappointment.

Kneeling, she continued her ministrations, laughing when the water poured into her eyes. Brett moved the showerhead away from her.

Massaging the soap on down his legs, she kneeled and discovered he had

very ticklish feet. Laughing, she looked up at him. “Ammo for later on if you get out of line.” She squealed when he turned the showerhead back on her for a moment.

Brushing the water from her eyes, Lana stopped laughing when she realized that she was eye level with his member. Looking up at Brett uncertainly, she told him, “I’ve never—Ah, that is, I want to—”

Embarrassed that Brett understood she meant she’d never taken a man into her mouth before, he reassured her. “You can do whatever you want, kitten. I’m at your service.” His brilliant grin made her feel more confident.

She swallowed hard before tentatively touching him with her tongue. Brett’s body jerked in reaction as he released a groan.

Gaining confidence now, she pulled the tip of his penis into her mouth, using her tongue to tease him. He reacted by sucking in a quick breath, his hands gently cupping her head. Encouraged, she was ready to explore more deeply.

With Brett’s hands guiding her motions, her tongue slid over the smooth skin. Reaching her hands around to his buttocks and digging her nails gently into his cheeks, she took him deep into her mouth, sucking and roving to touch every part of his rod. Gradually she took his member all the way to the back of her throat. Unmercifully, her tongue teased him while her eyes remained fixed on his, which were glazed with passion. Pleased with his sensitive responses as he

gasped, tensing in reaction, Lana moaned, feeling her own need rise. His fingers threaded through her hair, setting the pace as she began to slide him in and out of her mouth.

She felt muscles contract in her lower abdomen. He moaned, his body tensing at her ministrations. Lana found that she loved the power of making him lose control. Moving her head faster now, she began breathing quicker in her excitement.

One hand moved to his genitals and she cupped them. A wave of desire burned through her body as she heard his uneven breathing. Her breasts ached and she felt a pull deep in her belly.

Suddenly, he pulled away. Lana protested until she saw him struggling to hold back, grinning ear-to-ear in pleasure at her newfound power.

Brett was in agony. "Damn, we don't have any condoms in here."

He looked at her, his eyes speaking volumes. She pointed upward. Brett looked then reached up to catch the condom packet floating above his head, chuckling. "I told you it would come in handy."

Standing up, Lana laughed and ran a finger down his length, pleased when his member jumped to attention. When he growled while trying to put the condom on in a hurry, she assisted him then let out a small scream of surprise when he picked her up, putting her back to the cold tile wall, and thrust up,

impaling her.

It was Lana's turn to groan as she wrapped her legs around his waist. He began to move in a fast, smooth rhythm. Lana was so turned on already from playing with him that she came right away, lights bursting behind her eyes as waves of rapture filled her. She held onto his shoulders in a death grip while she rode the waves of bliss.

Brett moved faster now, pumping up into her for all he was worth while she writhed against him.

"Brett, please. I—" Lana had no words to describe what she needed, but he knew. He moved his fingers to her clitoris to help her.

They found sweet release at the same time. She was amazed how Brett seemed to know just when she would come as he joined her for the spin up to the heavens.

Holding onto him, Lana tried to regain her breath. Reluctantly, she lowered her legs, kissing him with wild passion, sliding her tongue into his mouth.

"I want to do it again, Brett," she whispered.

"Let's wash off and get dry and into bed. It'll take me a few minutes to regenerate." He chuckled at her enthusiasm.

"No, I mean, I want to kiss him again, lick him, and put him in—" She stopped when his fingers touched her lips.

Brett laughed in delight. “I promise you, you can have all the practice you want, even if it kills me!”

“Now how can a girl refuse a promise like that?” Laughter filled the room.

Brett returned the favor and washed Lana’s whole body, paying particular attention to her breasts and inner thighs. The water was turning cold by the time they left the shower. They spent hours making love. Lana couldn’t get enough of his touch, his kisses, his heady scent.

Lana’s world came crashing to a halt when Brett’s cell phone rang later in the evening. The killer had struck again.

Chapter Seven

Burning the Bed

After Jessie Chan picked Roger up from work and escorted him home, he made sure there were no suspicious people along the way and they hadn't been followed. Jessie figured the perp knew Roger was under police protection and had decided to lay low.

Entering the front hall, Jessie said, "Mr. Brinkman, please wait at the door while I check the house."

"Certainly." Roger sat on the bench in the hall while Jessie began his search.

It took about twenty minutes to search the large mansion, but it was all clear.

"Everything looks good, Mr. Brinkman. Before I head home I'm going to check in with the surveillance team. Do you need anything?" Jessie asked.

"No thanks, Detective Chan. Brett gave me his cell number in case I need to get a hold of him and I have yours, too. I feel like I'm royalty with all this attention."

"We just want to ensure your safety, sir. Good night, sir," Jessie said, nodding. He turned and left for the night after making sure Roger locked the door

behind him.

Stopping by the unmarked car, Jessie identified himself by pulling out his badge.

“Any unusual behavior in the neighborhood?”

Shaking his head, the driver shrugged. “Nothing. It’s a quiet road, no one but a few power walkers and an old couple walking their dog. It should be a nice dull evening for us.”

Smirking, Jessie nodded. “I’ve been on surveillance before. I know just what you mean, but in this case I hope you have the most boring night you’ve ever had. There have been a lot of alarming signs that Mr. Brinkman is in real danger so keep your eyes sharp. Call my cell if you have any issues.”

Handing the cop his card, Jessie left them and climbed into his car and headed home.



Roger was tired. The murders and the stress at work taking its toll. He was ready to just give up. Depression had set in and he was unable to fight it anymore.

Heading to the bar, he poured a scotch then turned on the news after sitting in his favorite chair in the TV room. With a weary sigh, he took a sip of his drink and put his glass down on the table beside him.

“Nothing on the news about the author murders, thank goodness,” Roger

murmured to himself, relieved.

He picked up his drink and took a few more sips.

Staring down into his glass, he began to feel very tired. Deciding to hit the sack, even though it was only six p.m., Roger took his drink and went to the bedroom, changed into his pajamas, then climbed into bed.

His room was quite large for a master bedroom. Since Roger had lots of money and no one to share it with, he had invested in a small mansion. It was elegant and warm though he seldom had people over to show it off.

Each year he did have the company Christmas party at his home for his employees. They all knew he liked his scotch and each year he received a few bottles as gifts.

Picking up his glass he took a larger sip. He was beginning to relax now. Though he seldom drank, over the past few months he had come to depend on his shot of scotch before bed each night.

The stress of running Brinkman-Bonnette was really getting to him. He wondered if it was time to retire, even though he was only fifty-eight years old.

Lana was the perfect candidate to replace him. He'd never even considered Allan Hansen as the one to take the reins. Lana understood the business like the back of her hand and she was like a daughter to him—the daughter he'd never had.

Having no close family, Roger had redone his will and power of attorney. He

would give Lana nearly everything, including the reigns to Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing. Roger owned the company outright since buying out his old partner, William Bonnette, years ago.

Of course, Lana had no idea about the contents of his will. He liked to think she would be pleased with his gift. He'd known her for a long time and knew that she was worth a million Allans.

Lying back on the bed, Roger finished his drink and was feeling amazingly relaxed. It had been some time since he could—

Roger stopped his musing. He suddenly felt very strange. The room was moving and he couldn't lift his arms or move his legs. Closing his eyes, he tried taking a few deep breaths but after opening them again, the room moved even more. He wondered if he was having another heart attack but there was no chest pain.

Panicking wasn't an option. He didn't have the strength in his limbs. Roger tried to reach for his phone to call for help, but his arm wouldn't move. What the hell was happening?

Hearing a noise, he looked over at the doorway. Someone stood there, but his vision was so distorted, he couldn't figure out who it was. Trying to speak brought only a moan from his mouth.

Laughter filled the room as the figure came into view. The person was

dressed all in black and had a mask over their face. Roger tried to talk again. His heart began to race with panic but couldn't say a word. *Oh, God, it's the serial killer!* The scream inside his head went unheard.

In moments the killer had him tied to the bed with duct tape, hands to the headboard, feet spread-eagled to the footboard. Eerie humming, which sounded like one of Beethoven's symphonies, filled the silence.

The dark figure leaned over him. A familiar voice said, "What is the worst way to die, Roger? I'm going to make your nightmare come true." Patting Roger's cheek, the murderer moved off out of his line of sight.

Roger could hear his killer moving around the room but couldn't see them. He was terrified now, still unable to struggle. A strong, vile smell filled his senses. *Kerosene!*

Realizing the killer had spiked the scotch with some kind of drug, he mentally screamed in frustration. Despair settled over him. Closing his eyes, he tried to block out the sounds.

"Good bye, Roger. It's time for you to die. You should have stopped the manuscripts from being published. I gave you plenty of hints. This didn't have to happen. You should have listened to my warnings." The killer fell silent and moved away from the bed.

Roger, hopeless now, waited for the end. The dark room suddenly erupted

in flames, igniting the curtains, the carpet, and even the bed. Screaming in his mind, Roger knew a fear so great he passed out.



Jessie was almost home when he decided to return and check on the surveillance team. He had a gut feeling something wasn't right. Always trusting his instincts, he found them justified when he pulled up and saw the flames in the window of Roger's home. It looked like they had just begun.

Running toward the house after waving to the unmarked car, he yelled for them to call a fire crew and ambulance then tried to open the front door. It was locked tight so he took out his gun and shot out the lock, then kicked it in.

Entering the hallway, he put his coat sleeve over his mouth and nose and ran to the back bedroom where he knew Roger slept.

The other cops were right behind him. One of them had grabbed a fire extinguisher from the car.

Opening the bedroom door he saw Roger tied to the bed with duct tape. Flames rose all around the room. The cop with the extinguisher put out the flames around Roger's body, his skin already badly burned. Jessie pulled out his penknife and cut the tape.

One of the cops helped carry Roger to the exit. Soon after they reached the street, sirens announced the arrival of help. The house was more than half

consumed by then. The three men coughed, having inhaled a lot of smoke.

Keeping his eyes sharp for the perp who'd started the blaze, Jessie checked Roger for vital signs. He was still alive but seriously burned. His breathing was shallow, his heartbeat erratic.

When Jessie asked the surveillance team what happened, they told him there was no sign of any attempt to enter the home. Since the doors were all locked, they couldn't figure out how the killer had gained access to the home.

Grimly, Jessie moved aside as the paramedics began to work on Roger. He had a phone call to make. Brett wasn't going to like what he had to say.



Brett answered the phone on the first ring. He had been trying to recuperate from Lana's third assault on his body, tickling and teasing her for being so voracious in her appetite for him.

"Hello?" Brett expected the prank caller again. He was surprised when he heard Jessie's voice. Schooling his features he remained silent until the end of the call.

"Okay, I'll talk to you when we get there." Standing up, Brett quickly called a cab.

After hanging up the phone, he turned to Lana. "Lana—" he stopped and took a breath.

“What’s happened, Brett? Please tell me.” Lana stood beside him, her eyes wide with fear.

Placing his hands on her shoulders, he tried to explain. “It’s Roger—”

Her knees buckled, and he caught her, carrying her back to the bed.

“Oh, my God! Tell me he isn’t dead! Please, tell me he isn’t dead,” she cried out, her body shaking.

“He’s alive, but in bad shape. The killer tried to burn him to death in his bed. They’ve taken him to the burn unit at St Michael’s hospital. We need to get dressed and go there. Okay?” He knew he couldn’t leave her home alone, if not because of her anguished state, then to protect her.

Lana’s tears tore at his heart. She could only nod. He had to support her while she dressed, her body trembling in shock. Quickly throwing on his clothes, he was ready in moments. She’d become pale, her skin pasty white as she stared into space.

“Lana. Do you want me to stay here with you? You don’t have to go to the hospital.”

She just looked at him, her eyes glittering with tears. “He’s like a father to me. I have to go.” Taking a deep breath, she straightened her shoulders and got a hold of herself, hurrying to finish dressing.

Nodding, he waited for her then led her to the street where the cab idled.

Chapter Eight

The President's Final Call

The emergency room was bedlam. People were lined up for triage, children were screaming, and every chair was full.

Leading Lana right to the nurse's station, he caught the attention of a harried nurse.

"Excuse me, ma'am. We're here about Roger Brinkman. I understand he was brought in a little while ago."

"Are you family?" she asked Brett.

"This is his daughter." He indicated Lana. "I'm Detective Colton." He flashed his badge at her.

"Please, come with me." The nurse led them to a quiet waiting room, telling them the doctor would be right with them.

Lana shook as Brett held her close. "He's the most wonderful man I've ever known, Brett. He never did a thing to hurt anyone. What the hell happened? The police were supposed to be guarding him!"

"We'll know soon, Lana. Hang in there." Brett brushed her hair soothingly with his hand.

“Brett. I thought I’d find you here.” Jessie came into the room. His clothing was covered in soot, and he was coughing.

“Are you all right?” asked Brett.

Jessie nodded.

“You are a cop, too?” Lana asked in a dull voice.

“Sorry, Lana, but we secretive cops stick together.”

“What happened to Roger, Jessie?” Lana asked. Before he could reply, a frazzled doctor entered the room.

“Miss Brinkman?” he asked.

Lana didn’t correct him. “How is he, doctor?”

The doctor was solemn, and Lana felt a chill go up her spine. “I’m sorry, Miss Brinkman. He succumbed to his injuries a few minutes ago. I wouldn’t recommend that you go see him. His body was severely burned.”

Knees buckling, she began to sob. Brett supported her, pulling her into his arms and holding her close. The window in the waiting room door shattered, startling everyone but Lana. It was a few moments before the doctor could continue.

“I can arrange for a sedative for her, if necessary,” the doctor said. His eyes kept flicking over to the windowless door. “If you have no further questions, I have a room full of patients to see to.”

“She won’t require a sedative, but thank you, doctor. We’ll get our report from the coroner.” Jessie shook the man’s hand.

The doctor nodded and left them.

Brett sat on a chair and rocked Lana, whispering soothing words to her as she sobbed. Jessie waited patiently to talk to him.

Finally, Lana calmed and rested quietly in Brett’s arms. Jessie decided it was time to fill Brett in on the details.

“I had a hunch. You know my gut instincts are usually correct, Brett. I arrived at the Brinkman place a few minutes after the blaze started. That was no less than twenty minutes after I left him.” Jessie looked at Lana to see if he should continue. Brett nodded.

“The fire was set with kerosene. It looked as though it had been poured around the whole room. It accelerated fast. He was tied with duct tape to the bed, spread-eagled. The doctors are going to do an autopsy, but it looks like he might have been drugged. He wouldn’t respond to the doctor’s physical. His pupils were dilated. The doctor said that Mr. Brinkman was awake when they brought him in, able to see and feel though his limbs were frozen in paralysis as is the case with the drug *Ketamine*.”

Brett was silent for a moment. “What happened to the two cops on duty?”

Shaking his head, Jessie told Brett, “They didn’t see a thing. The perp was

either already in the house or had come in through the rear door. I checked the place with a fine-toothed comb before I left him, so I doubt the killer was inside. There was no sign of a break and enter, so he must have had a key. The fire department arrived before the house was totally engulfed, so we have evidence to gather.”

“We will find out what happened, Lana. I promise you.” Brett cradled her closer.

Brett’s jaw was tight with anger. “I’m going to get her home now. I’ll call you later. Or call me if you find out anything.” He helped Lana stand and walked her out. Brett walked toward the exit, a protective arm circling her shoulders.



Two days later, Lana sat on her sofa as Brett and Jessie explained the autopsy findings. Numb since she’d been told about Roger’s death, Lana had closed the office until further notice, pending the reading of Roger’s will.

“A drug called *Ketamine* was found in his bottle of scotch. On the streets it’s known as *Special K*, *Kit Kat*, or *Super C*. In hospitals it’s used as a surgical anesthetic. When higher doses are ingested, the person can experience symptoms of numbness, poor coordination, and eventually muscle rigidity and paralysis. They become disoriented and can have hallucinations. They aren’t able to communicate and eventually lose consciousness.” Jessie sat back for a minute before continuing.

Lana hadn't moved a muscle. She just stared at Jessie while he talked, and Brett was worried about her. He turned to Jessie.

"Are you saying that Roger would have known what was going on, but was unable to move?"

Nodding, Jessie explained. "That's about it, Brett. The perp obviously wanted to get the ultimate terror out of his victim before starting the fire. The confusing thing is, he must have had a key because there was no other way to enter the home. It was sealed tight, the alarm system in place. He'd have to know the code to turn it off also."

"Brett." Lana finally spoke in a stilted tone. "Roger had the entire office staff come to his home for Christmas every year. It is possible someone could have lifted a spare key from his key rack in the hall. I have a key to his home, also."

"That's a good point, Lana. It supports our theory of someone at the office having access to the home, perhaps with a key, since there was no break-in," Jessie agreed.

Thoughtful for a minute, Brett mused aloud. "The trick will be to flush the guy out. We need to set something up so that he'll tip his hand."

Nodding, Lana said in a harsh tone, "He's already after me, Brett. I'll be the bait."

"Absolutely not, Lana, it's too dangerous!"

“Be reasonable, Brett; I’m already a target. We just got lucky he didn’t get me at the office. I want his hide nailed to the wall, and I won’t take no for an answer!”

“Brett, Lana has a point,” Jessie agreed. “The killer wants her already, and she does have both of us to protect her. We can even bring in backup. Let’s give it a try.”

Fury radiating from him, Brett stood up. “I don’t like it, Jessie. She’s already been through enough.”

“*She* is right in front of you, Brett, and *she* says it’s going to happen, whether *you* like it or not!” Lana was getting her fire back. The cups on the coffee table were starting to shake.

Jessie watched the cups in wonder. “Are we having an earthquake?”

Shaking his head, Brett looked at Lana and she quickly banked her anger. He placed his fingers on the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath. He knew that Lana would go through with it no matter what he said, so reluctantly he gave in.

“Fine, we’ll try it your way, Lana. But you’ll follow my rules and there will be no taking matters into your own hands. Do you understand?”

Smiling sadly, she said, “I understand, Detective. We’ll do this together.”

“Don’t worry, Lana. We’ll make sure you’re safe. I promise you,” Jessie said, standing up to leave.

She stood also. Reaching up, she kissed Jessie on the cheek. “Thank you, Jessie. Goodnight.”

With a deep flush on his cheeks, Jessie made a quick exit. Brett was amused at his friend’s discomfort. Lana had a way of doing the same thing to him. She was one incredibly sexy woman and a man would have to be insane not to want her.

Luckily, Jessie was his friend and not his rival. Brett frowned at that thought. The new feeling of jealousy was unsettling.



The funeral was held the next day. Lana was very quiet but ended up spending most of her time after the service reassuring the employees that they hadn’t lost their jobs as far as she knew. As soon as she spoke with the lawyers the next day, she would call a meeting and they would all know where they stood.

It was a long day. Lana was exhausted when she and Brett arrived at home. She tensed when they approached the steps. A black silk rose lay in front of her door with a note.

Brett picked up the paper with his shirtsleeve and read it aloud, his anger apparent in his clenched jaw.

“*‘When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul lends the tongue vows.’* This seems to refer to the fire and silencing Roger. I believe that’s a quote from *Hamlet*.”

“I’m going to call Jessie and see if we can get prints. I doubt we will, but it’s

worth a shot.” Brett was so angry that she could feel the waves of fury coming from him.

“Let’s get inside, Brett.” Indicating she wanted to get off the street, Lana nodded toward the door. Her whole body felt numb. She couldn’t feel anger or anything else at this point, wanting only to be held in his arms, safe and secure. Her heart ached for Roger and the pain he must have gone through before he died, vowing to capture the killer regardless of the cost.

“Wait here, kitten. I need to do a thorough check. Stand just inside the door, out of sight from the street.” Brett was meticulous in his inspection and finally let her come in.

While Lana made dinner, Brett called Jessie to discuss the latest find. Lana heard a crash behind her and sighed in frustration when yet another glass smashed on the floor.

In seconds, Brett came running into the kitchen. “Are you all right? What happened?”

Giving him a *‘what do you think happened’* look, Lana didn’t say a word, she just cleaned up the broken glass.

She felt Brett watching her and looked up at him. His shirtsleeves were rolled up and his tie gone. With the top two buttons of his shirt undone, he looked so sexy that Lana caught her breath. She wanted to feel...something. Her need for

him caught like a wildfire. She dropped the broom and dustpan on the floor. Lana knew her eyes held unmasked passion and an unspoken question. Brett smiled down at her as though he knew exactly what she was thinking. Lana just grabbed his hand, leading him to the bedroom. Some things were better left unsaid.



Lana will be ready for the kill soon. Now that Roger is out of the way, it's time to plan her demise. It doesn't matter that she and Roger aren't authors. They are a big part of getting those venomous novels published and they both have to be silenced! One down and one to go!

Smiling as if the goal had already been met, the killer lay back on the worn old bed cover, staring up at the ceiling to think about the next move.

This one could be tricky.

It was becoming more difficult to plot and plan since the cops were getting closer. The office was under constant surveillance, as were a few of the employees.

Sitting up quickly, the killer moved to the window and peeked out, spotting the unmarked car and smiling at the inadequacy of the cops.

There is no way they can follow a hero when it is time to fight for justice!

Dropping the curtain back in place, the murderer moved to pick up the novel on the bed stand.

It's time to draw Lana out of her protective circle. This chapter will be perfect for killing

the next author.

Pointing to the marked chapter that was printed out on standard paper, the murderer smiled in devious delight. *It should get lots of attention.*

Turning the light out and climbing into bed, the killer fantasized about the next kill.

Chapter Nine

Mind Reader

Much later that night Brett tried to distract Lana from her anguish regarding Roger. Thunder roared and rain pelted the windows while they sat across from each other on the living room floor playing cards on the coffee table. Their companionable silence was only broken by their laughter as they battled to see who would win.

“You must be cheating, Brett! There’s no way you can know what cards I have in my hands.” Lana looked at the backs of her cards for any telltale markings that would identify them.

Brett laughed. “I don’t think so, Lana. You just don’t have a good poker face, that’s all.”

Narrowing her eyes, Lana held up a card. “What card am I looking at, Brett?”

Without a thought, he said, “Ten of diamonds.”

Lana’s eyes widened. “That was a lucky guess! Try this one.”

“Ace of clubs.”

Stunned amazement on her face, she tried one more. “I’m turning my back this time. When I tell you to, tell me what it is.” Lana spun around and selecting a

card did her best to keep it hidden from him. Before she could say go, he spoke.

“King of hearts.” Brett was serious now, thinking how strange it was to know what she was thinking all the time.

Lana turned to face him, shocked. “How did you do that?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he frowned. “Beats me, Lana. It’s like a picture of the card just pops into my head.”

Pursing her lips, Lana continued, not about to drop the subject. “Okay, I’m going to think about something and I want you to tell me what it is. Okay?” At his nod, she turned her back on him.

“Sure.” Brett slowly smiled. “But, Lana, I don’t think that’s physically possible.”

Her jaw dropped. “Brett, you *can* read my mind! Tell me what I just thought?”

Laughing, Brett tried to explain, “Well, it’s about you and me, a whole lot of whipped cream, some hand cuffs, and you lying on a...”

Lana’s hand came up fast. “Stop! Oh, my God, Brett! You *can* read my mind, literally. You have ESP!”

“But can you read mine?” Brett smiled.

Brett thought back over the years to when he’d played cards with friends and been teased and called a cheater because he’d always won unless he let

someone else win. He also had the ability to know when someone was lying to him.

He'd been able to read minds since he was a young kid but never realized he was doing so. He'd just figured he was a good judge of character and very lucky at cards and other games. It was interesting to know that he was literally a mind reader. What a great gift!

Turning his thoughts to Lana, Brett began to think about getting her back into bed.

Laugh low in her throat, Lana shook her head slowly. "I don't need to read your mind to know what you're thinking, you pervert." She threw some popcorn at him.

"Hey, watch it, you!" Brett raised his arm to defend himself, popping a kernel into his mouth.

Lana sobered. "I may not be able to read your mind, but I *can* read you like a book, Brett. Where did you get such a twisted mind?"

She was so serious that he thought she believed he really was a pervert or something. "Lana, I'm not like that, really!"

She laughed in delight.

"You are so easy, Brett!" She threw more popcorn at him.

He leered at her. "Easy, eh? I'll show you easy!" He started to get up from the

floor.

Lana squawked and took off at a run to hide in the bathroom.

At the bathroom door, Brett tried the handle and found it locked. “Open the door, Lana. You don’t want me breaking it down, do you?” he teased.

“Go away, you goof. I’m never coming out of here. Never!” She laughed.

Looking at the door, Brett saw a pinhole in the handle that was there to use to unlock the door if it was locked by mistake. He moved to the cupboard and picked up a coat hanger.

“You’ve done it now, my pretty. I’m coming in, whether you like it or not! Prepare yourself.” Brett inserted the end of the hanger in the hole.

“Ha! You’ll never catch me, you varmint. I have my trusty locked door to keep you ou...ahhh—” Lana screamed as the door opened and she found herself suddenly captured in arms.

“I’m a cop, kitten. No lock can keep me out. Now you have to fork over a dollar in payment to be able to leave this room.” Brett laughed in wicked delight.

“Well, my fine young officer, I don’t have a dollar on me, so I can’t pay a thing.”

Holding her tight, Brett stared at her lips. “Then I’ll have to take it out in trade, won’t I?” He lowered his lips for a gentle kiss, unbuttoning her blouse as his fingers roved over her silky skin. The kiss soon became ardent, making them both

spiral out of control.

A loud crash brought his head up and he grinned, placing his forehead on hers. “Let’s go to the ‘Lanatized’ room, shall we?”

She snickered. They had removed everything that wasn’t nailed down in her bedroom because of her tendency to kinetically raise objects into the air when she was aroused. The bathroom was definitely not a good place for loss of control because of the shampoo, cream rinse, and other bottles lining the shelves.

“That’s fine with me.” She squealed as he swept her up and over his shoulder, taking her to the ‘safe room.’



The next morning, Lana bent over and scooped up another section of the newspaper from beside the chair where Brett had been sitting the night before, sighing in frustration. Having a man around was a lot of work, even if he did do dishes! She picked up his socks and groaned in annoyance.

Coming into the room whistling, Brett stopped in his tracks. “What’s going on?”

Glaring at him, Lana held up his socks. “I hate it when you leave your socks rolled into balls, Brett. They never come clean in the wash that way and it’s disgusting when I have to unroll them myself. I know I haven’t done your laundry, but it’s just a pet peeve I have. Why can’t you just unroll them and place them...oh,

gee, I don't know, how about in the *clothes hamper*?" She threw the offending socks at him.

Laughing, Brett threw them back. "What about the way you squeeze the toothpaste in the middle? You're supposed to push the paste up and roll the bottom of the tube up as you go so you can get to it easier and there's no waste. Would you like me to teach you how?"

"Toothpaste and socks are hardly the same things. You don't have to wash toothpaste! As for 'teaching' me anything, well, you have a lot of nerve. As if—"

Her tirade stopped when the phone rang, cringing for fear of more bad news, or her daily phone calls from the silent killer.

"Hello?" Since she was beside it, Lana picked up the phone at the same time as Brett. They had set it up so the two phones were close in case of a call from the killer.

Silence reigned for a moment, then a breathy whispered voice said, "*You speak like a green girl, unsifted in such perilous circumstance.*" The phone went dead before Lana could speak.

Brett raised an eyebrow.

"It was *Shakespeare*." She shuddered, fear rekindling. Lana was beyond being scared now, defeat filling her mind. Sitting down hard in the chair, she put her head in her hands, trying to pull herself together.

Picking up the phone again, Brett called Jessie. The phone had been tapped and all incoming calls recorded. The police specialist would try to define the voice using high-tech equipment. Hanging up the receiver, he turned to Lana.

“Jessie is getting the department on it. We have about half an hour before we need to leave for the lawyer’s office. Are you all right?”

His gentle caress over her cheek didn’t still her fright.

“I doubt I’ll ever be all right again.” With a deep sigh she stood, her eyes damp as she headed to her room to get ready for the appointment.



Sitting in the office of Roger’s lawyer, Theodore Sharpe, Lana was curious about why she’d been asked to come to the reading of the will. She wasn’t related to Roger, but there were no other family members present either.

Clearing his throat, Theodore began. “Miss Anderson, I understand this is a difficult time for you and you have my deepest sympathies. Roger Brinkman didn’t have any immediate family and considered you to be like his daughter. He wanted you to know that he loved you.” Theodore paused.

Tears glistened in Lana’s eyes but she fought them back.

“Roger wanted you to have his entire estate, all monies, and Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing, which includes the position of president of the company.” Theodore stopped talking, waiting for it to sink in.

Stunned, she stared at the lawyer as though he'd just sprouted two heads. "He—he's giving me everything?" Her voice cracked as tears flowed unchecked down her cheeks.

Nodding, Theodore continued. "He wanted you to be taken care of, Miss Anderson. It's all yours. I realize it's small compensation for losing Roger, but he was adamant that you inherit everything."

Shaking her head in disbelief, Lana could barely speak. When Brett squeezed her hand gently, Lana suddenly turned to him, and cried, "I'd rather have Roger alive, Brett! I'd rather have him alive." Lana choked on a sob as she fought back the tears.

When she heard a crash, she stopped crying abruptly. Wincing, she met Brett's gaze. He held her hand tighter as Theodore scratched his head as though wondering how his lamp had ended up on the floor.

Pulling herself together, Lana forced words past the lump in her throat. "Mr. Sharpe, I would be grateful if you would consider continuing to watch over Roger's estate and business as my lawyer." A tear escaped and trailed down her cheek.

Peering over his glasses at her, he said, "I would be honored, Miss Anderson. I'll write up the papers immediately. I would suggest you update your will also. We can work it into a package to save your coming back a second time."

Lana was relieved that Roger's estate would be handled by the same lawyer who had taken care of it for many years. "Please, call me Lana." Fighting back her anguish, she stood and shook his hand.

"Thank you, Lana. You can call me Theo. Unless you have any other questions, I'll see you out." Lana didn't, and a few minutes later, she and Brett were on the street in front of the law firm.

"Brett, can you believe this? I had no idea Roger was going to do that. I've loved him like a father since I first met him. He was such a...such a wonderful man." Taking a deep breath, she forced herself to calm down. "I'm sure Allan will be upset when he finds out." Lana released a reluctant grin.

"I personally can't wait to see his expression when you tell him. He's such a jerk." Brett put his arm around her. They walked down the street to the office. *Her* office!



Having invited the employees to return to work, Lana called a meeting for late that afternoon. She ordered food and drinks for them, making sure the boardroom was ready.

When Lana went to the ladies room, chills rushed up her spine as she remembered her near-death experience. Pushing past the door, she refused to let her fear conquer her and entered the small room the same as she did each day.

The entire staff attended the meeting, even those who'd considered quitting. Allan sat in the chair beside Lana with a self-satisfied smirk on his face. He apparently expected to lead the pack and lord it over Lana. Boy was he in for a surprise!

Since Brett was at the meeting, too, keeping an eye on everyone, he studied each staff member, looking for any hint of who the killer could be. Jessie stayed out of sight in Lana's office in case he was needed.

Lana stood and called the meeting to order, but Allan leapt to his feet and interrupted her. "As vice-president of this firm, I feel that I should be the one who leads the meeting, Lana." His voice was filled with arrogance.

Nodding, Lana bit back a smile, stepped back and let him have the floor.

"Now that Roger is gone, I feel it's my duty to step in and take over the ship. After all, you need a good strong leader, and I'm your man." He turned to Lana with a look of glee. "Lana, you've been with this firm a long time and we're at a critical moment in the growth of Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing. Therefore, and I want you to know it pains me to say this, but *you're fired*. Clear out your desk by the end of the day."

There were horrified gasps coming from around the room. Lana was calm while she waited for quiet.

"It's wonderful of you to think of the company before all else, Allan. Perhaps

you'd care to discuss this in a more private room?"

With a wicked grin, he shook his head. "No, I think that everyone needs to hear this so there won't be any mistaken impressions."

"As you wish, Allan. However, since I now own Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing, I believe it is *you* who are fired and *you* can clean out *your* desk by the end of the day." Her manner was cold and hard as she waited for Allan to comprehend what she was saying.

"*You* own it? You're lying! I want proof." Allan was livid, his face mottled red with fury.

Brett held up the papers and watched as Allan read them. Suddenly spinning in his fury, he tossed the papers aside and threw Lana up against the wall, choking her. Brett was on him in an instant. He had Allan on the floor in one fluid motion, slapping handcuffs on him. Jessie burst into the room.

"Take him downtown for assault," Brett said and went to Lana's side. "Are you all right?"

Holding her throat with both hands, she nodded. She was shocked at the speed with which Allan had acted, then Brett had reacted. She'd had no idea Allan could be so violent. Had she been wrong? Maybe he *was* the killer.

Bedlam reigned in the room and Lana raised her hands for silence. As Allan was taken from the room, he yelled at Lana, "If it's the last thing I do, you bitch, I'll

get you for this!”

After Jessie led Allan out of the room, Lana had to raise her hands again. “Please, listen to me.” The staff quieted down. “I’m sorry it had to come to that. I want you all to know your jobs are safe. We will continue to run Brinkman–Bonnette Publishing and keep Roger’s memory alive. Are there any questions?”

She did her best to still the trembling as shock set in, hiding her hands behind her back as she tried to keep the staff from seeing how upset she was. Even harder was preventing anything from exploding. Always the professional, she put on a good front.

There were many questions and Lana spent the next two hours answering them as best she could. At the end of the meeting, she said to the group, “It’s been a hell of a week and we have a lot of work to catch up on. I’m putting a bonus in each of your paychecks and I want you all to know how much I appreciate your dedication.” There was a roar of approval.

She continued when it was quiet again. “Also, I’ll be going away for a week. I have some things I need to work out, so I’m counting on you all to keep everything moving smoothly. I’ll be available by phone if you have any emergencies.” Lana smiled. “I doubt there will be any though because you are all professionals and can handle anything. The meeting is adjourned.”

Each staff member came up to Lana and offered her their congratulations.

Some expressed their alarm at Allan's actions.

Lana's secretary, Deanna, stopped to talk to her before leaving the room. "Oh, Ms. Anderson, I'm just shocked at all of this. Are you okay?"

Smiling sadly, Lana nodded. "I'm fine, Deanna. Hold down the fort for me, okay?"

"I sure will, ma'am. You're the best boss I've ever had." Her expression changed to uncertainty. "Are you going to replace me with Mr. Brinkman's secretary now?" Deanna seemed very unsure of herself, her eyes filling with tears.

Reassuring her secretary, Lana patted the woman on her shoulder. "Not even for a minute. You know me like the back of your hand, Deanna. I had hoped you'd like to stay and keep taking care of me."

"Oh, I'll definitely take care of you, Ms. Anderson. You name it, I'll do it." Deanna's enthusiasm was a little overboard, but Lana was touched.

"Thank you, Deanna. I'll see you in a week." Nodding goodbye, Lana waited for the final few people to stop and chat.

Anna Warrington stepped up in her brisk manner. "I would have decked him for you, Lana. That man always was a regular pain in the ass."

Biting back a laugh at the woman's militant attitude, Lana nodded. "Thank you, Anna. I'll see you next week."

Anna nodded abruptly and left the room.

Jeffrey Reed came up and grasped Lana's hand. "Lana, I want you to know that if you need anything, all you have to do is ask. I'd make a good bodyguard too, you know?"

"I'm sure you would, Jeffrey." Lana held back a smile at the young man's serious demeanor. "I appreciate the offer and will consider it, if necessary. Good night, Jeffrey." Jeffrey was tall, thin, and very wiry, but not exactly the Arnold Schwarzenegger type.

Finally, the room was empty except for Brett. "Let's get out of here, Brett. I feel like I'm going to drop." She took his hand and he walked her out of the building. He was going to take her out for dinner at a nice restaurant before returning to the condo.



A man watched the couple enter a classy restaurant. It had been nearly impossible to track down Gregory Giovanni, but he had finally found him! With a confident grin, he moved toward the restaurant.

He decided to give Gregory a few minutes alone with his chick before interrupting them. The boss would be so happy with him this time. Hands shaking with excitement, he took a deep breath and entered the building.



Having just ordered drinks, Lana and Brett were going over the menus when Brett looked toward the door and swore.

“Lana, please stay quiet and go along with whatever I say. I’ll explain later.” Stunned at the sudden change in Brett’s demeanor and attitude, Lana simply nodded, obeying his order out of curiosity, not because he’d tried to command her to do so. Looking back down at the menu, she stayed alert to what was happening around them.

A man approached the table. He was a tough-looking Italian wearing a wrinkled business suit. His tie was crooked and sported remnants of his last meal. Looking nervous, he came up to the table and stood quietly waiting for Brett to look up. Brett ignored him for a few moments.

Not lifting his head, Brett growled with an accent, “What do you want, Vinnie?”

Vinnie shuffled his feet. “Can I sit down, Gregory? Please? The boss has been after my hide to track you down for weeks now.”

Looking up at Lana, Brett quickly hid his amusement. “Princess, would you mind if I did a little business before we eat?”

Surprised that Brett suddenly had an Italian accent, Lana could only nod and watch while he talked to the man.

Nodding his head toward a chair, Brett allowed Vinnie to join them and sat

back with an arrogant attitude, crossing his arms over his chest. “So speak to me, Vinnie. What does your illustrious boss want from me now?” His haughty, bored attitude had Vinnie squirming in his seat.

“Ah, well—” Vinnie looked over at Lana. “You want your bimbo to get lost while we talk?”

Taking a sip of water, Lana bit back a laugh while she waited for Brett to continue. She felt like she’d just walked into a scene from *The Godfather*. This was getting interesting.

Shooting Vinnie a lethal stare, Brett remained silent until the man went back to his question, all thoughts of the ‘bimbo’ erased.

“Well, the boss wants you to know how much he appreciated all you done for him. He says he wants you to come by and visit, maybe take Louisa Marie out on a few dates. He says you are prime son-in-law material.” Vinnie paused, squirming under Brett’s cold stare.

“I already told your boss my business with him is done. That includes becoming a relative.” Brett held his silence until Vinnie squirmed again.

“But, Gregory, the boss’s daughter really likes you and wants you to marry her. Gimme a break, will ya? Just think about taking him up on his offer. Think about his daughter, his money, and the business. You would inherit it all.”

Brett slammed his fist on the table, making both Lana and Vinnie jump.

Lana took another sip of water to hide her smile.

“Once I make up my mind, Vinnie, I make up my mind. You tell your boss to back off. I don’t want to have to come down there and tell him myself. He definitely wouldn’t want that now, would he?” Brett was leaning forward, his face just inches from Vinnie’s.

If Lana didn’t know better, she would think it was time for Vinnie to invest in adult-sized diapers based on the look on his face. Sweat beaded the man’s brow. With a shaky hand, he took out a handkerchief and dabbed at it.

“Okay, okay, Gregory. I’ll tell him. But I don’t think he’ll like it much.”

Vinnie was obviously distraught at the thought of facing his boss again, but Brett didn’t give in.

“Are you saying...” he paused with a deadly look in his eyes, “...that I have to tell him *myself*?” The last word he growled emphasizing ‘Gregory’s’ fury.

“No! I swear, Gregory, I’ll tell him.” When Vinnie didn’t get up and leave right away, Brett gave him a verbal nudge.

“You tell him I don’t like to be pushed. There will be no more following me, Vinnie! If I see even one of your goons even looking sideways at me, there’ll be big trouble. You got it?”

Vinnie jumped to his feet, sweat rolling into his eyes. “Sure, Gregory, whatever you say—I guess I’ll be going now.”

Before Vinnie could leave, Brett spoke, “You forgetting something, Vinnie!” He nodded his head at Lana.

“Oh, ah...yeah, ah, excuse the interruption, miss.” After nodding his head, he practically ran from the restaurant.

Only able to stay silent for all of one minute, she burst out laughing. “What was that all about...*Gregory*?”

With a wicked grin, Brett leaned back in his chair and blew on his knuckles before wiping them on his lapel. “Just one of the tricks of the trade, *Princess*. Occasionally, I run into the odd characters from my undercover assignments and have to remember who I was portraying when I worked with them. The *Italian stallion* was my favorite character,” he said in his Italian accent.

Lana laughed again. “Hmmm, maybe we can play dress up sometime and you can practice on me?” Resting her chin in her palm, she leaned forward, raising a brow as she grinned.

Wiggling his eyebrows, Brett winked and explained. “The day we first met, I was trying to dodge Vinnie. He’d been stalking me for weeks. I saw you standing by the elevators looking so beautiful and decided on the spot to use you to hide from him. That was the most memorable mission I can recall.”

The remarkable kiss was still fresh in her memory. She placed her hand over his. “You were pretty mean. I feel sorry for him.”

“That was nothing compared to how his boss is going to treat him when he comes home empty-handed. His boss doesn’t take no for an answer. Poor Vinnie is caught between a rock and a hard place.” Brett chuckled. Their dinner arrived a few minutes later.

“Show me more of your characters, Gregory.”

Entertaining her with his charming acting skills, Brett kept her laughing throughout their entire meal. Lana was more than ready to get back home to try out a few characters herself. The stress from the day had definitely lifted.

Chapter Ten

Muskoka Getaway

Staring at the room in horror, Lana swallowed hard and turned to Brett. “Please tell me there’s a functioning, four-piece bathroom. Please?” Lana cried with hope and despair in her voice.

They stood in the doorway of an old cabin on Muskoka Lake that had seen better days in its more than sixty years of service.

Laughing, Brett took her hand and walked with her over to the small door at the corner of the rustic cabin. He opened it and let her peek inside. There was a toilet, a sink, and a stained, old-fashioned tub.

Lana was just about to relax until he said, “That isn’t a regular toilet. It’s like the ones you use in a camper and runs on chemicals so you have to use the outhouse out back if you need to...ah, go number two.”

“Say it isn’t so!” At Brett’s sheepish grin, Lana vowed, “I’m holding it for a week then. I don’t *do* outhouses!”

“The bathtub is big, Lana. We could both fit nicely in it.” Brett wiggled his brows. Lana gave in and laughed.

“Fine, but we’d better have a bed and not be sleeping on the floor in a

sleeping bag.”

“Let me show you the rest of the place.” Brett led her to the center of the cabin. “This is the living room, dining room, kitchen and hallway.” With mischief in his eyes, he smiled as he indicated the one room in which they stood. “We call it an ‘open concept’ cabin.

Looking up at the cathedral ceiling and the creepy lamp that hung in the center of the room, Lana shuddered. It was made of deer antlers entwined together. Sharp horns jutted out in all directions. She’d never seen anything so ugly. Snickering, she followed him to the only other room in the building.

“This is the master bedroom.” The room was about eight feet wide by eight feet long and had a double bed and some shelves that were used as a dresser.

“How...quaint,” she said sarcastically, rolling her eyes. Lana walked back to the main room. Brett pointed up to the second floor where an old cedar railing lined the wall above the master bedroom.

“That’s for company. It’s a little snug, and you have to crawl to get to the bed, but it’s functional. Don’t worry, kitten. Usually you just lie down in the bedroom so it doesn’t matter how tall it is up there.”

Lana shoved him. “It’s a regular honeymoon hotel. I can’t *wait* to see what’s next.”

Brett laughed so hard he had to hold his stomach. It took him a few minutes

to get control of his mirth.

“Jessie and I always come up here in the summer to go fishing, and we spend a lot of time on the pontoon boat.” Smiling, Brett looked like he was waiting for approval. “We usually flip a coin to see who gets the master bedroom.”

“Gee, fishing. Isn’t that every girl’s dream?” Lana was disgusted with the place. “I’m a city girl, cowboy. I don’t *do* fishing, *or* camping, *or* use outhouses—*ever!*” Anger filled her. She’d had enough of his idea of a getaway.

“It’ll grow on you, Lana. Let’s get changed and I’ll take you swimming.”

“Where’s the pool?” At Brett’s grimace, she cried, “You aren’t telling me we’re going to swim in a filthy lake, are you?”

“Sorry, kitten. That’s how we do things up here,” Brett apologized.

“Don’t you *‘kitten’* me! You said we’d have a week away with sun and fun, not...” Lana paused, waving her hand at the room, “...nightmares and slime!” She was really heating up now.

Brett reached up and grabbed the driftwood lamp that floated by his head and put it back down without even blinking.

“Lana, listen—” Brett began.

“No, you listen, Brett Colton! I have *tons* of money now, and I say we should find an expensive hotel with a pool and a hot tub for this entire week.” Hands on hips, she faced him down.

“No.” Brett said sternly, finally losing his temper. “You’re going to stay here with me, and you’re going to bloody well enjoy yourself and stop acting like a spoiled princess.”

“A spoiled—How *dare* you! Just because I have a little *taste* and like my creature comforts, that doesn’t make me a spoiled princess.”

“Oh, yes it does.” Brett grabbed two floating picture frames and put them under the cushion of the sofa. “I dare you to stay here for a week and *prove* you aren’t a yuppy!”

Her voice rose to nearly a shriek. “Yuppy? I am not a yuppy! Why, I’ll have you know that I went to camp when I was a kid and slept in a sleeping bag, sat around a campfire, and even made a bloody wicker basket!” Lana finally shouted. She was livid. Brett had to grab at the teakettle that rose off the potbelly woodstove before it went flying.

“Prove it. Stay here for the week with me, and *if* you pass the test, I promise I’ll never call you a yuppy again.”

“Fine! I’ll prove to you that I’m not a yuppy.” Lana turned away, about to leave the room, but realizing she had nowhere to go, she growled in frustration, her hands clenched into tight fists. Storming into the master bedroom, she slammed the door. A big mistake, she soon realized, when the door broke off its hinges and fell on the floor with a loud crash, spewing dust up into the air.

Lana shrieked in frustration, then her face crumpled up and she started crying, throwing herself across the bed. When another cloud of dust rose up, she coughed then sneezed before crying all the harder.

When Brett pulled a pair of boots out of the air and put them back in the corner she would have laughed, yet she found no humor in it in the frame of mind she was in. She felt the bed tip as he lay down beside her, running his fingers through her hair soothingly as she sobbed.

It took a long time for her to stop crying. There were many loud bangs and crashes coming from the main room before she finally quit.

Once her tears subsided, Lana rolled onto her side and faced Brett. "I'm sorry, Brett." A little hiccup escaped her. "I don't know what's gotten into me. I usually have more control."

Pulling her into his arms, he rubbed her back and dropped a kiss on her head. "You've been through hell for the past few months, Lana. You're entitled to lose it once in a while."

At his softly spoken words, Lana raised her eyes to his. "I'm really not a yuppy, Brett, honest!"

With a gentle chuckle, he kissed her tenderly. "I know, kitten. You're a regular warrior princess." His lips came down to capture hers in a passionate kiss, his hands roving over her body while hers moved frantically to undo the buttons

on his shirt, practically ripping it away as she began kissing his chest and suckling his nipple.

Gasping, Brett peeled her shirt over her head and moved to undo her pants.

Hands ripping at his belt, she kissed him as though today were her last day on Earth.

Standing up, Brett pulled her jeans down her legs and slipped her socks off, dropping them on the floor. He then peeled his own jeans down dropping them on top of hers.

At the last moment, he removed a condom from his wallet, put it on and climbed between her quivering legs. There was no waiting, no buildup of pleasure. Brett entered her in one smooth move and they both groaned in ecstasy.

Desperate with desire, Lana curled her legs around him and urged him to move faster and faster. She threaded her hands through his hair and pulled him close for a kiss, dueling tongues and breathing quicker now as their hearts raced.

Too soon, Lana threw back her head and screamed her pleasure. Brett joined her, his wild groan filling the cabin as he too had a powerful climax, his hot staff throbbing deep within her channel. Finally, she began to slowly float back down to Earth. Brett lay on top of her as her hips jerked with aftershocks.

Breathing in short gasps, she said, "Okay, so I'll go fishing with you, but I'm not a yuppy!"

Shoulders shaking with laughter, Brett raised his head and kissed her. “There’s my champion.” He looked at her in wonder for a moment. “You know, kitten, I think I’m falling in love with you.”

Blinking in surprise, she caught her breath. “It took you long enough to figure it out, didn’t it?” She smiled. “The feeling is mutual.”

Brett dropped his head, meeting his tender lips to hers. “You know, I might just be ready for another round. How about you?”

Snickering, Lana pointed up above his head. A condom floated there. Further words were not needed.



Country music played softly in the background as Lana rested in a bubble bath, her eyes closed as she relaxed. She loved the scent of lavender and was glad that she’d thought to bring some with her.

Never could she have imagined what Brett meant when he’d said he was taking her to a cottage getaway in the Muskoka Lakes area, but boy had she been surprised!

She smiled as she recalled the afternoon with Brett. He was very good at apologizing. Hearing a scratching sound, she opened her eyes and a scream ripped from her throat.

Brett came slamming into the bathroom with his gun drawn. Standing in

the tub, shaking and pointing towards the wall, Lana was unable to speak.

“Lana, what’s wrong?” She was staring with horror toward a hole in the wall beneath the sink and didn’t answer.

“Lana! What the hell did you scream for?”

She spared a quick peek at him then focused on the wall again. “Th...th...there was a gray furry thing staring at me. Over there by the sink.” She screamed again when the mouse popped his head out to see what the fuss was about. Clutching a facecloth to her chest, she prepared to leap to her feet and race out of the bathroom but fear of the creature held her immobile.



Taking a deep breath, Brett shook his head and placed his gun on the counter. He walked over to the tub. “Lana, it’s just a mouse. He’s more scared of you than you are of him.”

She grabbed his arm and stood up in the tub. Bubbles clung to her skin, revealing more than they hid. “Br...Br...Br...Brett. T...t...take me out of here n...n...now.” She still watched the wall warily, clutching at him.

Lifting her out of the tub, he was about to put her down when she shrieked and begged him to carry her. She obviously didn’t want her feet to touch the ground.

Shaking his head and grinning, he obliged. He carried her back to the

bedroom and set her down on the bed.

Lana began staring into every corner, as if expecting a giant mouse to attack her at any minute. Biting back a grin, he tried to distract her. “Why don’t we get dressed and go for a walk outside? I’ll show you around the neighborhood.”

She could only nod as she scrambled onto her knees with her back to him and frantically searched for her clothes in the tiny room. Brett stared at her butt. Not one to let a good thing pass him by, he stripped off his clothes and climbed up behind her.

“What...ahh...Brett...we just...ohhhh...”

His fingers pinched her tender nipples while his lips began to move down her wet spine. She had a condom floating near his head in an instant.

The walk could wait. It took some time to make sure all of the bubbles were gone from her body and the afternoon had turned into evening by the time they roused themselves enough to get out of bed.



The next morning, Brett took Lana for that walk. He introduced her to many of his neighbors who knew him from his yearly trips to the cottage.

Feeling such a warm welcome, Lana was amazed. The neighbors were friendly and relaxed. It was not the same as in the city where people tended to stay aloof from strangers.

Hand-in-hand, they walked up to a tiny yellow cottage where an older woman in her sixties was sitting on her front porch.

“Hi, Ella. This is Lana. Ella is the local fortuneteller.”

“Well, hello, Lana. It’s a pleasure to meet you. It’s about time you got yourself a girlfriend, young man. When are you going to put a rock on that girl’s finger?” she teased.

Grinning, Brett said, “Not until I’m sure you won’t marry me first, Ella. You know you’ve always had my heart.”

“Oh, you big tease.” Waving her hand at him, she giggled like a young girl, though her voice was rough, her chest rattling slightly from a cough.

“Would you like me to read your tarot cards for you, Lana? No charge.”

“I’ve never had them read before, Ella. What do I have to do?” Lana asked, curious.

“Just come have a seat while I get us some lemonade and my cards.”

“Let me help you.” Brett winked at Lana before he followed Ella into the house.

Moments later, they were back out front and the three of them sat around a small round table.

“Lana, shuffle the cards and think about your life and what you want for your future.” She handed the cards to Lana and closed her eyes to meditate for a

few moments.

Brett sat back and watched.

When she opened her eyes, Lana handed her the cards and Ella told her to cut the deck into three piles. Then Lana was to put the cards back into one pile in any order she chose.

Ella then placed the cards in a specific order faced down, closing her eyes in concentration. Without turning the cards over, she opened her eyes abruptly and stared at Lana with concern.

“Someone means you harm, Lana. Be cautious of dark places. There’s a knife I’m seeing. Don’t walk alone. I—” Ella seemed very disturbed by her prophecy. “I usually read the cards, but I can’t today. I’m sorry.”

Because Lana had her own gift, she didn’t question whether Ella was genuine. Too much of what she’d said was true. She was content to end the reading though because she was unsettled by the look in Ella’s eyes.

“Thank you, Ella. I have my own personal bodyguard, so I should be just fine.” Lana smiled and motioned to Brett. Graciously, she thanked Ella for the reading and nodded to him, indicating that she wanted to leave.

They walked in silence for a few minutes, Lana deep in thought.

“It’s like she can see through you, isn’t it? She told me last summer that I would meet the woman of my dreams this year. She said she would have

strawberry blond hair and green eyes.” Brett smiled at Lana.

“Are you kidding me or are you just trying to be nice?” Lana asked.

“Nope, you can ask her if you want.” He pulled her hand to take her back but she shook her head in protest, snickering.

“No thank you, I think I’ve heard enough for the day. I’m hungry. When are you going to feed me anyway?” She did her best to change the subject.

“Well, I suppose I should feed you. After all, you have been getting vigorous workouts lately.” Brett’s fiendish grin had her giggling. He took her to a small restaurant that sat on the shore facing the lake.



“This is so nice,” Lana sighed. They’d just finished a fish and chips dinner, and drank a few beers. Finally done with their meal, they watched the sun setting on the lake.

Sitting back in his chair, Brett watched her while she studied the setting sun. She was so very beautiful inside and out. He was in awe of her sometimes. Smiling, he remembered she also had her gift and that made her even more fun. The thought of leaving her when the job was done and the killer was behind bars had him frowning.

When Lana turned to face him before he could hide his frown, she raised a delicate eyebrow. “Problem?”

“You might say that, Lana.” Brett sighed and went on. “I was just thinking that when this is over I want to continue our relationship. I’m hoping you feel the same way.”

When she just stared at him for a minute, he knew she was thinking about the time they had already spent together and realized she wanted that too. Catching her thoughts, he felt it when she imagined what it would be like to have children with him.

He knew she’d forgotten about his being able to read her mind when her face turned red and she ducked her head. “Sorry, I—” Lana paused as though trying to gather her wits about her.

“It’s okay, Lana, I feel the same way.” Brett picked up her hand.

Raising her eyes to his, she said, “If I live that long.”

Frowning again, Brett was annoyed that she was thinking like that. He wanted to make her feel safe.

“Lana, if you let him beat you before his game even gets started then he’s already won. I hope you have enough faith in me to know I’ll be by your side to the end. We’ll catch him and put him away, then we can move on with our lives together. I’m hoping that...” Brett caressed her wedding ring finger, “you might consider marrying me.”

Lana’s mouth dropped open. “Brett! You’ve only known me for a few weeks!

How can you be so sure about something this serious? I mean, in this day and age, people get married and divorced before the wedding bouquet wilts. And many of them have been together for years before they formalize it.”

“Lana, look at me.” Brett cupped her cheek with his hand and waited until her eyes met his. “We’ve been together for a short time, I agree. But I’ve never met anyone who...*fit* so well with me. When I get married it’ll be for good. There’ll be no fooling around on the side, no walking out the door when things get tough, no giving up on our relationship! I want a marriage for keeps: children, a mini-van, the whole shebang.”

Smiling at him with wonder in her eyes, Lana said, “You *are* a mind reader, aren’t you? I feel the same way. People fight, that’s a given. The secret is to stay in the ring and work it out. It’s just too easy to give up these days.” Lana squirmed a bit. “I just have to say that no one, and *I mean no one*, can hit me. I won’t have it. Honesty and trust are at least half of a marriage. Without that, you have nothing.”

Nodding, Brett said, “I agree, and no one, and *I mean no one*, is allowed to hit me either. If my wife doesn’t like me rolling my socks into balls then I’ll work on straightening them out.”

Wrinkling her nose, Lana gave a delicious shudder. “That would be great. And I think that smoothing out the toothpaste tube might save time, money, and aggravation in the long run, so I’m game to try.”

Taking a deep, exaggerated sigh, Lana said in a wistful voice. “I suppose that I’ll just have to marry you. I doubt anyone else would do the sock thing for me.”

She squawked when Brett jumped up quickly, lifting her in a bear hug. He kissed her passionately and only stopped when they heard applause coming from the customers and staff of the small restaurant.

“She’s going to marry me!” Brett said proudly.

Cheers and pats on the back followed. The owner of the restaurant insisted on giving them a bottle of wine so they could celebrate when they got back to the cottage. It was difficult to leave with all the well-wishers delaying them, but laughing, they both managed to make it to the door. The owner wouldn’t let Brett pay for the meals and sent them on their way with congratulations.

Once they were a distance away from the restaurant, they walked hand-in-hand along the dark road in the quiet night. There were some lights along the way but it was difficult to see where they were going. He kept her close by his side. “I can’t believe I’m getting married! Tina’s going to fall flat on her face in shock.” Lana gave him a brilliant smile, then exclaimed, “All right! That means no more blind dates, *ever!* Bonus!” Brett joined her in her laughter.

Leaning down, he kissed her gently. “Mrs. Brett Colton. It has a nice ring to it.” *Ring! I need to get her a ring.* “I think that tomorrow morning we’re going to go shopping. There are some things we need for the cabin.”

With a beatific smile, Lana nodded, leaning her head on his shoulder while they slowly walked back to the cabin.



Over a leisurely breakfast, Brett made a show of making a list of the supplies they would need when they went into town. Lana didn't have a clue what he was up to. He was sure because he read her mind. *This mind reading thing is great. She can't keep a secret from me.*

He wondered what he was going to do at Christmas time when she was buying him presents. He figured he'd just have to fake it and pretend he didn't know what her gift was. *This is getting better by the minute.*



Arriving in town, Brett appeared to consider entering a few stores along the main road. Lana was flabbergasted when he passed by nearly every store without buying a thing on his list.

When he stopped in front of another store to kiss her, she was distracted enough that she didn't notice him open the door behind her and walk her backward inside.

When he released her lips, Lana looked up at him for a moment with her heart in her eyes then looked around, surprised to see that they were in a jewelry

store. “Brett, wha—” she started.

“You can’t be engaged without a ring on your finger. It just isn’t done.”

“But, you don’t have to—I mean—” Lana was stunned, a rosy color rising in her cheeks.

With a wicked smile, Brett turned and led her to the counter to pick out her ring. The jeweler was attentive, not pushy, and was happy to rush the sizing of the ring they picked. They could have it that afternoon.

Before Lana let Brett lead her from the store, she stopped at the counter where the men’s rings were on display. She asked the jeweler to pull out a certain ring and placed it on Brett’s finger. Surprisingly it fit him perfectly and would not need sizing, so she paid for it and insisted he wear it right away.

“It’s a whole new world now, Brett. Even men wear engagement rings. Besides, Tina will think twice about messing with my man if she sees the evidence on his finger...or else!” She grinned, with a gentle fake punch to his stomach.

Pretending she’d wounded him, Brett teased her. He was game and wore his ring proudly as he led her onto the street. Pulling her into his arms, he kissed her. “Thank you, kitten. I love you.”

Tears filling her eyes, she said, “I love you, too, Brett. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I’m so glad Roger brought you in to protect me.”

Never in his entire career had Brett been so grateful to be hired to protect

someone. He felt humbled by her love.



Lana walked beside Brett. She didn't hear him talking until he gently pinched her nose.

Blinking, Lana looked up at him. "Oh, sorry, Brett, I was a million miles away."

Running his knuckle gently down her cheek, he said, "That's fine with me as long as I'm there somewhere in your thoughts."

She laughed. "You and no one else, guaranteed!"

"Would you like to have lunch first, or check out some stores?"

"The stores first, please. I may be a city girl, but I know how to make a cabin comfortable." Smiling, she pulled his hand, dragging him willingly into numerous stores.

They had to keep going back to the car to pile up their purchases. Lana was on a roll and the shopkeepers were thrilled with the revenue.

The only thing that Brett wouldn't let her buy was a hanging lamp to replace the antler horn lamp. She was disappointed but didn't fight him about such a minor thing. It was just a lamp after all, and nothing could spoil her joy at being with her man.



After a leisurely lunch in an Italian restaurant, Brett took Lana back to the jewelry store to pick up the ring. The fit was perfect and she had tears in her eyes while she studied it. Throwing herself into his arms, she kissed him, much to the delight of the staff at the jewelry store.

Glowing with joy, Lana walked slowly back to the car with Brett, her arm around his waist while he cradled her shoulder. Connected to her thoughts, he found her lost in another world. Seeing the starry look in her eyes, Brett kept glancing at her as he felt the waves of joy she gave off. Lana stared at her ring all the way back to the cabin.

Chapter Eleven

Not a Fisherman's Friend

They thought they could hide from justice. Well they can just think again. It's time for another lesson. Maybe this time Lana will see the error of her ways. Now that she's in charge, it's up to her to stop making the books!

Pulling out a handgun, the killer loaded it and placed it in a duffle bag. There was duct tape, a large zip-lock bag filled with air, and another of the hero's notes inside.

The executioner was determined to give Lana a chance to reform. Lana was a kind and generous boss. Everyone at the firm thought so. *Except for Allan!* The killer chuckled.

What a fool the man was, but he provided a good distraction, taking the attention away from the true hero, even if only for a brief moment.

With the duffle bag loaded, the killer left the car and moved down the road to the lakeshore looking for a boat to "borrow."

The kind people at the restaurant had mentioned Brett liked to go fishing early in the morning. It was just a matter of waiting for the moment when the

pontoon boat showed up.

Seeing just the right boat at the dock and ensuring there were no witnesses in the still dark pre-dawn hours, the killer smiled behind the black mask. It was a good day for fishing!



The sun wasn't even up when Brett woke Lana. Stretching, she looked at the clock and yawned. "What's wrong? It's too early to get up."

Brett smiled at her in the dark. "Come on sleepy head, the fish are biting."

"Ew! Let them bite. I'm going back to sleep." Lana rolled over, pulling the pillow over her head. Shrieking when Brett smacked her butt, Lana kept her head under the pillow but protected her rear end with her hand.

"Come on, kitten. You said you'd go fishing with me. You can even curl up and sleep on the pontoon boat if you want to. I'm not leaving you here. So...get up or I'll throw you over my shoulder and march you down the street in your pajamas," he threatened playfully.

"I'm not wearing pajamas, you goof," she murmured from under the pillow.

"My point exactly!"

Suddenly sitting upright and holding the blanket to her chest, she cried, "You wouldn't." She wasn't sure if he *would* follow through with his threat.

Eyebrows raised, Brett moved to pick her up and she shrieked with

laughter. “No! I’ll get up, I promise I will.” Lana held her hands out to fend him off.

Brett had a ‘your lord has spoken’ look on his face. Even though Lana wanted to fight him about getting up, she decided to try a different tactic.

Concentrating her thoughts on him, she pictured him naked and straining with his release, their tongues entwined and chests rubbing together. She grinned when his expression changed and he put his hands on his hips.

Desire burned from his eyes. “That’s not fair, kitten. You’re not going to get me back in bed. We’re going fishing.”

Smiling with confidence, a question in her eyes, she made her thoughts more erotic. A shower, soap, bubbles, tongues, lips...

Cussing, Brett jumped on her while she giggled and screamed in delight. His lips burned a path down her neck but then he moved back, picking her up and throwing her over his shoulder.

Thinking that he was going through with his threat, Lana shrieked, fighting him as they moved into the main room toward the front door.

“No! Brett, don’t! I’ll go fishing with you, I promise!” Lana giggled. “Don’t take me out naked! Please...” She shrieked again as he turned abruptly and moved toward the bathroom. Lana started laughing as she increased her erotic thoughts and heard him groan.

Instead of putting her down, Brett started the shower and pulled the curtain

around the tub. He placed her quickly in the bathtub and she screamed as the cold water hit her.

“Brett, turn it off. Turn it off!” she shrieked.

Laughing he obliged.

Lana shivered, glaring at him. “You bastard! That was really cruel.”

“Awake now, kitten?” Brett’s wicked smile told her he wasn’t going to give in to her plan to stay in bed, so she gave up and conceded defeat.

“Fine, I’ll get dressed. Now get out of here, you creep! I need a hot shower to warm up now.” Turning her back on him, she turned on the shower. Brett surprised her by slipping in behind her and kissing her neck.

“Time for a compromise, I think; you get what you want, then we go fishing, okay?” His hands cupped her breasts, his stiff member pressed into her back.

Melting into his embrace, Lana only whispered one word. “Deal!”



By the time the sun was up, Brett and Lana were in the middle of the lake floating on his pontoon boat. It was beautiful and peaceful on the water. Birds sang in the early morning stillness. The lake was so calm it looked like a mirror reflecting nature’s glory.

Lana took a deep breath. The air was crisp and fresh. Staring out over the lush, forested landscape, she spoke wistfully, “Do you think we can just stay here

and never go back to the city? It's so serene."

Slipping his arms around her waist, Brett nuzzled her neck. "Maybe we should think about living in the country instead of downtown. I'd like that. We could move you into the cottage, and you and the mouse could keep house for me."

Spinning around in his arms, Lana lightly punched him in the chest. "I am *not* sharing our home with a mouse, and that's final!"

"Not even a tiny little one?" His teeth caught her lower lip and nibbled.

"Not even one hair on its head!" Slipping her arms around his neck, she kissed him.

Groaning, Brett captured her lips in a long, gentle kiss. Finally, with reluctance, he pushed away, "It's time we get fishing. Have a seat while I get the gear."

Disappointed, Lana sat on the stiff bench and waited while Brett whistled and gathered his fishing gear.

"I thought you were supposed to be quiet or the fish would run away?"

"Naw, that's just an old wives tale. Jessie and I always make a heck of a racket and it never scares the fish away." Sitting beside her with a fishing rod and a small pail, Brett removed a worm and began to skewer it on his hook.

"Ew! Oh, Brett, how can you be so cruel? The poor worm!" Repulsed by the smell and sight of the worm's demise, Lana gagged.

“Lana, you need a worm to lure the fish or you can’t catch them.” Brett was patient with her as he finished attaching the worm to the hook then showed her how to flick the rod to send the line out away from the boat.

“That’s disgusting.” Lana shivered, shaking her head when he offered her the rod.

Shrugging, he cast the line and they sat down in companionable silence. She wouldn’t let him put his arm around her, still grossed out by the worm guts on his hand.

As time went by, Lana became restless. Since Brett hadn’t had a bite so far, Lana took matters into her own hands. She snickered when Brett’s eyes widened as a fish flew up out of the water and landed in the boat. Another fish followed, and another. Soon there were ten fish squirming on the floor of the pontoon boat. Brett’s line still went untouched.

Sighing, Brett turned to look at Lana from the corner of his eye. “You take all the fun out of fishing, Lana. It’s not about catching them. It’s about trying to catch them, the peace and quiet, and communing with nature.”

Grinning, she shrugged. “Fine, I’ll just send these poor creatures back.”

“Lana, wait...”

She sent the fish all back into the water, stood and brushed her hands off as though she’d touched the fish herself. “Ready for lunch?”



Her mischievous grin was his undoing. Unable to be angry with her, Brett laughed. He stood up and reeled in his fishing rod. The worm was gone, so a fish had taken it anyway without even getting caught.

Shaking his head, Brett was about to start up the motor when he noticed a speedboat moving slowly out of the brush by the shore a few hundred feet away. The driver wore a black balaclava mask and black clothing. He appeared to be studying the pontoon boat. A glint of light reflected off what appeared to be binoculars.

“Lana, get down on the floor.” Brett said urgently.

“But Brett, the fish—” she began.

“Now, Lana, no questions!” Brett kept his gaze on the boat. He could hear that Lana had obeyed him.

The boat’s motor roared to life as it moved closer to their location. Brett dove for the floor when he saw that the driver had a gun. A shot sounded then the boat began to make a wide circle around the pontoon.

Brett lay protectively on top of Lana. When he peeked over the railing, he saw that the shooter had moved in closer. The driver threw something into the water, taking off at high speed before Brett could even get off a shot.

Turning to Lana, he looked for any injuries. “Are you all right?”

Wrinkling her nose, Lana tried to be flippant about the situation. “Nothing a long shower can’t cure.” She indicated the floor where the fish had lain.

Unable to find humor under the circumstances, Brett looked around once again to ensure the shooter was gone then climbed to his feet, helping Lana up.

They heard a hissing sound. Brett peeked over the side to see that one of the pontoons had a bullet hole in it and it was rapidly filling with water. They would not be able to drive the boat in to dock.

Turning on the radio, Brett called the police and was told they would arrive as quickly as possible.

He then pulled out two lifejackets, putting one on Lana. He was efficient and all business now. Curious as to what the shooter threw into the water, Brett looked over the other side. It appeared to be a clear plastic zip-lock bag filled with air and a note inside.

Using his fishing pole, Brett tried to pull the bag closer so he could catch it. It didn’t surprise him when the bag flew up and landed in his hands. Lana shrugged, offering a slight smile. The boat listed to the side now and Brett had Lana move to the higher side to balance it until help arrived.

With the work gloves he kept on the boat, Brett opened the bag and slid the note out reading the quote aloud. “*The smallest worm will turn being trodden on.*” He raised his head and stared across the lake where the shooter had disappeared.

“What does it mean, Brett?” Lana’s voice was shaking.

“I think it’s his way of telling us he can find us anywhere we go, the cocky bugger.” His eyes still scanned the horizon. The sun had risen completely an hour before and the wind began to pick up.

Tensing, Brett noticed a speedboat coming up fast but relaxed when he saw it was the police.

Replacing the note back into the bag and sealing it, he put it in his pocket. The Muskoka police department didn’t need to know about the quote. It would just mean lots and lots more paperwork. He’d call Jessie the first chance he got.

Once the police were finished taking photos and statements, they had the pontoon towed to the dock where forensics would extract the bullet from the float.

Since the shooter had covered the name and license plate on the speedboat with duct tape, it was impossible to trace. There was a report of a stolen boat matching the description but so far there was no sign of it. The Muskoka lakes were connected together for many miles, therefore the boat could have been hidden anywhere.

By the time the police were finished with Brett and Lana, it was past noon. They walked back to the cabin slowly, silent companions. His eyes were sharp for any danger as he held her hand in a firm grip.

Tuning in to Lana, Brett knew she was thinking she should stay far away from him before he got himself killed. Her mind was in turmoil, desperate for a way to finish the killer's reign of terror.

Tightening his arm around her shoulders, he said, "You can't get rid of me, Lana. I'm in this to the end."

She swung her eyes up to his, surprise on her face. "Remind me to do a little research on how to block my thoughts from you. This is just getting eerie."

Smiling, Brett kissed her forehead. "I'm not so easy to get rid of, kitten."

Lana dropped her temple on his shoulder. She was silent for a moment. "We have to bait a trap, Brett, and I'm the most logical bait. I don't want to see anyone else hurt. It seems to me that the killer is just toying with me."

"The roses with the worms, the fake bomb, the notes, the black rose, and even the episode on the lake this morning, it's all smoke and mirrors, like they're daring me to run or to face them." Lana's brow was furrowed with concern.

"I agree with you about them daring you, but I absolutely refuse to let you be the bait. It's become way too dangerous now. We considered it before but the stakes have changed since Roger died. The bastard even found us way up here in the Muskokas and only Jessie knows where the cabin is."

Once they arrived at the cabin, Brett surveyed the area surrounding them and walked quietly up the steps holding her hand firmly in his. He made Lana sit

on the lounge chair, out of sight from the road and went inside to check the cabin.

After a careful check, Brett carried out a piece of paper and a dead fish. He handed her the note. Lana read it aloud, “*But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears.*”

She looked up at Brett. “Is this another threat that he can find us anywhere, or he wants us to shake in our boots with fear?”

“I think it might mean both. There is no sign of forced entry and I locked the doors and windows when we left. Let’s get packed up. We’re leaving.” Brett held out his hand to her and waited.

“I’m tired of running from him. Why should we leave?” Her voice was strained and bitter.

“Because, my beautiful fiancée, we need to get you into a more secure environment. This cabin was child’s play to break into. I want you safe while we figure out what to do next.”

Shaking his hand, he waited for her to take it. Lana finally accepted and stood. They were packed and in the car within minutes.

Chapter Twelve

Fast Forward Romance

In Lana's living room, Jessie sat with Brett discussing the events of the past week. There had been no more author murders and the killer hadn't made any prank phone calls or left threatening notes to any other staff member.

The picture frames on the shelves behind Lana were rattling as she paced back and forth behind the sofa. Clearing his throat, Brett caught her attention and nodded at the frames. She looked surprised to see them moving and sighed before taking a seat near him and doing her best to calm herself.

Taking her hand, Brett rubbed her soft skin with his thumb. When Jessie raised an eyebrow, Brett and Lana both held up their ring fingers with wide grins.

"I guess I can't say it's a surprise. You two have been 'thicker than thieves' since you met. Congratulations." Jessie laughed then shook Brett's hand and gave Lana a kiss on the cheek.

"Jessie, I'd like you to be my best man. You already have been for a very long time so let's make it official. What do you say?" Brett waited for Jessie to answer, holding his breath.

Looking stunned, Jessie at first just nodded then after a moment, shouted

with an enthusiastic, “Hell yes!” The men hugged and slapped each other on the back.



The doorbell rang. Lana was about to go answer it but Brett gave her a look and she sat down hard, crossing her arms in frustration. He’d taken over everything in her life and she was getting tired of it.

Hearing a familiar voice, Lana jumped up and walked to the hall to greet Tina. She was hugging and kissing Brett. Lana saw green! *Damn, I have to get Tina a permanent man, or I’m going to have to thump her on the nose!*

“Lana, he just keeps getting more and more gorgeous every day. Can I keep him?” Tina was flirtatious and smiling sinfully.

“Not today, Tina. I’m getting used to having him around. Come on in and meet Jessie.” Lana led the way. Tina stopped dead in her tracks when her gaze fell on him. Her mouth dropped open and her eyes widened. Lana hadn’t seen Tina speechless before and she found it amusing.

“Tina, this is Jessie Chan, Brett’s best friend.” Lana wryly handed Tina a napkin in case the drool got out of hand. Tina accepted it absently. Lana nearly burst out laughing. *Hmmm, this could be a good thing!*

Walking across the room, Jessie held out his hand to her. “I’m pleased to meet you, Tina.” He had to literally pick up her hand and shake it, she was in such

a daze.

“Oh, ah...Yes, nice to meet you, too, Jessie. Hey, are you related to...” Tina started to ask.

“Nope, he’s just my hero. I’ve watched every Jackie Chan movie I could get my hands on.” Smiling, Jessie led Tina into the living room and seated her on the sofa beside him, completely focused on each other.

After shooting a look with raised eyebrow at Brett, Lana said, “I’ll get you a coffee, Tina.” She left the room unnoticed by the couple, rolling her eyes at Brett who simply shrugged.

When Lana returned to the room Tina and Jessie were deep in discussion as if they had been friends for life.

Leaning against the wall with his arms crossed and an amused expression on his face, Brett was obviously forgotten by Tina.

Thinking the two made a nice couple, Lana was startled when Brett said, “I agree.” He winked at her.

“Tina?” Lana called, placing the cup on the table. There was no response, the woman’s eyes remaining glued to Jessie’s. “Tina?” Today Tina’s hair was black with a blue streak going down the right side above her ear. She was very petite sitting next to Jessie’s six-foot frame. With his blue-black hair and hers, they made an adorable couple.

Since Tina was lost in limbo with Jessie, Lana glanced over at Brett with a grin and took drastic measures. She walked right up to Tina and waved her beringed finger in her face.

It took a moment for Tina to register the glitter in front of her eyes. Suddenly, she grabbed Lana's hand and screamed before jumping up and throwing herself into Lana's arms.

Lana would have fallen over if not for Brett's quick intervention. He stood behind her and kept his arms around her waist while Tina gushed all over Lana's hand.

"Oh, it's beautiful, Lana. When's the date? Am I invited? What colors are you going to use in the wedding party. Can I help you plan the wedding? And what about..." She was running on like a motor so Lana stopped her cold.

"Thank you. Don't know the date. Sure you're invited since you're my maid of honor. I'm kind of partial to purple. Yes, you can help plan the wedding. And..." Lana stopped when Tina shrieked.

"Maid of honor? Oh, my God! Maid of honor? I can't believe this! You are so awesome!" Tina was so wound up she jumped on Lana again until Jessie laughed and pulled her off. To his surprise, Tina turned and grabbed his head and kissed him soundly.

The couple began getting carried away so Lana and Brett quickly left the

room. Lana's face was flaming with heat which made Brett chuckle.

"She sure does work fast."

Clearing her throat, Lana poured herself another coffee to gather her wits.

"I've never seen her quite so...exuberant before."

Laughing, Brett leaned over and kissed her briefly. "I've never seen Jessie so off balance. It's a good thing, I think."

Hearing movement in the hall they looked up as a blushing Tina, holding Jessie's hand and mumbling some excuse about leaving the water on at her place, dragged a grinning Jessie toward the door. Jessie offered his partner a salute as he was pulled out the door.

"Wow, he sure moves fast," Lana said, tongue in cheek. Silence reigned for all of ten seconds before they burst out laughing.

Brett still chuckled as he began nuzzling her neck and kissing it. Lana leaned back and sighed. "Oh, that's nice, Brett. Right there...that's it." Her breath quickened as he picked her up and carried her from the room, their lips locked as they followed their friends' lead.



The mood in the office was still tense when Lana returned to work the next day. Her workload was enormous. She told Brett he might as well find something else to do since she would be buried under the large pile of paperwork all day.

“Lana, I have a meeting at the station. I’d rather you come with me. I don’t want to leave you alone.”

“Look, I already told you, I have a ton of work to do. Not only do I have the two weeks’ worth that I’ve missed, but I’ve also got Roger’s and Allan’s jobs to do. Plus, I have to supervise the staff. I’m going nuts trying to get it all done and you’re one distraction I just don’t need. Nothing is going to happen to me with all these people around.”

“I still don’t like it, kitten.”

“You don’t have to like it. I know you’re worried, but I promise I’ll stay chained to my desk and won’t go any further than the cafeteria or the ladies room. Honest.”

“All right, but you call me if there’s a hint of trouble.” Brett looked anything but relieved.

“I promise. Now will you please just go!” she cried pushing him out the door with a swat on his butt.



Brett reluctantly left her office, stopping to speak with Deanna.

“Will you keep an eye on Lana for me and call me if anything comes up? I’m worried about her.” He handed her his cell number.

“Of course, Mr. Colton.” Deanna took the card. “I’ll be happy to watch over

her for the day.”

Not feeling much better about leaving Lana, Brett walked to the elevator hearing Deanna’s keyboard clicking as she went back to typing a letter.



Putting a fair dent in her work by the time there was a knock at the door near noon, Lana called out, “Come in.” She was pleased to have a distraction.

Linda Winters came in the room looking as harried as ever. “Hi, Lana, welcome back. I need to talk to you about some legal matters regarding a few of our authors.”

“Problems? I was hoping that the panic would have lessened by now. What’s going on?” Lana leaned back with a sigh.

“Well, we have three authors who want to renege on their contracts. They’re afraid of the murders, of course. I tried to talk them out of it but they’re adamant.” Linda was wringing her hands together.

Taking a deep breath, Lana nodded. “Okay, let me give them a call and see what I can do. Is there anything else I should know about?”

Smiling and shaking her head, Linda crowed, “You won’t believe this, but we’ve had six new authors sign up this week. It seems that the notoriety we’re getting from the killer is bringing in more authors because they feel we can give them more publicity.”

“You’re kidding me!” Shaking her head, Lana stared at Linda in disbelief. “That is the weirdest logic I’ve ever heard. However, I’m not one to look a gift horse in the mouth.” She laughed in amazement.

After Linda left, Lana decided to open her mail. There were bills, bills, bills, and junk mail, then a letter with no return address. The writing looked oddly familiar. She felt a chill crawl up her spine. Rather than wait for Brett, she opened it, trying to keep her fingerprints to a minimum.

The note inside said, *‘O most pernicious woman! O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain! My tables, –meet it is I set it down, That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain: At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark.’*

“Pernicious woman?” Lana wondered why the killer would consider her destructive or malicious. It seemed to indicate that Lana was smiling on the outside but evil on the inside. She was about to put the letter aside and call Brett when he walked through the door.

“You know this is getting a little freaky, you showing up just when I think about you.” She smiled as he kissed her.

“What’s going on? I could feel your distress all the way downstairs.” He sat on the edge of the desk as she handed him the note.

Tensing up, Brett picked up the envelope with the edge of the letter opener. “No return address, of course. It’s the same writing style. I guess our buddy Allan

is off the hook for murder since he was in jail when we were shot at in Muskoka.”

Reading the quote, Brett gazed into space for a few moments then looked up at Lana.

“It’s time to go for lunch, kitten. Let’s get out of here.” He appeared to be brushing off the threat and Lana was happy to play along.

“I really should stay here, Brett. I have lots to do. Can we just order in? Maybe Chinese food?” she asked.

“Against my better judgment, I’ll order in. But you’re going to relax and eat it when it comes, okay?” Brett shook his finger at her.

Though Lana tried to bite it, he was too quick. Laughing, she agreed with his bossy command. After he’d ordered the food, she told him to get lost so she could get some work done but he just pulled up a chair and opened his laptop to set to work.

They worked in comfortable silence until Deanna called Lana on the intercom to say the food had arrived.

Taking the bag into the large conference room, Lana and Brett had a quick lunch break before getting back to work. Lana began to feed Brett with her chopsticks but had to stop since they were both getting turned on. Shaking her head, she wondered how she’d ever survived without him in her life. She couldn’t get enough of him. Forcing herself to get back to work, she led him back to the

office.

They had been working for about two hours when a knock on the door interrupted them, and Jessie popped his head in.

“Come on in, Romeo,” Lana teased.

With a please smirk, Jessie entered the room and pulled up the second chair. Brett handed him the note. Jessie just put it in his pocket without looking at it.

After Lana looked from one man to the other with a question in her eyes, Brett smiled. “E-mail. I sent him an e-mail about the note.”

Exaggerating a long ‘*Whew*’ and swiping her brow of imaginary sweat, Lana said, “Thank goodness. I thought you two also had a psychic link or something since you never used the phone after I’d shown you the note.”

The men laughed. Then Brett got serious and asked Jessie some questions about the case. Lana just went back to work. She was about to approve a novel when she had an idea.

Lifting his eyes, Brett waited a moment. “Go on.”

With a raised eyebrow, Jessie looked back and forth between the couple. “Talk about psychic! She never said a word to you.”

Chuckling, Lana explained. “He *can* read my mind. It’s the strangest thing, but he always knows what I’m thinking. Never play poker with him!”

Putting his hand over his eyes, Jessie groaned. “Too late!”

Laughing with delight, Lana grinned at him.

“Lana, tell me your idea.” Brett was all business now.

“Well, I’ve been thinking that the killer is after me because I approve the novels. No novel leaves this building for publishing if I don’t approve it, and now that I own Brinkman–Bonnet, I’m willing to bet they’ll be even more determined to stop me. So what if we set him up using ‘*a novel approach*.’” Lana quipped, snickering at the clever play on words.

Both men nodded with interest. “Go on,” Jessie urged.

“We could choose a novel with a dire murder scene in it. We’ll promote the novel, giving it lots of hype. I’ll publish a strong statement of approval. This setup ought to capture the lunatic’s attention, leaving the way open for you to catch him!” Lana was pleased with her plan until Brett shot it down.

“Absolutely not, Lana, you’re not setting yourself up to be bait. I forbid it! There has to be another way.”

Brett was adamant about it. Lana was surprised and annoyed by his furious, demanding refusal.

“Brett, hear me out. I will be perfectly safe since you’ll be there as well as Jessie and any other backup you think we need. It’ll work; I know it will. We have to stop this person, and we have to do it now!” Her coffee cup began to shake as her level of frustration rose. Not only was she under constant surveillance, but

Brett was starting to become controlling, something she opposed vehemently.

“No! I won’t take a chance with your life, Lana! You’re staying where it’s safe, and that’s final.” Brett was starting to lose his temper.

The cup exploded and all three of them jumped. Lana was having a hard time trying to gain control of her temper. Brett ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

Stunned, Jessie cried out, “What the hell is going on?”

Lana just took one look at Brett and ran from the room.



Looking down at the shards of the cup and the coffee spilled over the papers, Brett took a deep breath.

Making sure the door was closed, he said, “Lana is a telekinetic. When she gets angry or has strong emotions things fly—although I’ve never seen them explode before.”

“What, are we in the *Twilight Zone*? You’re kidding me, aren’t you?” Jessie shook his head in disbelief.

“No, Jessie, it’s true. We can’t even have—” Brett’s face flushed. “Never mind, let’s just say it’s been an *enlightening* experience.”

Jessie threw back his head and laughed. “I’ll just bet.”

Changing the subject while he mopped up the coffee with some napkins,

Brett asked his friend, “So, about Tina. What’s the deal there?”

Smiling, Jessie sat back, his eyes filled with pleasure. “Wow! That’s all I can say. Wow!”

Throwing the mess into the wastebasket Brett suddenly fell silent. “No, she is not!” He whirled and opened the door to find Lana speaking with Deanna.

“Make it for three o’clock and you be there too please, Deanna. Thank you for all your hard work these past few weeks. I know it’s been very hectic for you.”

Brett shot her an accusing glare.

Shrugging, Lana turned away and went to the conference room to prepare for the next meeting.

Following right behind her, Brett waited until they were behind the door before taking her arm in a firm grip and turning her to face him. “I told you *no*, Lana. What the hell are you doing?”

Staring at him in defiance, she said, “I’m getting this mess resolved and you can’t stop me.”

“Wanna bet?” Turning, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Chapter Thirteen

Making Bait

Six manuscripts sat on the long conference table in front of Lana. The room was filled to capacity with the firm's staff members. Deanna sat beside Lana, taking the minutes of the meeting.

"I've asked you all here to update you on how Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing is doing since the murders began. I'm pleased to say that we have had six additional clients join our firm. Two of them are sports writers, which is Adam's department." Lana paused and acknowledged Adam with a nod. He seemed pleased with the attention.

"Three of our professional authors wanted to leave, but I was able to retain two of them. The third will wait to see if the killer is caught before she makes her final decision to stay or leave."

Pausing to pick up the first folder, she held it up for all to see. "These manuscripts are exceptional. I wanted to share with you all some of the highlights which should capture an audience and make each a successful seller." Lana continued to discuss the novels and finally picked up the last one.



Sitting at the back of the room with his arms crossed, Brett was fuming. He had been unable to cancel the meeting, and Lana refused to back down. She was putting herself right smack dab in the face of danger, and he was helpless to stop her.

He watched as she did her best to ignore him, bending her head as she opened the last manuscript to a marked page.

“Now, I have some concerns about this one. The author is new and the murder scene is quite disturbing. The character is forced to strip her clothes off and get into a bathtub, where she is drowned. The murderer doesn’t do it quickly but plays with his victim by forcing her to the point of drowning then bringing her back again, over, and over. His goal is to draw out the greatest fear from her.” Lana made a show of shivering like someone had walked over her grave.

Closing the book, Lana addressed the group. “I think we need to persuade the author to soften the scene. It is extremely violent and I think our readers might be shocked by it.” Looking over the faces of the staff members, Lana asked, “Are there any questions about today’s meeting?”

Hands raised, and Lana spent the next hour answering or deferring questions to the right people. “If that is everything then we can adjourn. Thank you for your support. Have a nice evening, everyone.”

Making a show of straightening up the paperwork, Lana waited until the staff members had left the room. Brett just stared at her with simmering eyes.

“I’m going to stop this one way or the other, Brett. There is no way I’ll let Roger’s business be destroyed by all of this, or let his killer go free. He didn’t deserve to die, especially not the way he did.” Picking up her papers, she moved to the door, keeping her eyes on the manuscripts as she left the room.



Brett didn’t try to stop her, nor did he say anything. After the door closed, he shook his head, determination marring his brow. She was in for a surprise if she thought he was going to just stand by and let her get herself killed.



For the next three days, Brett seldom left her side for more than a few minutes. He even forced her to go with him when he had to go to the station, placing her under guard when he was unable to be beside her.

Many dishes broke over those three days, much to the consternation of the people around her who didn’t know about her abilities. Jessie wasn’t much help, laughing when things broke and grinning when the couple stood together in stony silence.

Lana had to guard her thoughts carefully so Brett wouldn’t find out what

she was thinking. He hadn't touched her in three days but lay by her side, tense and unresponsive. There had been no further threats from the killer. Lana was beginning to think her plan had failed.

Heading for her office on the fourth day, Lana sat deep in thought, Brett silent by her side in the cab. She started to cry, overwhelmed by the increasing tension between them. The radio made a loud squeal and shut off. The cab driver tried to turn it back on, but it was dead. He hit it a few times and nearly hit a pedestrian before cursing and giving up on it.

As though he finally understood her predicament, Brett sighed and pulled her close. She cried into his shoulder the rest of the way to work.

Wiping her eyes with a tissue, she stepped out of the cab and held her composure while they entered the lobby. Nodding to George, the security guard, she stopped suddenly when she came to the spot where Brett had kissed her that first day. A stranger's kiss! They were both quiet until they reached her office, shutting the door tightly behind them.

"Look, Lana, I am scared to death of something happening to you. I'm not trying to make you miserable." Brett pulled her close and held her.

Raising her eyes to his, she said in a soft voice, "I have to finish this, Brett. There are so many people in danger, and the police haven't had one good lead. I have to!"

Brushing her tears aside with his thumbs, Brett lowered his lips, capturing hers in a gentle caress. “I know you have all the right reasons to do this, Lana, but I’m the cop. I should be the one who baits the trap, not you.”

With a wet laugh, Lana pulled away, “*Huh!* Well, it seems it was all just a joke anyway. There have been no attempts since the meeting, no phone calls, no strange packages, and thankfully no murders. Nothing has happened, so I guess it was a waste of time to even try.” She threw her briefcase on the desk and sat down hard in her chair.

As Brett stood there watching her, she studied him. Lana loved the way his hair fell into his eyes and ached with longing to push it to the side. Licking her lips, she stared at his mouth then his muscular arms, moving down to his hard abdomen and well-defined thighs. She smiled when she noticed his pants were tight, becoming snuggier by the minute.

Knowing exactly what she was thinking, Brett reached behind him and locked the door. Lana called Deanna on the intercom and asked her to hold all calls since she was in a private meeting. She blushed when she realized Deanna would know what she was up to.

Brett walked around behind the desk, never taking his eyes from hers. Pulling her to her feet, he claimed her lips in a passionate kiss and began to undo the buttons of her blouse. Suddenly feeling an urgent need, they both ripped at

each other's clothing until they were naked. Brett swiped his arm across the desk, clearing it off and laying her back on it.

After a quick gasp as the cold desk met her back and buttocks, Lana soon forgot about it when Brett's lips burned a path down her throat and along her chest, nibbling at her and sucking on her nipples.

Wild with need, Lana reached for him as Brett pulled away slightly to get a condom from his wallet, which he found floating beside him. Grinning, he opened the wallet, pulled out a condom, slipping it on.

Plunging deep into her core, he kissed her to swallow her cries. He began to pump in a rhythm that climbed faster, and faster. Lana's hands clawed at his back, pulling him closer, reaching for the unknown, until finally they both groaned in blissful release.

Running her fingers through his hair as he laid his head on her chest, Lana smiled mentally telling him of her pleasure, her joy at their joining.

Finally coming back to Earth, they began to dress.

Once they had cleaned up the room, putting the papers and desktop items back, Lana stood quietly, held in Brett's arms while they did their best to pull themselves together.

"I'm never going to be able to walk out that door again with Deanna knowing what our *'meeting'* was about." Lana giggled against his chest.

Shaking with laughter, he kissed the top of her head. “Maybe she’ll ask for lessons so she can land herself a guy.”

Lifting her head to look at him, Lana said, “The poor thing is so shy. She hasn’t had a boyfriend since she started here as far as I know.”

Smiling tenderly at Lana, Brett said, “Maybe she prefers women?”

“Who knows? That doesn’t make her any less a person in my eyes.” Taking a deep breath, she straightened her shoulders. “I guess I’d better go face the lions.”

Moving away from him, she reached up and pushed his hair out of his eyes. Pulling his head down for a last kiss, she ran the back of her fingers down his strong cheek then opened the door.

Deanna looked upset about something.

“Is everything all right, Deanna?” Lana asked, concerned.

“I have a family crisis, Lana. I’m sorry, but I have to go home. Can I take the rest of the day off? I’ll work longer hours tomorrow if you want me to.” Deanna looked extremely upset.

“Take as much time as you need. I can manage.”

“Thank you. Goodbye.” Without another word, Deanna left in a hurry.

Brett came up behind Lana. “What was that all about?”

“She has a family crisis, poor thing! I don’t know much about her family; she’s pretty quiet about her life.” Lana took a deep breath. “I’ve got work to do.”

She went back into her office. The glow of her interlude with Brett had dimmed.

Chapter Fourteen

The First Response

Lana worked late that evening, Brett hovering over her every minute. She was annoyed by his constant presence.

“Will you please go find something to do? You’re driving me crazy! All you do is keep staring at me! You’re never more than two feet away. It’s really getting ridiculous,” Lana cried.

“I like staring at you. You look so beautiful when you get pissed off at me.”

Rolling her eyes, Lana checked the time on her laptop. It was six p.m. “I can’t do anymore today. Let’s just get out of here.” She packed her things up to take home.

“What do you want to do for dinner?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we could just order a pizza. Let’s wait until we get home to decide.”

As Lana stepped out of her office into the empty corridor, she shuddered, remembering another night when the lights were low and Donald had surprised her, just before the killer attempted to murder her.

Knowing what she was feeling, Brett put his arm around her shoulders.

“You’re safe with me, Lana. I promise.”

“I wonder if I’ll ever feel safe again.”



Tina thought it was strange when someone from Lana’s office called her and said that Lana wasn’t coming home that night and could she water her plants.

“Funny, I don’t remember Lana having any plants.” She dug out the spare key from her purse and walked over to Lana’s place, thinking about Jessie along the way. He was such a *hotty*! Tina had never met anyone she wanted to see more than once, until now.

It was late in the day. Tina was just about to open Lana’s front door when a taxi pulled up and Lana and Brett climbed out.

“Hey, you two. I thought you weren’t coming home tonight?” she called.

Brett looked at Lana in question then they started to walk toward her.

“What are you talking about, Tina? I never said that.”

Shrugging, Tina turned the key in the lock to open the door for them.

A violent blast rocked the building, knocking Brett and Lana to the ground and sending Tina flying twenty feet through the air where she hit a brick wall and dropped to the grass like a rag doll.



Protecting Lana with his body, Brett made sure she was okay, looking for signs of injury.

“Are you all right?” he shouted over the roar of the fire.

At her slight nod, he jumped up and ran to where Tina lay in a crumpled heap, checking for a pulse, relieved that she had one, though barely. He pulled out his cell phone and called 911.

“Send an ambulance, the fire department, and the police!” After giving them the address, he closed the phone and looked back at the condo. Flames roared out of the hole in Lana’s home. Black smoke billowed thick and heavy into the sky.

He didn’t want to move Tina, but was concerned about the flames reaching her broken body.

When Lana screamed Tina’s name, trying to get to her, Brett leapt to his feet to hold her back.

Grabbing Lana by the shoulders, Brett yelled at her. “Lana, we can’t move her. She’s alive. Help will be here soon. Just calm down!”

The flames coming from house were getting hotter. Brett hoped that the rescue team came soon, before he was forced to move Tina away from the building.

Lana was fighting him still, crying and screaming. Brett looked up and saw Jessie running fast toward them. He must have heard about the explosion on the police radio in his car.

Racing directly to Tina's side, he dropped to his knees. "What the hell happened?"

Shaking his head, Brett looked over at the fire. "Tina asked us why we were home when we were supposed to be away for the night, then she turned the key and the place blew up. That's all I know. Here's the ambulance and a squad car."

The fire truck was right behind them.

Still holding Lana back, Brett asked Jessie to hang onto her while he spoke with the cops, pushing her into his friend's arms.



Moving Lana away from Tina wasn't easy for Jessie. She struggled to get to her friend and Jessie had to deflect a garbage can lid with his arm and a few other flying objects. He shook her, yelling, "Lana. Stop it right now! Tina needs help and you're getting in the way. Do you hear me?"

In shock, Lana finally looked up at him with horror in her eyes then fainted. Jessie picked her up in his arms and moved her away from the fire. The paramedics carefully placed Tina on a gurney and moved off when the heat from the fire increased.

Moving Tina right into the ambulance, they continued to work on her, the doors closing behind them. In a burst of speed with sirens screaming and lights flashing, the vehicle moved off at a fast pace, rushing her to the hospital.



With the fire truck in place, and the police busy keeping the crowds back, Brett couldn't get close to the building to investigate. Turning back to Jessie, he saw Lana was unconscious and ran over to them.

"What happened?" he cried, gathering her into his arms.

Without pause, Jessie handed her over. "She fainted. I'm going to head to the hospital to check on Tina." Without another word, he turned and ran for his car.

Brett took Lana to a clear patch of grass far from the confusion and danger then sat down with her in his arms. His hand was shaking when he touched her smudged cheek.

When one of the officers came over to talk to him, Brett filled him in on what he knew, telling him about the threats. Soon Lana started coming around.

"I'm going to take her up to the hospital. Let me know if you have any further questions."

Opening her eyes, Lana was still for a minute then gasped, struggling to get up. Brett held her tight in his arms, speaking to her calmly. "I'm taking you to the hospital so we can check on her. Stop struggling, Lana, or we'll just stay right here."

She froze and looked at him with terror in her eyes. "What happened? What the hell happened?"

“We’ll find out later. Here’s the cab I called. Let’s go.” Releasing her, he stood and drew her to her feet, leading her to the taxi.

“Now control your abilities so we can make it to the hospital without wrecking the cab,” he warned her about her gift going wild.

Nodding, Lana slipped into the cab, moving over so Brett could slide in right beside her. He held her close all the way to the hospital, rubbing her back in a soothing motion to help keep her calm.



The crisp, sterile smell of the hospital filled Lana’s senses as they found Jessie pacing back and forth in the waiting room, his hands balled into fists, his hair mussed in all directions. As soon as he saw them, he gave them an update in a monotone voice that belied his agitated appearance.

“She’s holding her own. She might have brain damage and broken ribs, maybe even internal bleeding. It’s going to be a long night. The first twenty-four hours are critical in this type of case.”

His hands were shaking as he paced back and forth. Lana went to him and pulled him into a hug, tears filling her eyes. Although stiff at first, Jessie accepted her support and held onto her tightly.



“I’m going to get us some coffee and check in with the nurses.” While he was on his own he also made a few calls. When he got back, Jessie was sitting beside Lana. He wondered if he should tell her or just tell his partner. Knowing how upset she’d be if he kept it from her, he spoke up.

“It appears that the killer has struck again. A gas explosion has been ruled out since Lana only used electric heat.”

Anger flashed in her eyes, bringing a red flush to her face until Lana jumped to her feet, then her face drained of color as though she were about to pass out.

Placing the coffees on the table, Brett grasped her shoulders.

“Are you all right?” he asked her with concern.

“I’m dizzy. I guess it’s all the—” Lana gasped, “I have to call Tina’s family! They don’t know.”

“I’ve taken care of it, Lana. Just relax.” Brett made her sit down again and handed her a coffee. “Drink it.” His order brooked no argument.

Passing a cup to Jessie, he sat beside Lana and took a sip from his own cup.

“Her parents live about half-an-hour away and her brother and sister are more than an hour away.” Lana held the coffee cup like it was an anchor as she spoke, her eyes full of dismay. “This is all my fault! If I hadn’t tried to set up—”

Gently turning her chin until she faced him, Brett shook his head. “No, Lana. She thought we were away for the night. She said that. Someone set her up. The

killer is trying to get to you. Your plan did work. Now we have to prepare for whatever comes next.”

Tears flowed down her cheeks. “Everyone who comes near me is in danger. That means you and Jessie are too. I need to get away from here and hide for a while.” Her hands shook as she held onto the cup.

“Not even for a minute, Lana. You’re sticking with me. Do you hear?” Brett framed her face with his hands, making her look at him. As though realizing he knew she wanted to bolt, Lana dropped her eyes. Pulling away from him, she closed her mind.

Suddenly, Jessie jumped up, spilling his coffee when the doctor came in. She was covered head to toe in pale green scrubs. Pulling her mask off as she walked, she stuffed it into her pocket and lifted her clipboard as she searched the faces of the group in front of her.

“Are any of you the family of Tina Johnson?” she asked.

“No, I’m the attending officer on the case,” said Jessie. “Her family will be here soon. Will you please tell me her status? We need to know if it will be a charge of murder or not.”

Knowing that Jessie was flying by the seat of his pants, making it up as he went along so he could find out how Tina was, Lana remained silent as Brett pulled out his badge also.

Clearing her throat, the doctor reluctantly provided details. “She’s in a coma and there is swelling in the brain. She has three broken ribs. There doesn’t appear to be internal bleeding, but it’s too soon to tell. The greatest concern is the swelling, and we won’t be able to tell anything further until we do a CAT scan. The next twenty-four hours are the most critical.”

Keeping the expression on his face impassive, Jessie nodded. Brett held Lana close, not giving her a chance to ask questions. He knew that since she wasn’t a cop or family, the doctor wouldn’t answer her anyway.

“Let the nurses know when her family arrives and I’ll fill them in.” Nodding, the doctor left, hurrying back to the trauma rooms.

Hands tightened into fists, Jessie shook from head to toe, more unsettled than Brett expected after only a few dates with Tina. He obviously cared about her a great deal.

When Lana started crying again, Brett sat her gently on a chair. “Here, drink some more coffee, kitten.”

Twenty minutes later, Tina’s parents arrived, fear written all over their faces. They came directly to Lana, throwing their arms around her while tearfully asking what happened. Lana was so choked up she couldn’t answer, so Brett filled them in. Jessie went to tell the nurses that Tina’s parents had arrived.

Once the doctor told the Johnsons the same information she had already

told Jessie, the group settled down for a long night of waiting with coffee and tears. Time moved on slowly until early morning when a different doctor came to update them on Tina's status.

"Tina has shown a slight response to stimulation and appears to be coming out of the coma. If she keeps improving, she should be awake in the next few hours. Her stats are good and strong, and the swelling in her brain was minimal. As for the ribs, she'll be in quite a bit of pain for the next four to six weeks. She'll require 'round the clock care for the first few weeks. Other than that, her prognosis is relatively good." After answering a few more questions for the Johnsons, the doctor left them.

Brett decided to take Lana back to his place. He asked the Johnsons and Jessie to call if there were any changes. Handing the Johnsons his card, he walked a protesting Lana out of the room.

"I can't just leave her. It's my fault she's even here! How can you expect me to just walk away?" Lana tried to pull away from him, unsuccessfully.

"And just how are you helping Tina by staying here exhausting yourself? Boy, you sure think a lot of yourself, like you, and you alone control Tina's destiny. Yeah, you're solely responsible for everyone's murder too, aren't you, Lana?" Brett was being brutal to give her a wakeup call. They were outside the hospital and he kept her walking.

“Yes, I am responsible! Why, Roger would be alive now if I hadn’t approved all of those novels.” Lana was beyond making sense now.

“Really? So you're saying you should just close down the company and never approve another novel again because someone just *might* be insane enough to want to kill more authors, or your best friend? You’re a piece of work, Lana, a real piece of work.” Brett had stopped, grabbed her shoulders, and turned her toward him.

She was so angry now that she tried to smack him across the face, but he knew she was going to and kissed her instead. Struggling against him, Lana tried to pull away but couldn’t break free from his strong hands on her shoulders. Finally giving in, she began to kiss him back desperately as tears flowed down her cheeks.

Lifting his head, Brett looked into her eyes tenderly. “You’re not at fault, Lana. It’s time you started believing that. There is a psychotic killer stalking you. There’s no rhyme or reason to the way they think. They just murder people. They don’t have consciences and they don’t particularly care about the consequences of their actions.” Brett sighed, “Let’s get you home to my place.” Turning, he put his arm around her and hailed a cab.



After a long hot shower and breakfast, Brett told Lana he had called her office and his, telling the staff not to expect them in today. It was Friday, so they

had the weekend to spend keeping vigil over Tina. But first, Brett made her lie down.

Tossing and turning on the bed for nearly an hour, Lana finally turned to Brett and asked him desperately, “Please make love to me, Brett. I need you so.”

Groaning with desire, he complied, taking her away from the world around them and bringing her up to the stars. Sometime later, they slept fitfully in each other’s arms. Lana was prepared to wake up as soon as the phone rang. Thankfully, she had a long wait.

Chapter Fifteen

Taming the Kitten

The silent figure sat rocking back and forth in a chair in the darkened room. There was just enough light from the lamp to highlight the pages of the novel clenched in a tight grasp, agitated and muttering over and over.

“*One fire burns out another's burning, one pain is lessen'd by another's anguish.*” Romeo and Juliet knew what had to be done. They knew. She will burn in her anguish. That’s as it should be. And I must now set the final curtain. It is time to stop her wickedness for good. Romeo and Juliet knew. They knew it well.”

The rocking back and forth began again, clawed fingers pulling at short hair, while muttering the same quote over and over again in a monotone voice, “*One fire burns out another's burning, one pain is lessen'd by another's anguish.*”



Awaking first, Brett noted they’d slept a full twelve hours. He carefully slipped from the bed and moved to the kitchen to call the hospital then the station. Jessie had finally gone home to change and get some sleep.

Slipping back into bed, Brett noticed Lana was dreaming. In his mind he

could see pictures of fire, the explosion, and Tina's crumpled body on the ground. Tina's accusing finger pointed at her. Lana was about to scream when Brett pulled her into his arms, holding her trembling body while she cried out in her sleep.

Kissing the top of her head, he felt her beginning to wake.



When she opened her eyes to see Brett's concerned face above her, she felt the dream fade. Touching her cheek, she was surprised to find tears streaming down her face.

"What's going on?" she asked in confusion. She looked around and remembered they were at Brett's apartment. Then all of the horror of the past twenty-four hours rushed back to her and she gasped, grasping his arm.

"Hush, kitten it's okay now. You just had a bad dream." He tenderly kissed her.

"You mean it didn't happen? The fire..."

"No, that definitely happened. I meant the dream you had didn't happen. Tina isn't going to blame you for anything, Lana." He brushed a strand of hair from her face.

"Oh, my God! Tina!" she struggled to sit up but he held her down, pinning her to the bed. "Let me go. I have to call the hospital."

"Relax, I already did. Tina is awake and talking. Her parents are with her.

Jessie went home for a shower, a change, and a quick nap then he's going to head right back there. She'll be just fine, Lana. Stop fighting me!" Brett lay on top of her now, preventing her from getting up.

"She's okay? Are you sure? You wouldn't kid me about this, would you, Brett?"

"Lana, look at me. Do you seriously think I would be so cruel?"

Taking a deep breath, Lana shook her head. "No, I know you wouldn't. I was just afraid that..."

"...that I would lie to you to make you feel better?" He stared hard at her.

Lana nodded slightly.

"Listen to me carefully, my future bride. I will not now, nor will I ever lie to you. That is not what I'm about. Truth is a strong foundation for a marriage and I plan on starting that foundation from this day forward. I'll tell you the truth even when you don't want to hear it. Got it?" Brett waited for her response.

"Okay, Brett. Can you let me up now?"

Smiling, he moved off her.

"Go ahead and hit the showers while I make you something to eat. Then we can go see Tina."



Suddenly Lana's eyes lit up and she jumped out of bed, running for the

bathroom.

Chuckling, Brett went to the kitchen. Just as he turned on the kettle, the phone rang. He listened for a long time, responding when required, then slowly put the phone down. *Lana is not going to like this. Not one little bit.*



Feeling refreshed after her shower, Lana stopped at the kitchen doorway just as Brett hung up the phone. His serious look stopped her in her tracks. Taking a deep breath and pulling her shoulders back, she moved into the room and smiled at him when he looked up.

“Do you want to feed me first or hit me with the truth?”

“Let’s feed you first, Lana. You won’t like what I have to say.” Brett moved to get her a cup of coffee and pulled out some cereal.

Not liking the thought of waiting for the bad news, she asked, “Does it have to do with Tina? Is she okay?” Fear snaked up her spine.

Brett smiled. “She’s fine. Just eat then we’ll talk.”

The wheels began turning in her head while she ate the now tasteless food. When the cups started to rattle he put his hand on top of hers and gave her a loving look that said, “calm down”.

Nodding, she complied and finished her cereal and coffee. Brett automatically poured her a second cup. Sitting back in his chair, he began to tell

her about the call.

“The condo blew up because of a bomb. It had a trigger that would set it off as soon as someone opened the door. From what we can figure, Tina got a call from a person at your office and was told you had requested she water your plants. That was why she was at your place opening the door.”

“But, Brett, I don’t have any plants. Not even one. I’d think Tina would know that.”

“She told the police she thought it was strange, but since you’re her best friend, she wanted to help. She would’ve died if we hadn’t distracted her, since she’d moved to the side of the doorway when the blast went off. She didn’t get the full impact of the explosion.” Brett paused, uncertain he should continue.

“The truth, Brett, whether I like it or not, remember?” Lana prepared herself, watching his face.

“Me and my big mouth,” he said wryly.

Tilting her head, she waited.



“Okay. There was a note delivered to your office again. This one was from Romeo and Juliet. ‘*One fire burns out another's burning, one pain is lessen'd by another's anguish.*’ It appears that the killer is trying to make you suffer from guilt for getting your friend killed, or almost killed in this case.”

Waiting for her to digest that, Brett sipped his coffee.

“That bastard! I’m done with his games! This is going to end. It’s going to end now!” Lana jumped to her feet and her coffee spilled. She ran from the room. Before Brett could react, the entire table tipped on him, temporarily pinning him down.

Lana had moved so fast by the time Brett could read what she was thinking, she was gone. Leaving the mess behind him, he raced out of the apartment and searched the streets to see if he could spot her.

Swearing, Brett got on his cell phone as he tried to catch up with her, calling Jessie.

“Jessie? Lana took off and I can’t find her. I need your help. Can you get a few of the guys to help me search downtown? Get them to call the cab companies with a description of her. I have to find her before she does something foolish, or worse, the killer gets a hold of her!”

“I’m on it, Brett,” Jessie said and hung up.

Damn, but the woman is fast! Brett thought. Fear and fury raced through his gut as he began to track her.

Calling the station again, he gave a description of her and what she was wearing then hung up and called her office. Deanna was not back from her family emergency, but another woman answered the phone. He told her to call him as

soon as Lana showed up. He stressed the urgency of the call.

Deciding she might head for the hospital, Brett hailed a cab. When the cab approached the first intersection, Brett saw the traffic lights were flashing oddly. Smiling grimly, he knew he was on the right track. Leaning over he showed the driver his ID and asked him to call on the cab's radio to find out where there were other traffic lights out in the city.

Impatient, Brett sat back and waited to see if he could track her using her out-of-control gift. Luckily, he knew what to look for. When her emotions ran riot, Lana left a path of electronics going haywire behind her like crumbs on a trail.



Racing from the apartment, Lana apologized mentally to Brett for delaying him in such an outrageous fashion. She caught the first cab she saw and asked the driver to head for the city's major TV station.

Her emotions were running wild and she heard cars screeching and horns blowing behind her as they drove. Looking over her shoulder, Lana cringed, realizing the stoplights had blown out when she passed them.

They were only a few blocks away from the TV station when suddenly the driver swore out loud. The entire dashboard lit up with error lights and the radiator blew, smoke billowing out.

"Damn it! This cab is only six months old, what the hell is going on?" the

driver yelled. Picking up his handset for the radio, he soon threw it down in disgust when it didn't work either.

Gingerly, Lana opened the door, tipping him with a large bill. "I'm sorry." Wincing, she left the cab and ran off down the street.



A few cars ahead, Brett saw a cab spewing steam and told his cabbie to stop the car. Paying the man, he got out and ran over to the other taxi. The driver was looking under the hood, scratching his head in confusion.

"Excuse me, sir? Did you have a woman in your cab a few minutes ago? She's a beautiful redhead wearing an oversized t-shirt and jeans."

The frustrated man blew out a harsh breath and nodded. "Yeah, she handed me a large tip and took off down the street." Pointing in the direction Lana had gone, he shrugged.

Handing the man a fifty-dollar bill, Brett ran off leaving a very confused driver behind him.

Trying to figure out where Lana was going, Brett noticed a TV station sign up ahead. Knowing her mind literally inside and out, he figured she might try to bait the trap tighter. She could use her power as the owner of the publishing firm to get the station to let her air her message to the killer. He ran full tilt, trying to catch her before she could do it.



Out of breath by the time she reached the station, Lana took a moment before she entered the building. Lights and neon signs had malfunctioned or exploded as she passed. Knowing the TV station had equipment too, she realized she'd better pull herself together and gain some control of her gift. The last thing she wanted was to be unable to send her message because the equipment was destroyed, too.

Taking a few deep breaths, Lana struggled to rein in her powers. It was hard to focus when her heart raced so fast. A few precious minutes passed before she felt calm enough to enter the building. She straightened her spine and approached the counter and spoke quickly to the male receptionist.

“Hi, I'd like to speak to the Station Manager, please.”

“Oh, you're Lana Anderson. I recognize you from your promotional interviews over the past few years. Hang on just a minute and I'll get Mr. Black for you.” Picking up the phone, he called the producer.

Unable to sit still, Lana was ready to jump out of her skin by the time the producer, Albert Black, entered the reception area.

“Miss Anderson, it's a pleasure to see you again. Come into my office and tell me what I can do to help you.” He led the way, holding out a seat for her.

Sitting on the edge of the chair, Lana came right to the point, skipping the

pleasantries. “I have an exclusive for you, Albert, but we need to go live, right now. There’s no time to waste.”

“Whoa, Miss Anderson, can you at least tell me what’s going on? I can’t just go live on a whim.”

Lana explained her situation and why she wanted to make her announcement. Albert knew a good story when he heard one and made a quick call to prepare the interview set right away.

“So you think this will lure the killer out? And you’ll give us an exclusive when you catch him?” Albert looked like he had just won the lottery at Lana’s nod.

Ten minutes later, Lana stood in front of the camera and gave her message. It only took a few minutes, but the station would air it numerous times during the day and Lana’s heart finally began to slow. That is, until she heard a door slam open and saw Brett’s furious face.

She was about to run when he pointed his finger at her, growling, “Not one step, woman. You have *no* idea what you’ve just done!”

Standing her ground, Lana faced him, her chin up. “I know exactly what I’ve done, and you can’t do a thing about it!”

“Oh, can’t I? How about forty-eight hours in jail in protective custody?” Brett was livid, the veins in his neck bulging.

“Try me! You can’t keep an eye on me every minute of the day, Brett.

“If I have to sit on top of you for forty-eight hours, you’re going to obey me in this!” he ground out.

“I am not going to ‘obey’ you in anything,” she snapped.

Sparks began to come out of the power outlets and Lana realized she needed to get out of the building before her plan blew up in her face, literally.

Changing tactics, she dropped her gaze, suddenly meek. “Okay, Brett, fine, you win.” Sighing dramatically, she asked in a small, defeated voice. “Will you let me see Tina now, please?”

She could tell by his narrowed eyes Brett was trying to figure out what she was up to.

Pleased that he wasn’t able to read her mind for once, she allowed him to take her arm in a firm grip, and walk her from the building. The damage was done. Her challenge had been sent to the killer.



Brett remained furious with her for the rest of the day, his anger fueled by his need to protect her. While Lana and Tina talked and cried together, he stood not two feet away with his arms crossed over his chest.

Since it was Saturday, Lana couldn’t persuade him to go to the office. She then wanted to go back to her place and look at the disaster. He obliged only because he wanted to check it out himself.

There were work crews onsite, and yellow police tape surrounded the condo. It had burned beyond repair and would have to be demolished.

He watched her shudder as she looked at the wall that Tina had slammed into. When Lana turned around fast, her nose collided with Brett's hard chest.

"Will you please stop standing on top of me?" Ineffectually pushing his chest, she tried to step around him, only to find herself caught up in his arms.

"You will not be more than two feet from me until this thing is done, Lana. I mean it. And if you *ever* pull a stunt like that again, so help me you won't sit for a year!" His voice was harsh with anger and concern.

Swallowing hard, Lana kept silent.

Brett held her arm in his strong grip and walked her to the cab. Before they entered, he said through gritted teeth. "Try and be nice to this cabby. You totally screwed the last one's car up. The man will have a hard time making a living without it." At that warning, he remained silent throughout the ride back to her apartment, simmering in anger.



After they watched her broadcast, Brett and Jessie looked at her in horror.

"Are you out of your freaking mind, Lana?" asked Jessie. "After what happened to Tina, I would think you'd have a little common sense."

Silent, Brett just stared at her, fuming.

Lana ran from the room and threw herself on Brett's bed, slamming the door shut with her mind and unknowingly smashing Brett's belongings in her anguish.



In the living room, the men heard the crashing but Brett just held out a hand to stop Jessie from running after her to see what had happened.

“What the hell! You sure got the tiger by the tail, my friend,” Jessie said.

“You have no idea,” Brett said dryly.

“Now what? The damage is already done, and the captain is beside himself about the broadcast. Lana's in more danger now than she ever was before.”

Shaking his head, Jessie whistled. “I'm amazed that you have such a wild woman on your hands, and you don't seem to mind the challenge of the fight to come.”

“She's a challenge all right. I'm still not sure if it's courage or stupidity on her part that made her do such a foolish thing.”

Brett tilted his head as though listening to something. “Hang on a second.” He went quietly into the hall and waited just to the side of his bedroom door with his arms crossed.



The door creaked open slowly and Lana's head peeked out, looking back

down the hall toward the living room where the men had sat talking. She turned to move toward the front door but screamed when she came up against a wall of steel, a very warm wall of steel.

Standing there waiting with an impenetrable look of implacable fury on his face, Brett didn't move an inch, nor did he try to grab her

Backing up, Lana attempted to shut the door in his face, but he put a hand out and stopped her. Stalking her, Brett backed her up to the bed until she fell on it backward.

"You will not leave this apartment without me. Not for a minute, do you understand me, woman?" he ground out slowly, his face getting closer to hers with every word.

Trying to speak, Lana could only let out a small squeak. She ended up just nodding her head as she trembled from the power of his angry presence. She wasn't afraid of him, but knew he would brook no argument.

Apparently satisfied, Brett moved to the door before turning to point a finger at her. "Do not move one muscle. Got it?"

Mutely nodding, Lana stayed exactly where she was until he returned a few minutes later with a toolbox. She stared at him in disbelief when she saw he was putting a lock on the door. On the *outside* of the door!

It took only a few minutes for Brett to install the heavy-duty lock. When

she tried to talk to him, he only raised that finger, along with an eyebrow, and she fell silent.

After he shut the door tight in her face, she shrieked at him, pulling at the door handle. It wouldn't budge, so she began shouting names at him and throwing things across the room with her gift. She was trapped!



Smirking, Brett rejoined Jessie in the living room. Jessie stared at him strangely.

“What?” Brett asked innocently.

“How long do you plan on keeping her in there?” Jessie asked in wonder.

“As long as necessary. I’m not going to let her serve herself up on a silver platter,” Brett said with a glance down the hallway. She’d fallen silent but he could feel her anger at him.

“Isn’t that against the law, forcible confinement?” Jessie grinned; being a cop he already knew the answer.

“It’s either here or jail. I have to keep her safe!”

Raising his eyebrow, Jessie looked surprised. “You’re serious!”

With a deep sigh, Brett ran his fingers through his hair then shook his head. “I’ve never met a woman with such a stubborn streak before. Her courage and loyalty to Brinkman–Bonnet is undying. That being said, you see why she’s willing

to give up her life for her staff and the authors.”

Unfortunately, since hers was the only mind he could read so clearly, he was unable to reveal the killer.

The lights flickered, followed by a loud crash and a shriek.

Jessie looked over Brett. “Aren’t you going to check out what she’s doing?”

Shrugging his shoulders, Brett said simply, “Temper tantrum.”

With a laugh, Jessie sat back in his chair. “You have the strangest relationship I’ve ever seen. Thank God Tina is so sweet and malleable. I wouldn’t want a wildcat like Lana.”

Brett’s eyebrows flew up in disbelief. “Tina?”

“Well, yeah, she would never get out of line like Lana. She’s so nice—Like the girl next door.” Jessie looked thoroughly confused when Brett laughed heartily and slapped him on the back.

“You live in that world for a while, buddy. I’ll be here when you come back to Earth.” Laughing again, Brett shook his head.

Before Jessie could ask Brett what the joke was, there was another loud crash and a scream of rage, then the lights went out.

“A power failure! How about that?” Jessie said.

Brett just laughed all the harder.

Chapter Sixteen

A Battle of Wills

For three days, Brett kept Lana in the bedroom, only allowing her out for a shower or washroom break. After removing the phone from the room, Brett called her office and told them she wouldn't be in until further notice. He brought her meals to the room and made her shower with him so he could keep an eye on her.

Furious with him, Lana wouldn't let him touch her sexually, not that he tried, much to her dismay. She remained stubborn and still as a statue while he soaped up her body impersonally and even washed her hair. They brushed their teeth together and he kept her naked except for his large T-shirt so that she couldn't bolt for the door if his guard was down.

Her clothing had gone up in the blaze so she only had one outfit to wear. When Lana tried to borrow more of his clothing, he just moved it all to the spare bedroom. She *was* allowed sheets and blankets though, for which she was grateful.

Even though he didn't tie her up, she might have preferred that to the forced confinement. At least that would have given her further justification to be angry with him.

On day three, she'd had enough. She was trying to manipulate the lock with

her mind when he came into the room with a smirk on his face. Lana threw herself back on the bed and turned her back on him. Giving him the silent treatment didn't seem to bother him at all, even though it made *her* feel better.

When his palm met her butt with a loud smacking sound, Lana shrieked. She bolted upright and gave him a dirty look while rubbing her burning cheek.

"Time to get dressed, kitten, we're going out." Brett was being nice.

He's being a bit too nice. Her eyes narrowed with suspicion. Refusing to take the bite, she remained silent.

Raising his brow, he asked, "Not interested in seeing your best friend?" Paused for effect, he then shrugged. "Oh well, I'll just tell Tina that you were...tied up." He chuckled at his quip.

Shrugging at her lack of response, Brett turned to leave.

Lana yelled, "Wait!" Feeling humiliated, she tried desperately to come up with something nice to say to him. "I—I would like to see Tina."

"Oh look, she speaks." Sarcasm laced his words.

Swallowing her pride, she lowered her gaze, appearing submissive. "I really do want to see her."

"Really? How nice for you. No '*pretty please*' for me, kitten?" His condescending attitude grated on her nerves.

Through gritted teeth, she said, "Pretty...please." Her grating tone was dry

and stiff.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Brett waited, tapping his fingers on his arm.

Realizing that he wasn't going to let her get away with a nasty reply, she swallowed hard. "Pretty please, can I see Tina?" Bile filled her throat at the sugary sweet sounds coming from her mouth.

"That's much better, my love." Brett turned and left the room while Lana waited on the bed, unsure if she should stay or follow. He returned in a moment with her clean clothes in his arms. Before handing them over, he pointed to his cheek, indicating he expected a kiss for the favor.

Grinding her teeth, Lana got up on her knees and reluctantly, was about to place a brief kiss on his cheek when he turned his head and his lips met hers. His arms came around her pulling her close for a passionate kiss.

Squirming, she pushed away from him, shrieking when he wouldn't let her go.

"You could be arrested for keeping me prisoner here, you pervert!" Lana shouted. She lost her temper and although there was nothing left in the room to break, the windowpane rattled ominously.

Finally letting her go, Brett stood there staring at her for a moment in silence. Then taking her clothing with him, he slammed the door behind him, the

lock clicking into place.

“Ohhhh...” She screamed in fury, throwing herself back on the bed and pounded the mattress with her fists. She had thought there were no more tears left in her. She was wrong.



The next morning, Brett repeated the process. Expecting a kiss for bringing her the clothing, he pointed to his cheek. She refused to budge.

Shrugging, he turned and left the room with her clothing.

Refusing to cry anymore, Lana weighed her options; either give in, and seduce him into taking her to see Tina, or continue being stubborn and stay alone in his room with no TV, no books, nothing to entertain or keep her busy. It was a tough decision, but she chose the latter.

That night, like every other, he came to bed and pulled her close, his arm around her waist holding her in snug to his hard body. Keeping her body stiff, she could feel his growing staff against her buttocks but refused to give in and relax, even though she burned with need. She breathed in his clean scent and shuddered, cursing herself for allowing him to see how he affected her.

Her patience was especially tested when he wriggled against her, supposedly trying to get comfortable. Lana knew he did it on purpose. She had to bite back her groans.

Having not slept well in five days, she felt worn and dragged out. Not knowing if the company had managed to survive without her made it even worse. Feeling a sob about to escape, she forced it down and spent another long sleepless night.

The next morning, when Brett came to her with the clothes one more time and pointed to his cheek, she took off her ring and threw it at him.

Tears filled her eyes as she remembered the day he had placed it on her finger and agony washed over her, burning in her heart. Biting back her pain, she crossed her arms in imitation of him and stood firm.

Having caught the ring in his hand, Brett stared down at it for a moment. With a determined expression, he stepped toward her. "Put it back on."

Shaking her head, she refused in silence.

"Put it back on, Lana." She knew he was getting angry with her as the veins in his neck began to bulge.

Again, she shook her head and moved away from him, backing toward the wall.

He moved to grab her hand and put it on her finger, but she pulled it away, clenching it into a fist and placing it behind her back.

"Give me your hand, Lana, now!" he growled as his face flushed red.

Lana moved backward, again shaking her head, "No."

She thought about the day he'd put the ring on her finger. How she had loved the symbol of their love. Remembering the emotions filling her heart, she gasped, feeling hurt rip through her chest.

Suddenly Brett lunged and she screamed, trying to run but only backing into the wall. Picking her up under the arms, he spun around and dropped her on the bed.

She fought him every step of the way, hiding her hand beneath her.

Careful not to hurt her, he held her down, trying unsuccessfully to pull her hand from behind her back.

She remained firm, biting her lip in determination.

The air abruptly changed, crackling with passion and they froze, staring into each other's eyes. Their need for each other overrode all anger and pain. They were unable to continue the battle when their love for each other was stronger than any argument.

Suddenly they were kissing and wild passion ignited between them. Brett pulled his clothes off swiftly and entered her in one smooth move, causing both of them to gasp in pleasure. Lana held him close to her, grasping his hair with both hands, kissing him, out of control. Brett's hands roved over her body and he pulled her to him, gripping her buttocks with both hands, pumping furiously into her.

Her hips grinding into his, Lana lost herself in fevered passion. When the

time came, they both cried out in perfect sync with each other.

They came down slowly, neither speaking. Brett's head rested on Lana's shoulder, his shaft still planted deep inside, still rock hard and stiff even though they had met the stars.

Once their breathing slowed, Brett was about to move away when his head flew up, his eyes wide. "Lana, I forgot the condom!"

A tear escaped from the corner of her eye and she brushed his wayward hair from his brow. "I don't care, Brett. It doesn't matter anymore. I just don't care." More tears flowed.

Brett kissed them away. "Did I hurt you, kitten?" His eyes were full of concern.

Shaking her head, Lana's tears continued to flow. "It's just that—we're both so stubborn. I'm sorry about what I did. You were right. I should have listened to you."

"No, Lana. I understand why you did it. I'm just so terrified of losing you I can't think straight." Brett lifted his hand, the ring resting on his pinky. "Do you still want to break up?"

Sobbing, she shook her head. "No! I never want you to leave me." She let him put the ring back on and then kissed him with trembling lips while shedding cleansing tears of love.

Brett began to move his hips again, eliciting a moan from Lana. She wrapped her legs around him and moved in tune with the rhythm of his body. Their tongues danced to the same beat as their hips. She sobbed in delicious agony breathless moments later as he brought her once again to the stars. The kitten and the tiger had tamed each other.



After showering together, this time because they wanted to, Brett took Lana to the hospital to see Tina.

Laughing in delight when Brett told her Jessie thought Tina was sweet and malleable, Lana said, “Is he going to be in for a surprise!”

Entering the hospital room, Lana saw that Jessie stood beside Tina’s bed, holding her hand while giving her a look of puppy-dog love. It was so cute Lana had to hold back her laughter when she thought about the rude awakening he was in for when he really got to know Tina.

Crying out in joy, Tina held out her hand gingerly when she saw Lana. Her face was nearly clear of bruising but she had a large white bandage around her head.

Tina’s tears met Lana’s as the two gently embraced. Lana pulled away quickly when Tina gasped in pain.

“Oh Tina, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.” Lana looked at her friend in

despair.

“Don’t worry, Lana, it only hurts when I laugh, or cry, or breathe, or eat, or—well, you get the idea. Apparently they don’t wrap your ribs with bandages anymore. It’s supposed to be better to just let them heal on their own.”

“Are you okay? I’m sorry I couldn’t come sooner.” Lana glanced briefly at Brett. “I was ‘a little tied up.’”

Brett and Jessie both made conspicuous noises like snickers, but when Tina looked over at them, they acted innocent.

“I’m sorry about your place, Lana. If you want, you can move in with me.”

“Thanks, buddy, but I think Brett might object.”

Grinning then wincing, Tina said, “Jessie told me about what happened. I don’t remember a thing. I’m glad you weren’t hurt.”

Shaking her head, Lana stared at her friend in disbelief. “You’re glad *I* wasn’t hurt? My God, girl, *you* could have died! When I saw you...”

A sob escaped as she remembered seeing Tina fly through the air and hit the wall before dropping like a rag doll to the grass. Lana couldn’t continue as a sudden lump blocked her throat. A shudder of horror raced through her. Guilt rested heavily on her shoulders for Tina being involved in the killer’s plans for her.

“Lana, I’m fine. Jessie made sure of it. He pestered every doctor and nurse who came near me until they were positive I was okay, or else!” She started to

laugh but caught her breath, gasping in agony.

Immediately, Jessie was at her side, reaching for the medication button, but Tina stopped him in a breathy voice. “No, not yet, please, honey. I want to visit with Lana and that stuff knocks me out.”

Receiving a look from Jessie that said, “*No more making her laugh or else,*” Lana nodded seriously. She was impressed with his protective attitude. Tina deserved to be taken care of by someone like him who was strong and caring. Yes, that was what she needed.

Brett moved closer and spoke with Tina for a few minutes then he and Lana finally left her with Jessie, promising to return soon for another visit.



Keeping his arm around Lana as they walked out of the building into the sunshine, his eyes carefully scanning the surrounding area.

“I think I need to take you shopping, kitten. You could use a new wardrobe.” Brett kissed her forehead then smiled at her joyful expression.

“You mean you aren’t going to keep me half-naked in your room for days on end, with no phone, no TV, nothing to read, and only your company?” She fluttered her eyes in pretended wonder.

“Now that you put it that way, maybe we’ll skip the shopping.” Brett waggled his eyebrows and twirled an invisible handlebar moustache.

Laughing, she cried out, “No! Please. Take me shopping.” With a wicked grin, she continued in a sexy voice, “If you do, we can play captive anytime you want to, with or without the lock.” Her suggestive look had him groaning.

“Let’s make this shopping spree quick. Just how fast do you shop?” Brett hoped she was a fast shopper.

“Well...” She drew the word out, bringing another groan from Brett. “I think the last time I was shopping for a wardrobe it did take a *very* long time—many hours, in fact. It could even lead to days upon days of shopping.”

“Noooo...” Brett groaned. “Say it isn’t so!”

“Tell you what, you can be my fashion consultant. That should speed things up.”

Lana’s wicked grin told him she was looking forward to giving him a little payback. Still, he nodded with enthusiasm, and agreed.



After the first two hours his enthusiasm had slipped into frustration. Sexual frustration! Especially when Lana modeled for him with her sexy walk, shooting him sultry looks as she wiggled her hips playfully. He was beside himself by the time they left the stores.

Prayers that his groan of false anguish would make her feel sorry for him went unanswered when she told him he was taking her out for dinner to a nice

restaurant. He gave in out of sheer guilt after keeping her captive. They found a quiet booth at the back of a romantic restaurant where he ordered them a bottle of white wine and sat back, watching her in the candlelight.

“Just wait until I get you home, young lady. You owe me big time. These past few hours watching you wiggle your butt in front of me were worse torture than your whole five days as my captive.” Smiling with promise, he met her sneaky gaze with his own.

The waiter had arrived with the wine, and although his eyes widened slightly as he overheard Brett’s words, he remained the professional and served the drink without missing a beat. Nodding, his face serious, he moved away from the table.

“You’d better check your wine for arsenic after he heard that conversation.” Lana snickered.

Rolling his eyes, he took her hand in his and nibbled on her soft knuckles.

Making up for lost time, Lana and Brett spent the next hour wining and dining. It was getting late when they finally started for home.

Arms around each other, free hands full of shopping bags, Brett walked Lana home to his apartment, looking forward to an evening with her.

When they approached Brett’s apartment door, there was a dead rat on the floor with its throat slit. The killer’s trademark note was propped up beside it.

Brett pulled out his gun, alert and ready for trouble as he scanned the hallway.

Gagging, Lana placed her hand over her stomach and turned her head from the sight.

Brett picked up the note with a pen.

“Let’s get you away from the door. Come on down the hall to the end.”

Keeping his arm around her, he called the station and then Jessie.

Not taking a chance of opening the door with Lana present in case there was another bomb, Brett walked her toward the exit. He also called the superintendent and asked him to block the doors and evacuate the building just in case. He was taking no chances.

Opening the retrieved note, he read it aloud, “*I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er.*”

Holding Lana close in his arms, he kissed the top of her head. “Guess he found you, kitten.”

Hearing the sirens, Brett stayed put. There was no way he was going to leave her side.



The wonderful day was forgotten, the terror returning full blast. Guilt rode Lana hard as she remembered her challenge on TV.

“...*Stop being a coward and face me personally. No one else has to die. I’m ready to meet*

with you. Enough is enough. Please leave the authors alone—None of the novels get published without my say so. For anyone planning to use this as an opportunity to gain fame with false claims of being the murderer, think again. The police will be thoroughly checking any and all responses. Only the killer and I know how I can identify him...”

Chills raced up her spine when she thought of the turmoil she may have created. The stairway door opened, and two officers with guns drawn came through, stopping when they recognized Brett.

Putting his gun back in his holster, Brett explained to them what was going on, indicating the dead rat and the note hanging from his pen.

The bomb squad came in next. Using protective shielding, they checked the door with scanning equipment then used Brett’s key to open the apartment door. There was no bomb this time.

Remaining silent throughout the entire ordeal, she brushed past Brett and went to the bedroom after the apartment had been checked and the rat removed.



Two hours later, she sat forlornly on the edge of the bed staring out the window. There were no tears, just a dead calm that was unlike her.

Leaning on the doorframe, Brett watched Lana’s slumped back. He didn’t know what to say to her so he helped her in the only way he knew. Scooping her

up in his arms, he held her close while he kissed her. Pulling back, she tucked her head under his chin.

Her voice miserable with guilt, she whispered, “I’ve screwed up big time, Brett. What in the world am I going to do?”

Laying her down on the sheets, he gently brushed her hair back from her face, kissing the delicate mole to the right side of her mouth.

“It’s going to be fine, Lana. I’ll make sure of it. Just let me handle it from now on, okay?”

Nodding sadly, she rolled over and stared into space, rejecting his comfort. Brett undressed her and tucked her into bed. Kissing her tenderly on her forehead, he left her alone.

Once in the living room, he turned on the TV for the news. He was surprised to see his apartment and the emergency vehicles with lights flashing. “They work fast, those reporters.”

Brett started thinking about her broadcast message and how he could possibly make it work to their advantage. It was going to be very difficult keeping Lana safe until the madman was caught. Hiding her wasn’t an option since the killer would just target another author.

What he couldn’t figure out was what had motivated the killer to stop his murder spree. Brett had kept Lana out of the killer’s grasp so far, but somehow it

seemed more like a personal vendetta. The more times Lana evaded him, the longer he waited between kills.

Picking up the phone, he called Jessie. After a long conversation he hung up and sat staring into space, thinking over their conversation. Some things were becoming clearer. The background checks on the staff at the firm indicated three potential suspects. Now it was just a matter of weeding them out to unmask the real killer.

Looking toward the bedroom, Brett decided that telling Lana about the three suspects at her firm wouldn't be a good idea in case her gift gave her away. Sighing, he joined her in the bedroom and turned out the lights. Pulling her close, he held her protected within the circle of his arms.

Chapter Seventeen

Vengeance of Romance

The room was dark but for the wrought-iron vent in the floor that lay over top of the bathroom downstairs. Light shone through it, highlighting the face of the child watching the scene unfolding below.

The child's mother read romance novels every day, escaping from the abuse of her alcoholic husband. She lived in a dream world where there was no pain and seldom spoke to those around her. Rarely cooking or doing household chores, the woman ignored the cries and needs of her only child.

At ten years of age, the child cooked and cleaned, feeding the mother and brushing her hair when she was unaware of the world around her.

When the father arrived home each night, drunk and angry, the child would hide in the bedroom closet shaking in fear. Small hands covered tender ears while the mother's screams rang out over the sounds of fists beating her frail body.

Afterwards, Mother would speak Shakespearean quotes aloud in a disjointed voice, too hurt to move, chilling the child with the hopelessness in her tone and in her vacant eyes.

The only time Mother would arouse from her lost world was when the child put a romance novel in her hands. Slowly lowering her eyes to the book, the mother soon immersed herself in her “other” world—a world filled with happiness and love.

Tonight was different, though. Father was home and had finally finished beating Mother. He was more drunk than usual this time so it had been brief. Mother was acting stranger than normal.

Sneaking quietly out of the closet at the sound of the bathtub filling, curious gray eyes watched through the vent while Mother hummed and filled the tub with bubble bath. After turning off the water, she left the room, leaving a trail of blood drops behind from her dripping nose.

Hearing voices, the child watched the door in breathless silence. Soon Father staggered into the room, followed by a different woman.

“Come, my lord. I will bathe you and read to you. Your every wish will be my command,” Mother said in a sing-song voice.

Mother had become a caring and sweet maiden, about to bathe her lord and master. She stripped him down while he swayed, watching her with astonished eyes.

“What are you up to?” he growled, weaving on his feet.

Father grabbed at her breast, pinching it viciously.

Wincing, she continued to play her role.

“I just wanted to welcome you home after a hard day of work, my lord. It’s my duty as your

wife, is it not?" she said, smiling up at him as she stripped his shirt off, then his pants.

Remaining in character, Mother helped him into the tub, giggling as water sloshed over the sides when he hit the bottom hard.

"There you go. Just lie back now and I'll get your drink. You must be tired after working so hard. Poor darling," she cooed, tenderly brushing his hair to the side. Her nose still bled and scarlet drops fell, marring the white floor and her white nightgown.

He lay back, closing his eyes for a minute then yelled, "Hurry the hell up! Where's my drink, woman?"

In a musical voice that the child had never heard before, Mother spoke soothingly to him as she handed him a glass filled with amber liquor.

"Here you are, darling. I wanted to make sure it was mixed properly. I know how you like it. Go ahead, drink up."

Grabbing her wrist his grip cruel, he stared at her suspiciously for a minute but then, satisfied with her cringing reaction, took the drink and swallowed it in one long gulp.

Mother sat on the closed toilet seat and began to mutter quotes from Shakespeare, then picked up her novel. Opening it to a marked page, she read aloud from the book.

"He lay in the bath, surrounded by bubbles..." Mother smiled at him and continued in her soothing voice, "...his body relaxing under the effects of the drink she had poured him." Looking up at him again, she smiled gently.

Motioning her to keep going, he grabbed at his genitals, seemingly pleased with the unexpected attention.

“Soon, his eyes began to grow heavy. The drug she had slipped him was beginning to work. His reign of terror was coming to an end,” Mother said, looking down at him with glee in her eyes.

Smiling at him sweetly, she giggled as his eyes begin to lose focus and he realized that she had drugged him and was reading about a murder, his murder.

He grabbed for her but she was too far from him, cackling in delight. Trying to get up, he lost his grip and fell back into the tub, water sloshing over the sides.

Mother set the book aside. Caressing the worn pages, she watched him until he was too weak to fight her. Then she stood up and laid it aside, her face filled with hatred now.

Her voice harsh with loathing, she snarled, “You will die for your crimes, you bastard! Never again will you hurt me, or anyone else.” Mother began to roll up her sleeves.

Father was panting now, unable to speak, his eyes wild with terror. The child’s gray eyes jerked when his identical gaze met them through the vent in a plea for help. The child covered its mouth with both hands but continued to watch as Mother leaned over and spit in Father’s face.

“Suit the action to the word, the word to the action,” Mother quoted from Hamlet. Then she screamed at the top of her lungs and lunged at him, shoving his shoulders down deeper into the tub.

His struggles were weak against her. Within a few moments there was no movement in the

water, yet she still shoved at him, holding him under the water, screaming at him for all of the foul deeds he had forced on her.

When she ran out of things to yell at him, her voice hoarse, she finally, slowly released him. He didn't float to the surface but lay still beneath the water, dead.

Mother dried her hands calmly and picked up her novel, kissing the cover. Humming softly, she left the bathroom, her expression serene.

Gasping for breath, the child's eyes still watched the water as Father's face floated near the surface, his sightless eyes wide and accusing.

Pulling away from the vent, the trembling child moved back into the closet to escape the cruel face and began to rock back and forth, unsure of what to do. All through the night, the child kept vigil in the dark, too afraid to leave its haven.

The next morning the child left the closet and crept down the hall to Mother's room. She lay sprawled on her back on the bed, her skin sheet white, eyes wide yet peaceful. There was a bottle of alcohol and an opened pill bottle that lay tipped on its side, only a few pills visible. The romance novel lay face down on her chest. The title read, Desperate Revenge.

Backing from the room, the child ran from the house, walking for hours until finally a concerned citizen noticed the vacant look of shock on the child's face and called the police.

It took hours before the child was identified and taken back to the house, fighting in silent terror, refusing to enter the house. After a quick search, the police discovered why.

It was a very long time before the child would speak again, scarred for life by a chapter in a romance novel.



Immersed in work, Lana's head was bent over her paperwork, Brett's over his laptop. When his cell phone rang, he shot Lana an apologetic look and answered it.

"Colton—Right." He closed his cell phone and went right back to work.

It was difficult, but he bit back a grin when he touched Lana's thoughts and knew she was aching to ask him what that was all about. Faking a cough to hide his smile, he went back to work, typing quickly.

He felt her burning curiosity as Lana looked back down at her papers, sighing. It took her half an hour before she finally looked at the clock. Still, she hadn't spoken aloud, but he was in her thoughts.

"Yeah, I'm starved." Brett still watched his computer screen.

Seething, Lana tapped a pen on the desk. "You know, you can be such a pain in the butt!"

His eyes swung up to look into hers in all innocence. "What did I do now?" He could tell she caught the twinkle in his eyes that told he was baiting her.

"You know exactly what you did. I wish I could read your mind too, but since you can read mine, why don't you give it a shot right now?" she said,

narrowing her eyes.

Laughing, Brett pushed the laptop away and jumped up to grab her by the waist when she tried to run around the desk away from him.



Lana let out a little squeak, trying to keep it down so her staff wouldn't think she was '*doing the nasty*' in her office...again! Spinning around in his arms, she soon met his lips while her hands twined through his silky hair.

When Brett lifted his head finally, she could see the love shining from his eyes.

"Would you like to go out or order in?"

"Out? In?" she whispered in confusion.

Squeezing her closer to him, he laughed. "Lunch? Out or in?"

"Oh...ah, you can choose." Lana felt like she was losing it big time. She was barely able to put a sentence together when he was around.

"Well, let's go out for a while, shall we?" He put on his sexiest smile for her, distracting her even more.

"Sure. Let me just inform Deanna first." Picking up her intercom, she called the line but received no response.

"That's strange! She never leaves her desk for lunch without telling me first. I'll leave her a note on the way out." At the word "note" Lana shuddered.

Knowing instantly where her mind went, Brett kissed her as a distraction. It worked quite well. Capturing her hand, he led her from the room.

Deanna's desk looked as neat as usual. Lana left a note and followed Brett to the elevator.

As the doors opened Deanna came out in a hurry but came to an abrupt halt when she saw Lana and Brett. "Oh, you startled me!" She held her hand over her chest as she panted.

"Sorry, Deanna," Lana said, noticing the woman's agitation. "Is something wrong?"

Looking quickly over her shoulder at the closing elevator doors, Deanna hesitated before sighing then told them, "I think a man was following me down the street."

With a nervous laugh, she continued, "It could be just my imagination with all the—you know, all of the bad things happening around here, but it scared me." She rubbed her hands down the sides of her arms and jumped when the elevator bell dinged.

Brett placed his hand on Lana's shoulder. "Would you like me to have someone look for the man, Deanna?"

"Look for him? Oh, no, sir, that's okay. I might have just imagined it after all. I'd better get back to work. Excuse me." Deanna was about to walk away but Lana

put a hand on her arm, stopping her.

“Please, Deanna. Take a longer lunch today. You work too hard and obviously this has shaken you. You’ll get paid for it, so please take an extra hour off, okay?”

Nodding briefly, Deanna thanked Lana and moved away.

When Brett pushed the button for the elevator, she sighed.

“The stress is getting to everyone around here. It’s a wonder we get any work done at all.”

Turning back to her, Brett said with confidence, “It’ll be over soon then things will get back to normal.”

She had to wait until they were on the elevator before she could respond. “What do you know, Brett?” Her voice was a low whisper since they weren’t alone.

When he only smiled at her and remained silent, Lana’s eyes narrowed and she kicked him gently, trying to be inconspicuous.

Smirking, he ignored her.

Crossing her arms in a huff, she tapped her foot until the doors opened and they moved into the lobby. George smiled at them from his desk, so they stopped to say hello.

“How are you, George? It’s good to see you.” Lana shook his hand.

“Likewise, Ms. Anderson. I’ve been thinking about you a lot. I hope you’re

doing okay, what with all the murders and such.” George looked worried.

Laughing, Lana said she was just fine and chatted with him for a few more minutes until Brett gently urged her along. She knew she had plenty of work to do so she said goodbye and left with him.

Once seated in a local restaurant, she frowned, waiting until the order was taken before she kicked him in the shin under the table. “Spill!”

An innocent expression on his face, Brett cried out, “Oww! Spill what?” He made a big show of rubbing his leg as if she’d kicked him with steel-toed boots.

Unable to hide her frustration, she felt heat in her cheeks. “You know exactly what, Brett. Stop playing with me and tell me what you know about—”

The waiter suddenly arrived with their drinks and served them. Lana sat back with a frown until he was done, then pounced on Brett once again as soon as they were alone.

“Tell me what’s going on. Now, or I’m leaving,” Lana hissed, sending him some nasty mental ideas, grinding her teeth when he only laughed in delight.

“There’s nothing new, Lana. I just have a gut feeling that the killings are going to stop soon. Honestly.” Even though Brett looked like he was telling the honest-to-God truth, she didn’t believe him for a minute.

“You lie like a rug, Brett.” Throwing down her napkin she made a move to get up and leave. “What ever happened to *I’ll always tell you the truth, even if you don’t*

want to hear it'...hmm?"

Grabbing her arm, Brett suddenly turned serious, very serious. "You're not going anywhere. Now sit down, Lana, or we'll go back to the apartment and continue what we started last week."

Lana knew he meant locking her up again and sat down in a huff, anger simmering in her stomach. She refused to look at him or even talk to him throughout the entire meal. She cut her steak with vicious strokes of the knife, her fury building.

"Lana," Brett said in warning, nodding to the shaking dishes.

She threw down her utensils and took a deep breath. Her eyes began to fill with unshed tears. It took her a few minutes before she was finally able to calm herself down enough to keep the dishes safe from destruction. Dropping her head into her hands she groaned. She didn't finish her meal. Her appetite was gone.

By the time they were done and Brett was about to pick up the check, Lana swept it out from under his hand and briskly went to pay for it herself.

With a lop-sided grin, Brett followed her. Shaking his head, he led her outside and as usual, scanned the streets while they walked back to the office.



That night, Lana lay on the bed with her back to him, still furious at him for keeping secrets.

Lying beside her on his back with his hands behind his head, Brett kept wiggling his foot until with a loud shriek she left the room, grabbed a blanket and pillow from the hall cupboard and headed for the couch.

That lasted all of five minutes before Brett came to her, lifted her up, blanket and all, and carried her back to bed while she fought and yelled at him.

By mistake, she caught his chin with a lucky punch and stopped cold, realizing with horror what she had done. Holding her hand over her mouth, she stared into his burning gaze.

Brett dropped her roughly on the bed, turned the lights off then climbed back in beside her in silence, turning his back on her.

She whispered, "I'm sorry, Brett. I didn't mean to hit you."

Silence reigned.

Lana rolled over with her back to him and lay in the dark for a long time listening to him breathe, finally nodding off.



She didn't awaken when he pulled her close to him and placed a tender kiss on her temple.

It took him a long time to fall asleep, feeling guilty about keeping the information from her that he'd just received about the killer. Protecting his woman was going to be the death of him, and not because of the killer.

Chapter Eighteen

A Lesson Learned the Hard Way

Alone in her office for the first time since the day Brett had walked into her life, Lana found that being by herself wasn't what it used to be. She missed his comforting presence, even though they were still angry with one another.

Sighing and running her fingers through her loose hair, she tried to concentrate on her work. When she heard a crash and saw another smashed coffee mug, she gave up.

Standing, she opened the door and was about to head home alone when she saw a man sitting in the hall on a chair, reading a newspaper. He was an undercover cop assigned to watch her for the day.

Looking up at Lana, he was about to stand up when she shook her head and put her hand up to indicate she wasn't going anywhere. He was her bodyguard and she wasn't happy about it.

Telling Deanna she was just going for a break, she headed to the cafeteria. Lana tensed when she felt the cop following her, feeling as though she was going crazy. She desperately wanted to run away, anywhere she could rather than face the mess she was in.

The man's cell phone rang and she could hear him talking quietly while she poured a coffee and bought a chocolate bar from the vending machine.

Brett knew how she was feeling, even from the station. The guard handed her the phone without a word. Lana growled into it, "What?"

Smothering a smirk, the guard cleared his throat and poured himself a coffee while she talked to Brett.

"I-am-not-planning-on-leaving-the-building!" she emphasized, raising her voice. Lana gripped the phone tighter. She listened for another minute then cried out, "Oh, go to hell!" She practically threw the phone back at the guard.

Once she'd tossed the coffee cup into the sink, she left the room in a huff, heading to the washroom. She turned abruptly when the guard came up hard on her heels and pointed a warning finger at him.

"You are *not* coming in here, so just back off!" She practically ran into the bathroom, closing the door firmly behind her, barely able to keep from slamming it.

Standing in front of the mirror, Lana put her hands over her face and felt like screaming at the top of her lungs in frustration.

Hearing a toilet flush, she had just barely pulled herself together when Anna Warrington came out of a stall and moved to the sink to wash her hands.

Smiling wryly at Lana, she said, "You can barely move an inch before Mr.

Colton or a cop is on your tail. I feel for you, Lana.”

Running her hand through her hair again, Lana nodded, “Yeah, I know that they’re just trying to keep me safe, but this is getting ridiculous.”

Drying her hands, Anna nodded. “Let me know if you want me to distract your guard so you can make a getaway. I hate it when men think they’re so superior; like we ‘delicate flowers’ can’t take care of ourselves.”

Lana laughed, “Anna, you are definitely the kind of gal I want on my team when the going gets tough. I doubt many men could take you on and survive.”

The woman smiled with confidence. “You’ve got that right. Just call me if you want my help.” Winking, she left the washroom.

Feeling a little better, Lana was about to head back to work when she realized that Anna had offered her an out. But why would she, when she knew Lana was in danger?

Suspicion burned in her stomach as she leaned back against the wall. Was she going to start doubting every one of her employees? Anna might just want to help Lana after all, not kill her. But she had had a bruise on her temple the day after Lana had been attacked. Brett hadn’t told her if the story about the accident at the gym had been corroborated.

Ready to scream from the thoughts spinning through her mind, she began washing her face with cold water.

Realizing that Brett was probably still tuned in to her, a plan began to form in her mind. Smiling deviously, Lana closed her eyes and concentrated on the terror she had felt recently and kept it up for the next ten minutes.



In the middle of a meeting with his chief, Brett suddenly got the feeling in his gut that Lana was in big trouble. Cold terror rose in him, and he told his boss he had to leave.

He went tearing out of the office, grabbing his cell phone as he ran. Unable to remember the guard's cell number, he dialed Jessie and told him Lana was in trouble.

Brett found a fellow cop parked out front in his squad car. Jumping in the passenger seat, he quickly explained the situation. In seconds they were racing over to Lana's office with sirens sounding and lights flashing.

The elevators were excruciatingly slow, but taking the stairs up thirty floors would take forever—if it didn't kill him first.

Running down the corridor, Brett ran past Deanna's desk and crashed through Lana's office door. His heart accelerated when he found it empty.

Frantically, he asked Deanna where Lana was. She pointed towards the bathroom in silence, a look of fear on her face at his actions.

He found the guard standing outside the ladies room, leaning against the

wall, looking bored. Brett barked, “Where is Lana Anderson?” Tension rode his shoulders, his muscles taut with unleashed power.

The guard came to life, pointing at the door. Kicking it open, Brett came to an abrupt stop when he saw her calmly brushing her hair, looking innocent, calm, and composed.

“Oh, it’s you. Do you always use the ladies room?” Her tone was as dry as dust.

Speechless for a minute, his eyes narrowed when she continued to brush her hair.

“You did that on purpose,” he ground out in fury.

Raising a delicate brow, Lana asked in all innocence, “*What* on Earth are you talking about?”

Unable to prove his claim, Brett just stood there, his mouth opening and closing like a guppy’s.

Lana finished her ministrations and moved past him, heading back to her office. Neither the guard nor Brett moved an inch as they watched the way her hips swayed as she walked away from them.

Swallowing hard, Brett relieved the guard of duty. Taking a deep breath, he prepared to face the devious little witch, his eyes narrowed.

Employees stared at him with knowing smirks as he passed by, but he did

his best to ignore them as he moved toward Lana's door with determination.

She was sitting at her desk, relaxed and laughing low in her throat when he entered the room and closed the door behind him, locking it. Crossing his arms over his chest, Brett waited for the call to end until he realized she wasn't talking to anyone. She was faking the call to put him off.

She shrieked when he spun her chair around and yanked the phone from her grasp.

"What the hell are you—" she started in outrage.

Pointing his finger at her, not an inch from her nose, he growled, "Not another word, you. Not one more word! I've put up with a lot of crap from you up until now, but this one takes the cake."

Cutting her off before she could speak, he kept going.

"You have two choices, woman." Using his fingers, he emphasized his points. "One, you pack your stuff up and walk quietly with me while I take you home, or two, I throw you over my shoulder and carry you there, screaming or not. What is it going to be?"

Placing his hands on his hips, he gave her a moment. He was in a lethal mood, and she knew the jig was up.

Unfortunately, her stubborn temper flared, chin rising a notch in defiance. Before she could say a word, he growled, "Fine!" He picked her up and threw her

over his shoulder.

“Stop! Brett, stop it. I’ll go quietly, I promise. Put me down. Put me down now!” Lana shrieked.

Beyond fury, he didn’t say a word. Unlocking the door, he walked with long, purposeful strides to the elevator while she shrieked and punched his back all the way.



The staff was laughing and clapping. Lana was so embarrassed she couldn’t lift her face. Falling silent, she stopped fighting him and just hung there while he waited for the elevator. Her face flamed with heat and she wanted to strangle him.

“I’m going to be sick.”

The elevator doors closed on them. She didn’t think he’d heard her because she was still upside down, until she gagged.

Swinging her smoothly into a standing position, Brett steadied her then held up that hated finger, shaking his head, warning her to silence. His face was mottled red with fury, the veins in his neck standing out, and she knew she’d better not say a word all the way home.

Back at the apartment, Lana found herself locked in the bedroom once again. Brett hadn’t said one word on the way home and she was shaking with her emotions. She refused to think about giving in, having finally put one notch in her

belt in the battle between them.

She'd been alone in the room for two hours before her stomach began to growl and grumble. There hadn't been a sound from Brett in the other room. She tried to ignore it but finally had to give in and call Brett to take her to the kitchen.

Silent and stern, Brett opened the door allowing Lana to slip past him. When she had finished eating and gone to the bathroom, she went straight back to the bedroom without looking at him, cringing when the door closed and the lock clicked into place behind her.



Ten minutes later, the doorbell rang. Brett went to answer it, finding the long hallway empty. Shrugging, he closed the door and went back to the living room.

Just as he was about to sit in his chair, the doorbell rang again. This time he pulled his gun out of its holster. Once again, there was no one there. Scratching his head, he put his gun away and started back to the living room.

This time when the bell rang, Brett moved swiftly to open the door, looking both ways down the hall. There was no one there. He closed the door with a bang and stood there.

Aggravated now, when the bell went off again, he was ready and yanked it open. Still, there was no one visible.

Suddenly tilting his head, he looked back toward his bedroom, frowning. Closing the door behind him, he ignored the bell. When he sensed her laughter, he opened the lock and door in one swift move, causing Lana to squeal in surprise. Her face was covered in tears of mirth. His eyes narrowed.

She was laughing even harder now, trying to talk but only able to point at him while she shook with glee.

Brett crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow. “Nicky–Nicky–Nine–Doors? Another little trick you didn’t tell me about?” he asked, referring to a prank he used to play as a kid. He would knock on doors and run away before the owner could answer it. He couldn’t help but smile at her and was about to go over to the bed to kiss her when the bell rang again.

Lana roared with laughter, shaking her head in denial. “Not...me!” was all she could manage.

Closing the door behind him, he smiled all the way to the front door.

He found Jessie and Tina in the hall.

“Hi. Come on in.” His humor was restored.

“They just let her out of the hospital, but she refused to come home with me until she saw her best buddy,” Jessie grumbled with disapproval.

“Aw, you came all the way here just to see me? That’s nice,” Brett teased.

“Not you, you gorgeous ape. Where’s my best friend?”

“She’s resting. I’ll get her. Why don’t you two head for the living room?”

“Okay.” Tina leaned on Jessie’s arm and walked slowly with him into the other room.

Going back to the spare bedroom, Brett picked up some clothing for Lana and took it to her.

“Tina’s here to see you.”

“Oh, so I can get out of detention and visit her. You’re such a nice principal.” She was wiping the last of the tears of laughter from her eyes as she suddenly sobered.

Sighing, Brett put his hands on her shoulders.

“Lana, let’s call a truce for this visit. Please? I’m tired of fighting with you.”

She inhaled a deep breath. “You’re right. I’ll give if you will.”

“Deal.” Brett kissed her then left her to get dressed.



Walking into the living room, Brett poured Lana a drink of whiskey with water and ice and opened a beer. Jessie was driving and Tina was on medication so they opted for cola.

“Lana will just be a minute.”

“What did you do, tie her to the bed?” Tina asked, grinning.

“Just about,” Jessie muttered.

A red flush filled Brett's cheeks and Tina started to laugh but groaned instead, holding her ribs.

"Tina, no laughing, or I'm taking you home!

"Aren't you sweet," she crooned, caressing his cheek.

Jessie nearly melted into a puddle. Brett almost choked on his drink as he watched his friend. Tina had him eating out of her hand, literally.

"Hi, everyone." Lana entered the room with a wide smile.

She went to Tina and kissed her cheek, forgoing the hug to save her ribs.

"You look none the worse for wear, chicky!" Tina said her voice a bit breathy.

"I'm doing just fine. Getting a little cabin fever, mind you, but doing just fine. How about you? Are you heading home?"

"No. I'm heading over to Jessie's place. His mom is going to take care of me while he's at work. I'm going to stay there until this is all over and done with."

Tina looked serious for the first time. "Lana, please don't take any chances. Let Brett and Jessie take care of the killer. I just can't stand the thought of losing you."

"I know." Putting her hand on Tina's, Lana put on a brave face. "Don't you worry about me, girlfriend. You just take care of yourself."

"Jessie, can you help me in the kitchen?" Brett nodded at him to leave the

room. Once they'd left, Lana let out a very unladylike snort.

"Right, like the men are going to do the dishes or something. Actually, I can't say that. Brett's very tidy—for a man. They just want to talk about me behind my back."

"What you did—that broadcast—Lana, you took a big chance. I'm worried about you."

"Tina, I'm just fine."

"Did you call your parents, or Brandon?"

"No, and don't you dare. If they haven't seen the broadcast, then I'd prefer they don't find out about it. My brother knows me well enough since he's my twin, and he knows that I don't back down from a fight."

"I know I've never seen you run. So...tell me, is he really great in bed?"

Laughing, Lana winked. "Now I know you're going to be all right. I've missed you, Tina."

"I've missed you, too. I hope the guys catch the bastard who's doing all this and let you get back to your life!"

"Me too, pal, me too."



That evening at his apartment, Brett checked in with the station and was told there wasn't any new information about the case or the employees'

background checks. He asked them to call his cell phone if anything changed and went to get Lana.

“Come on.” Holding out his hand he waited for her to accept it.

“Come on where?” she asked, taking it.

“Let’s go for a long walk.”

“Now that’s an idea I like. But what about...”

“I have my gun and there are patrols going by frequently, watching over you.”

“I’m honored.”

While they walked hand-in-hand, Brett and Lana talked about the simple things in their lives...like growing up and their first kiss.

“I had a motorcycle when I was in my early twenties. The first year I was a cop, I saw so many fatal accidents involving bikes that I sold it and bought a responsible four-door car.”

“Good move,” Lana said. “I never liked life in the fast lane. I would take a responsible car over any fancy speed-demon car or bike any day. My brother is just the opposite. Nothing is too fast or too dangerous for him to try.”

“I like him already. Maybe I can earn some money for the department by following him around giving him speeding tickets.”

She laughed and slapped his arm playfully. “You’d better not. He’s my twin

and I adore him.”

The walk lasted close to an hour while they teased and joked with each other, feeling relaxed and happy by the time they arrived at the corner store a block from his home.

“Brett, can we get some chips and dip and rent a movie? I want to snuggle up in front of the TV with you.”

“Sounds like a great plan.” They walked arm-in-arm into the store.

Moving to the back where the movies were kept, Lana and Brett took their time looking over the videos, laughing over each other’s choices. Brett liked action-adventure and war movies, while Lana liked comedies, chick flicks, and action-adventure.

“I say we rent a Jackie Chan movie. Jessie always pretends to be related to him since they have the same last name. Did you know when we were rookies, Jessie used to practice his martial arts skills on me, pretending he was Jackie?”

Lana laughed in delight.

“I’m going to ask Jessie to show me a few moves so I can keep you in line.”

Pulling his head down for a kiss, Lana was soon lost in the wonder of his mouth until they heard a shout and a scream from the front of the store.



Brett immediately pulled her down out of sight. “Stay down, Lana. There’s a

guy robbing the store,” he whispered. He held her chin, looking into her eyes. “Promise me you’ll stay down. Please?” He handed her his cell phone. “Call 911. Tell them there’s a cop in the store and give them my name.”

Nodding, she stayed hidden while he moved on silent feet toward the front of the store, pulling his gun from his shoulder holster.

The young cashier was crying, “Okay, okay. I’ll give you whatever you want. Just don’t shoot me, please.”

The teenager stood with her hands up, her body shaking, tears streaming down her face.

The thief had on a ski mask and waved a gun at her. Brett didn’t see any accomplices hanging around outside the door so he moved ahead with stealth.

The girl was reaching slowly downwards to open the cash drawer for the money, sobbing. Brett saw the crook’s eyes follow her hands. He used that distraction to make his move.

“Police! Freeze! Drop your gun now!” he yelled.

The crook swung around with his gun, but before he could fire, Brett was forced to shoot him, landing a shot in his gun arm and one in his shoulder.

The man’s gun went off in reaction, and Brett moved forward quickly to disarm him and take him to the ground.

Kicking the thug’s weapon away, he held his own gun on the culprit and

said in a lethal tone, “Don’t you move a muscle, buddy! I mean it. You’re under arrest.” Brett’s eyes scanned the street with caution then slid back to the prone man.

Taking a quick look over his shoulder, Brett called, “Lana, please, can you come up here?”

She ran to the front.

“See what you can do to calm the young lady down, okay?” he asked quietly.

The terrified girl was still screaming and shaking.

“All right, Brett.” Lana moved around the criminal and put the cell phone back to her ear. She put an arm around the young woman and held her close while explaining the situation to the 911 operator.

“The police and an ambulance are on the way. Should I call her family, Brett?” Lana was cool, calm, and efficient, and he was proud of her. He nodded.

Lana got the young woman’s phone number and called her parents and the storeowner, then spent the next few minutes calming her until help arrived. The poor thing was beginning to hyperventilate.

“Brett, she looks like she’s going to faint,” Lana cried out in alarm.

“Sit her down and have her put her head between her knees. Get her to take deep breaths.” Brett took his badge out and held it up toward the door while holding his gun on the thief, who groaned and swore at Brett. He didn’t want the

police to mistake him for an accomplice.

“Watch your language, buddy. There are ladies present,” Brett warned. The crook kept swearing anyway, since he was clearly in a great deal of pain. Blood was pooling on the floor, but Brett was sure he’d be fine until help arrived and kept his steady gun on the creep.

The police entered the store with weapons drawn a few minutes later, the paramedics moving in right behind them.

One of the officers recognized Brett from his precinct. “Can’t take a night off once in a while, Colton?” he joked.

Brett put his gun and badge away and shook the officer’s hand. He explained the situation, and the cop wrote on his notepad while his partner and the paramedics worked on the crook.

Finally, he went over to Lana. She was still calming the girl, who was feeling better though still trembling, her eyes wide with fear.

Wiping the girl’s tears, Lana murmured, “It’s okay now. Your parents will be here shortly. You hang in there now, okay, Lisa?”

Lisa just nodded her head, tears still flowing, and threw her arms around Lana’s neck, holding on for dear life, her whole body shaking with reaction. When the police let her parents into the store after the thief was taken away to the hospital, Lana was able to step back.

Since Brett had given his statement, Lana wouldn't be required to do so, leaving them able to exit the store. Holding Lana close with his arm around her shoulder, Brett quipped, "Guess we don't get chips and dip, eh?"

"Huh! I'm just thankful Lisa didn't get hurt, she was..." Lana stopped in the street. "Brett, you're hurt!" She looked at his arm in horror. There was a small amount of blood just above his elbow.

"I'm fine, kitten. It's just a scratch."

"Like hell it is! Let's go back to the ambulance, now, Brett!" she cried. She tried to turn him around to go back, but he stopped her.

Holding her soft cheeks captive in his hands, he looked her in the eyes, "I'm fine. It is just a scratch, Lana. Let's get home and we can take a look at it. You're overreacting." The streetlight above them went out as it shattered.

"I am not over—" He stopped her from finishing her sentence since his lips were in the way, kissing her until she stopped fighting him.

Lifting his head when she was calm, he smiled at her. "Come on, Lana. I'm taking you home now."



Ten minutes later, they were in the bathroom washing his "scratch." It was a groove in his arm about two inches long, and it bled until she padded and wrapped it tightly in a bandage. Pulling the gauze snugly around his wound, she made him

wince.

“A scratch! Yeah, right,” she snapped, angry with him for scaring her half to death. Her whole body began to shake as reaction set in.

Holding her close, Brett walked her to the bedroom and stripped her down, tucking her into bed. He leaned over and kissed her head, about to leave her there, but she pulled his head down and began kissing him frantically. Reaching for his belt buckle she tore at it, trying to get rid of his pants.

Brett was naked and with her in seconds. They made love like wildfire, their passion burning brighter than flames. Her fear made her wild with need, and he responded with equal passion.

His hands were everywhere, and Lana screamed in ecstasy when she finally came, Brett following right behind her.

Lying quietly for a long time while they caught their breath, Lana was lost deep in thought. She was remembering the prank she had pulled on him earlier that day, scaring him so badly.

“I know, Lana. Just let it go.”

Lifting her head she asked, “How can you just forgive and forget like that? After watching you take down that man in the store and seeing the blood, Lisa’s terror—I know now what you were feeling when I tricked you. I was horrible to do that to you. I just...I just—Oh, damn it! I’m so sorry, Brett. I’ll never do

something so stupid again. I promise.”

He kissed her. “You could make it up to me,” he said in a thoughtful tone.

Her eyes widened. She was ready to do whatever he wanted. “Anything, whatever you want. You name it.” Lana got up on her elbow and looked at him, ready to climb any mountain for him.

Biting back a grin, he said seriously, “Well, I have a really bad itch right in the middle of my back. If you could just...”

Punching his rock hard stomach lightly, she cried, “Damn you. Can’t you be serious for a minute?” Unable to help herself, she laughed and he joined her.

Chapter Nineteen

Weeding Out the Players

It was finally Friday night. Brett drove Lana back up to the cabin in the Muskoka Lakes. He'd made sure the locks were changed and there would be patrols in the neighborhood while they were there.

She was actually looking forward to being at the cabin this time and didn't once think about renting a fancy hotel room.

A hot tub would have been nice, though. Sliding her eyes to the side, she saw by his expression that Brett agreed. Sometimes it was nice that he knew her thoughts. *Sometimes.*

Once they arrived, Lana waited in the car with the doors locked until he checked the place out. When he gave the all-clear sign, she went straight into his arms for a sweet kiss.

Soon they were sitting close to each other near the wood stove warming their hands. The kettle boiled away on top for hot chocolate.

"I'm going to go take a long, hot bath." Heading to the bedroom, Lana grabbed her robe and a towel.

Noting Brett's amused smile, she knew he was reading her mind as she thought about the little gray mouse. Regardless of her fear of the furry creature, she braced herself anyway and headed for the bathroom.

Filling the tub with hot water, she added lavender bubble bath and lit a few candles, keeping a wary eye on the mouse hole. She had a romance novel with her that she wanted to read. It was by one of the new authors who had come to the firm, hoping to publish a book with them. Stripping down, Lana settled back in the tub and picked up the book, sighing in delight.

This is heavenly.

Hearing a scratching sound, she rolled her eyes and sat up, looking over at the little mouse. After shaking a warning finger at it, she pointed to her chest. "Okay, let's you and I get something straight. I'm the alpha female, and you..." she pointed at the mouse, "...are the non-alpha female, or male, or whatever. You got it? So, you stay on your side of the bathroom, and I'll stay on mine. Deal?" Sniffing, she lay back in the tub and went back to the book.



Expecting a scream, Brett listened at the door in the other room, his shoulders shaking with suppressed mirth. Lana apparently had figured out a way to conquer her fear of the mouse. *What a woman!* Pleased, he went back to his hot chocolate.



A dark figure stood outside the cabin in the dark watching Lana through the crack in the curtains. She was reading one of the damn books. Would she never learn her lesson?

The old-fashioned tub and the bubbles triggered a memory, and the killer tensed grimly, knowing the perfect murder scene for Lana. *It's just like what Lana talked about at the meeting. It's just like Father and Mother.*

Hatred tasted bitter as the 'true hero' watched her relaxed and happy as she read the filth. A curse slipped out. *Now it's only a matter of getting her alone to play out the scene. She's safe for tonight with Colton guarding her, but soon, soon she'll pay for her evil deeds.*

Clenching gloved hands, the figure faded into the night.



Half an hour later, Brett opened the bathroom door and leaned on the frame with his arms crossed. Doing her best to appear like she was absorbed in the novel, she was more than aware of him.

After he closed the door behind him and moved toward her, peeling off his clothing. Standing naked beside the tub, she completely ignored him. Even when he placed his hands on his hips, his head tilted while he waited, his member thrusting upwards, hard and ready to play, she kept her eyes on the book.

Lana had a difficult time keeping a straight face while playing her game. She finally said in a bored voice, “Hey, *Bartholomew*. This character in the book has quite a well endowed...ah...penis. I bet he’d be plenty of fun in the dark.”

She continued to pretend to read, licking her finger before turning the page and making faces while her eyes scanned the text as though the story shocked her senses.

“Bartholomew?” asked Brett.

Acting like she’d just noticed he was there, she said in a dull tone, “Oh, hello, Brett. I named my little friend there.” She waved her hand toward the mouse and went back to the book.

“Bartholomew? What kind of name is that?” he asked in amusement.

“What? Oh, it’s a very...*looonnnng* name.” She stretched the word and looked at his turgid shaft as if measuring it against her novel’s character. “Hmm!” With a sniff, she turned back to the novel.

Brett crossed his arms over his chest, his muscles bulging, and an amused smile on his face. He cleared his throat. “So, this...*character*. Is he anything like me?”

Blinking, Lana looked him up and down in an achingly slow scan from top to bottom, leaning forward slightly to see his feet. “Hmm. Well...he might be a *little* like you. Although he does have some...*interesting* qualities.” She turned a page.

“Define *interesting*,” Brett said in warning.

A chill of desire curled up her spine. “Oh, well, you know, he has *very* sexy blue eyes.”

“Like mine?” he asked with patience.

Looking up at his heated gaze with a distracted air, she nodded briefly, “Oh, sure, I’d say so.” Ignoring him again, she put the book in front of her face so he wouldn’t see her smile.

In a slow, sensual move, Lana lifted her leg out of the water with her toes pointed, not taking her eyes from the book. She caressed the satin skin, trailing through the fragrant bubbles as she ran her fingertips down her leg, starting at her toes then slowing even more as she approached her inner thigh and her hand disappeared into the water.

Releasing a moan as she dropped her head back on the rim of the tub, her eyes closed in blissful abandonment. She licked her lips in a deliberate, sensual manner. Through her lashes she saw Brett shiver as he watched her every move, his member even harder now, bouncing as his obvious desire increased.

He cleared his throat again before he continued. “And, ah, what other *interesting* qualities does he have?”

Placing her finger on her lips, Lana thought for a moment and then sucked on the tip before sliding it deep into her mouth in a measured, sexy movement. She closed her eyes like she had just tasted ambrosia.

Gradually removing her finger with a lip smacking sound, she opened her eyes, looking into his. “He has gorgeous, inky-black hair that a girl might want to run her fingers through.”

Before he could respond, she continued, tipping her head slightly to the side. “She might even want to hold it tight in her fists while she...”

Brett bit back a groan when she stopped talking. “While she...what?” Low and husky, his voice was hoarse with desire.

Turning the page and arching her back, she ran her fingers lightly over her lips, down her neck, over her revealed nipple, and around to cup her breast. Moaning, she closed her eyes like she’d just eaten the most delicious chocolate in the world.

Sighing, she opened them again. “While she...” Pausing dramatically for effect, Lana finished, “...dipped her tongue into his mouth.” Locking her gaze on his, she let her rising desire show in her eyes. “*Very* deep into his mouth.”

By the way he tensed, she figured he was about to pull her out of the tub and carry her to the bedroom. He stopped with a groan when Lana held up her hand.

“Don’t you want to know the other very *interesting* qualities she likes?” she whispered, biting her lip while she stared at him, licking her lower lip slowly with her tongue.

Swallowing hard, Brett’s voice cracked as he hissed, “Yes.”

She took a deep breath. Her nipples rose above the water for a few seconds then disappeared again beneath the bubbles, teasing, tantalizing, begging him to seek them out. Lana lifted her free arm, bending and twisting her wrist like a belly dancer to music that only she could hear.

Finally, with her eyes closed in apparent ecstasy, using her tongue she licked slowly from her forearm, all the way up to her wrist in a leisurely meander. Turning her eyes to his, she continued to lick over her palm and up to her fingers, inserting them one at a time into her mouth and sucking, her eyes never leaving his.

Seeing that Brett was near his breaking point now, sweat beading his brow, Lana spoke again, her voice husky with desire as she emphasized the her words. “She likes his *enormous*, long member. She likes it when he puts it in her mouth and...” She paused.

“And...?” Brett blinked, in a daze, his voice a harsh whisper now.

“...and he puts his hands on the back of her head...gripping her hair...pulling her close...to take him *deep* into her throat...while she licks...and sucks...and he...”

Lana screamed as the book went flying when Brett jumped into the tub with her, lifting her up and sliding beneath her as the water sloshed over the sides onto the floor.

With a triumphant grin, she pulled him deep into her, beginning the dance.

Her breasts bounced, her neck arched, and she moaned as she rode him. He cupped her globes, rubbing her nipples vigorously until she cried out.

Gritting her teeth, she felt his hands slid down to her hips as he helped her with her rocking movements, groaning as she began to climb to her release.

Gasping, she moved faster, wanting to take him with her. Brett's thumb found her clitoris and soon she was grasping the edges of the tub while she moved even faster, crying out her need. Oblivious to the water sloshing, flowing over the sides of the tub, she forgot about Bartholomew, murders, danger, and all else as Brett took her toward paradise.

The mouse retreated at the noise.

Lana screamed as she neared her peak, gasping as she moved in a mad dance over him. Faster and faster, she rocked. As she tensed, Brett groaned and sucked in a quick breath. She rose with him up, up, into the stars where they both burst into pieces in unison, crying out together in release.

Lying on his chest as they came back down to Earth, Lana's heart raced as she fought to catch her breath again. She knew a contentment she'd never felt before. Life with Brett would never be dull. The way they battled and loved, it couldn't possibly be dull.

Kissing her forehead softly, Brett murmured next to her ear. "You're incredible, Lana. I've never met anyone like you. God, how I love you."

Tears of joy glistened in her eyes as she lifted her head and kissed him.

Sitting up finally, she began to wash him gently, paying special attention to his member, which was still hard. Brett was lying back with his eyes closed in bliss. With a sexy purr, Lana said, “I think we need to go to the bedroom to try the...ah...final *interesting* quality.” She smiled when his eyes popped opened.

“There’s more?” he asked in wonder.

Lana nodded slowly.

Lifting her up with him in a hurry, Brett was about to climb out of the tub when he looked over and saw Bartholomew staring at them.

“Eat your heart out, little buddy.”

Lana laughed all the way to the bedroom.



The next morning Lana and Brett lay cuddled up together, unwilling to leave the bed. When the cell phone rang, Brett groaned.

With a protest, Lana cried, “No, don’t answer it. Please?”

Brett looked at her with regret. “It might be Tina.”

Instantly feeling selfish, she nodded and he answered the phone.

She was alarmed when he sat up quickly and listened with intent concentration. He asked a few quick questions then hung up. His shoulders slumped, and he took a deep breath before looking at her.

“Brett, what happened? Is it another murder? Is it Tina? What?” She became frantic as he paused, as though hesitant to tell her what had happened.

“There was an apparent attempt on Linda Winter’s life last night.” Brett pulled her close when she started to shake.

“We have to go, Brett.” She tried to get up but he made her stay on the bed.

“Lana, I said it was an *apparent* attempt. Jessie said it didn’t happen.”

“But I don’t understand. What do you mean by *apparent*?” Frowning, she waited for him to explain.

“Have you ever heard about people who purposely make their kids or spouses sick? That way they can nurse them back to health and get a lot of attention as martyrs.”

“Ah, sure. I think it’s some kind of mental illness where the person is desperate for attention. I saw a movie about a little psychic kid who saw ghosts. He helped a dead girl prove that her mother had killed her with poison and saved her sister’s life. But what has that got to do with this, Brett?” she asked in alarm.

“Many of the details from the attack didn’t add up. The window in the back door was smashed in, but Linda told the police that she heard the killer coming and locked herself in the bathroom, screaming. She said she had to wait half of the night before she was brave enough to leave the bathroom and call the police. There was a note with a quote from Shakespeare, but it was on different paper—typed,

not hand written. Only you, Jessie, me, and the police know the letters weren't typed." Brett paused, letting Lana absorb what he had told her so far.

"You think Linda has that illness and needs attention so bad that she faked a break-in?" Dismay filled her.

Nodding, Brett continued. "Nothing about the break-in fit, Lana. The neighbors didn't hear her screaming and she indicated that it had happened at ten o'clock at night. Her next-door neighbor was out walking his dog around that time and he saw no one in the street, no strange cars, and heard no unusual noises. Jessie thinks it's bogus."

"Oh, my God! What the hell is happening to these people? Am I such a terrible boss my employees have to scream at the top of their lungs to get some attention from me?" Shaking her head, she crossed her arms over her chest, feeling the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Brett brushed her hair back from her face. "Lana, you can't be held responsible for a person's mental illness. There has been so much stress at the firm lately I'm surprised more people haven't flipped out. She's not responsible for what she did. She needs psychiatric help, and you're not responsible for that."

Nodding, Lana stayed silent for a few minutes. "You're right. I know you are. Maybe we should call a psychiatrist I know and ask him how to go about it without causing more damage when you question her."

“Good plan,” he approved.

“Should we head back to the city now?” Reluctant to leave their haven, she released a sigh.

“We can’t do much until Monday, Lana. Let’s leave Sunday afternoon, okay?”

Smiling at him, she ran her finger over his chest, her nail grazing his nipple. “But what can we possibly find to do until then?”

That adorable side-lopped grin graced his face. “Oh, I’m sure we can think of something to do, kitten. Why don’t you refresh my memory about my more *interesting* qualities so I can remember where we left off?” Brett brushed her lips with his finger.

Capturing it in her mouth, she sucked on it using her tongue to pull and tease it.

Shuddering at her erotic foreplay, Brett waited until she let his finger go and gently pushed her back down to the mattress. His lips found her neck, his teeth nibbled on her ear, and his hot breath warmed her skin, sending shivers up her spine.

Lana moaned and spent the next hour refreshing his memory.



While they spent the day walking around the neighborhood, Brett’s eyes

scanned the area around them on constant alert. They stopped to visit many of his friends.

“Brett, let’s avoid your fortuneteller friend this time, okay?” Holding his hand, Lana poked him in his ribs playfully.

He snickered in response.

“I already know our fortune. We’re going to live happily ever after. We might have our arguments, but we’ll have lots of fun making up.”

Swinging his hand with hers, she walked beside him and chuckled.

“I like the making up part best.”

After picking up their lunch at the restaurant, they took it with them to the repaired pontoon boat and headed out onto the lake. He took her to a connecting lake where they found a small island that appeared to be devoid of humans.

Lana spread a blanket on the ground while Brett tied up the boat. They spent the next few hours relaxing and enjoying each other’s company, kissing and laughing, leaving all their worries behind.

The sun was beginning to set as they made their way back. Lana noticed a For Sale sign on a forested plot of land on the south shore. It was beautiful. She kept her thoughts under control and refocused on the glorious sunset.

“I wish this moment would never end,” Lana said. She watched a pair of loons diving for fish, as the vibrant gold, orange, and violet colors of the sunset

splashed across the lake in gentle ripples.

Moving over to where Brett sat at the wheel, she leaned into his body, running her fingers through his hair, offering her lips for a tender kiss before he circled her waist with his powerful arm as he drove them back to the dock. No words were needed for the perfect end to their day.



Sitting in front of the woodstove, they drank wine and ate fried chicken as well as all sorts of other goodies the Fish 'N Chip restaurant staff had put together for them. They laughed and teased, talking about the things they had in common.

“It’s strange how we think so much alike now. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about, to prepare me for any more surprises?” Brett asked, brushing her hair from her eyes.

“Well, there is one thing.” Lana bit into a strawberry dipped in chocolate before slowly licking her lips.

His eyes never left her mouth. “What?” he asked.

“Well, you know I have a twin brother, Brandon, right?” Noting his focus on her lips, she sucked her finger into her mouth...very deep into her mouth, in and out as though making tender love to it.

Brett swallowed hard. “Brandon.” His absent nod had her biting back a chuckle.

“Hmmm, yes...Brandon.” Lana dipped her finger in the chocolate again, but this time she offered it to him and he automatically opened his mouth, sucking on her finger while still keeping his gaze on her lips.

“Mmmm.” He groaned as he sucked her finger, rolling it around on his tongue.

Breathless, she continued. “We’re twins. Twins run in my family. And Brandon is just as psychic as I am...so it stands to reason...” She gasped as his tongue moved over her finger in an erotic motion.

“Mmm-hhmm...” He urged her to continue.

“Oh, well, it’s more than possible that you and I, when we decide to have kids, would have twins, too. Psychic twins, Brett.”

She gasped again as Brett moved his tongue from her finger to her palm and slowly along her wrist, setting off her nerve endings that sparked chills up her spine.

“I’m okay with that, kitten.”



Gently, Brett lay Lana down on the blanket and picked up the chocolate. He dribbled it over her nipples and down her torso, filling her navel before moving lower to her inner thighs. Putting the container on the floor, he started to lick at her sweet nipples, then inch, by agonizing inch, he moved down her body,

following the trail.

When he reached her navel, he dipped his tongue into the nectar and kept his eyes on her face while his tongue swirled and lapped at her. Lana groaned shifting her hips as he teased her soft skin.

Finally satisfied that her navel was clean of chocolate, he moved down again, passing by her mound and licking along her inner thigh.

Feeling Lana quiver beneath his lips as she gasped for breath, he finished one thigh and moved to the inside of the other. Roving upward now, he slowly edged towards her entrance. Watching her face, Brett moved between her legs and raised them over his shoulders, snickering when her eyes widened and she shook her head.

“Brett, no...I can’t...Brett...ahhhh...” She shrieked as he found her clitoris and spent long delicious moments working it, licking and sucking, sliding his finger inside and chuckling deep down in his throat while she writhed in agony.

“Please, Brett, please.”

Adoring the way she begged him to fill her, he increased his tender assault. Her hips jerked as she came beneath his fingers, her hands grabbing at the blanket, her head rolling back and forth while she groaned.

When she returned to Earth, Brett moved up her body, kissing as he went until he reached her mouth and captured her lips and tongue so she could taste the

chocolate, and herself.



Panting, Lana wanted to give him payback and made him roll on his back. Her limbs were weak and quivering but she forced herself to get up on her knees.

Taking the chocolate container in her hands, she gave him a look that said, *'You're going to get yours now, buddy'*.

Instead of following the same path he had, she dribbled chocolate right on his staff, ignoring his chest and beginning with his inner thighs as she made sure to take twice as long as he did.

When he tried to get up to roll her on her back, she shook her head and shot him a wicked grin.

He growled a warning, "Lana!"

The chocolate on his member called to her and she watched his eyes as she took a tentative lick. His rod jerked as he gasped, a deep groan escaping his lips.

Encouraged, she licked from bottom to top, slowly following the path up to the tip of his member at a leisurely pace. Brett's eyes closed while he moaned, his hands clenching and unclenching until finally reaching for her head and threading his fingers through her hair.

Lana began to increase the pressure with quicker strokes of her tongue. The more he groaned, the faster and harder she licked, finally sliding him deep into her

mouth.

When he cried out at the sweet torture, she pulled and sucked with her tongue, placing her hands on his buttocks to pull him in deeper. She began moving in a rhythm, faster and faster until he yelled and sat up, rolling her onto her back and plowing into her in one smooth motion.

Hips pumped hard and fast as he neared completion. His whole body tensing, his breathing shallow, he gasped when Lana cupped his sac in her hand, squeezing gently. Butterflies fluttered through her stomach to her heart as she too sought release. An explosion of lights flashed behind her eyes as they peaked together.

Brett collapsed on top of Lana, resting his elbows on the floor to prevent crushing her. Sweat glistened on their bodies in the aftermath of ecstasy.

Laughing suddenly, Lana looked up at Brett's contented face. It was covered in chocolate as she imagined hers must be too.

"That better not be laughter at my expense, kitten. I'm too exhausted to get you back." His eyes remained closed, that sweet twisted grin she loved so much telling her better than words how content he was.

"You should see your face. I think you got more chocolate on your cheeks than you did on me."

Peeking out of one eye, he snickered. "You should talk. The tip of your nose

is covered in it, too. Maybe I should start licking you all over again.”

“Hmmm...Though that is a tempting thought, I think a shower would be a much better option. We can start again from scratch afterwards, perhaps with the whipped cream.”

“You plan on me meeting my demise after you wear me out with your lovely body, don’t you, my sweet wanton?”

“Absolutely. If you can’t keep up, say so now and I’ll find someone like the hero in the book I’m reading.”

“Ha! No way is a book character going to outdo me! Off to the shower, my lovely wench!”

Rolling away after he swatted her butt, Lana giggled and raced him to the bathroom.

Chapter Twenty

Dangerous Attention

Monday morning found Lana, Brett, and Jessie sitting in her office waiting for Linda Winters to arrive. Lana wasn't looking forward to the encounter but knew she had to be firm with the woman. Linda needed medical help.

As Brett and Jessie were quietly discussing Linda's options, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in." Lana took a deep breath to prepare for the inevitable.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't know you had company, Lana. I can come back if you'd like." Linda was cheerful and practically bouncing as she entered the office.

"That's okay. Please come in and close the door."

Nodding her head, she indicted the chair that Brett had brought in, placing the woman between the two men while Lana was safely behind her desk.

Once Linda was seated, she looked at Lana in confusion, wondering what was up.

"I understand you had some trouble this weekend, Linda," Lana began.

Wiggling in her chair in obvious delight at being asked about the "attack", Linda gushed with enthusiasm. "Oh yes, Lana, it was just terrible. The killer was

right there in my house. It was absolutely terrifying!”

The flush of pleasure on Linda’s face made Lana’s heart sink. She realized Linda definitely had a mental health issue and that Jessie was right.

“Linda, I heard about what happened and that’s why Brett and Jessie are here today.” Lana nodded at Jessie. “Jessie is a police officer. He has all of the information about each of the killings.” Lana deliberately omitted the fact that Brett was a cop to keep his undercover status.

With a nod to Jessie to take over the conversation, Lana sat back and watched.

“Ms. Winters, our investigation has proven that whatever might have happened at your home on the weekend, it was not linked to the killer who murdered the authors and Mr. Brinkman.” Jessie’s expression was serious but not accusing. “We know that it was not a real break in and we believe you made it up, planting the evidence yourself.”

Startled, Linda’s eyes widened as she turned to look to Lana for help. “What do you mean, I made it up? It really did happen, I swear it!” Her expression begged Lana to believe her.

“Ma’am, the evidence is nothing like that of the actual killings. We know you set it up. What we want to know is why?” Jessie was firm but gentle with her. Even though they had no proof of her actually fabricating the story, her case

history that Jessie had pulled up told them otherwise.

Tears filled Linda's eyes. "But I...I didn't, Lana. It was the killer. I stayed in my bathroom all night long hiding from him. I really did." Her voice was weak now.

Swallowing the sudden lump in her throat, Lana spoke softly to her. "Linda, we believe that the stress of these past few months has affected you more than you know. Mental illness isn't something to be ashamed about."

"I'm not ill, Lana," Linda cried, her voice rising in panic. "I'm not ill. I haven't been for a very long time. I know I'm well. I'm well!" Breaking down completely, she sobbed.

"Linda, you're not going to be fired, but you will be taking some time off. We expect you to see a psychiatrist so you can get well and come back to work. I won't let you come back unless you seek professional help. Do you understand me?" Lana asked gently.

Though Lana was sympathetic to Linda, she was determined to see that the woman followed through with her therapy, for her sake.

Pulling at her skirt, Linda was crying, staring at the ground, unresponsive to Lana's question.

"There are two police officers outside the door now, Linda. Would you please go with them? They just want to ask you some questions and will take you

to the hospital. We really do want to help you. I hope you understand that.”

Distressed at the woman’s complete loss of emotional control, Lana nodded to Brett, who gently pulled Linda to her feet and led her to the waiting officers. After a few quick words with his colleagues, he closed the door behind them, blocking out Linda’s pitiful sobs and the curious faces of the employees.

“I need to get back to Tina. Talk to you later.” Jessie left them, closing the door quietly behind him.

Brett pulled Lana into his arms and held her. She wasn’t crying, only very sad for Linda.

“She said she was ill before, Brett. I never knew.”

“Shock can cause strange things to happen in the brain, Lana. Depression and other types of mental illness like Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome are usually triggered by a severe crisis. Linda obviously has been under a great deal of strain regarding the killings. She’ll get excellent help now.”

Even though Brett’s gentle voice was soothing, Lana pulled away from him and forced herself to go back to work.



His laptop was fired up and ready to go so Brett set out to get his own work done. He knew the turmoil in Lana’s mind and understood her need for space.

Checking his email, Brett suddenly became alert. Before speaking aloud he

stopped himself, shooting a quick glance over at Lana. He didn't want her to know about his news yet. A background check on one of the staff members had struck pay dirt. Now all he had to do was figure out how to get the killer to tip his hand.

With a shudder, he realized that Lana had been working close to the killer for quite some time now. He wondered what had triggered the killing spree since it had only started in recent months and the killer was a long time employee. Sending an email response back, he sat quietly for a long time, thinking.

Eventually, Lana put her head in her hands in defeat then got up to head to the ladies room.

When Brett made to follow her, she shot him a warning glare and left the room. She looked even more irritated when glancing over her shoulder, she saw him following her.

With a nod at Deanna, he walked by, taking note of others in the office working at their desks. He was careful to school his features as he walked right past the person he believed was the killer. There wasn't a thing he could do until he had evidence except protect Lana.

Taking on three jobs since Roger's death was wearing her down, Brett knew, especially because of the time off he had forced on her. She was way behind in her work and he was concerned for her own mental health.

He had a proposal in mind and hoped she'd be receptive to it. Leaning

against the wall, he waited while Lana went into the bathroom. She was trying to clear her head, and he had to step back and let her. That was the difficult part, knowing when to let her deal with things on her own and not crowd her.



Once in the ladies room Lana washed her face with cold water, patting her face dry with a paper towel. This time she was alone in the room. She walked into a stall, closed and locked the door, then sat on the seat fully clothed.

She just wanted to hide for a while. Dropping her head in her hands she rocked back and forth in agony, desperately trying to hold back tears. Everything in her world was turned upside-down. People were dying, and now with Linda losing it...

Lana took a deep shuddering breath.

Someone at the firm was killing people! Lana just couldn't imagine anyone she knew could be so cold-hearted, so evil. Lifting her head, she took another deep breath and stared into space. If only she could draw the person out, help the police capture the killer. This waiting was driving her mad.

Lana laughed at that thought. *Mad! Like Linda losing her grip. I wonder if I'm going to be next to end up under psychiatric care.* Giving herself a good mental shake, she struck that thought out of her mind. She was stronger than that and she had Brett. He was her rock in a hard place. Although it was humbling to have to admit it,

Lana realized she needed him, his support, and his strength.

Finally ready to face the world again, Lana got up and went back to the sink. She washed her face once again with cold water and prepared to face her staff—and the killer.



Waiting patiently outside the door, Brett felt Lana's pain. Although he wanted to go to her, he knew better. She had to let it go, and she had to do it alone.

When the door finally opened, she was in control. He was proud of her. The chaos in her mind had cleared. She stood proudly, giving him a tremulous smile. Taking his extended hand, she walked back to her office with him.

Cold gray eyes followed the couple. No one watching the killer would be aware of the violent anger behind the façade. The mask was firmly in place.



Brett ordered in Chinese food. Together, they ate at the desk without a word between them. Finally, when he felt she'd had enough time to work it out alone, he broke the silence. "Lana, don't you think it's time you hired someone to do either your job, Allan's, or Roger's? You saw what the stress did to Linda. I don't want to see anything even remotely like that happen to you."

Lana surprised him. "I agree. I'll call the headhunters today and get them

looking for a replacement for my job.”

“Headhunters?” He was stunned at her quick acceptance of his suggestion.

“Headhunters are people who locate executive class potentials to fill positions like mine. The position of CEO is one job you don’t put in the classified section of the local newspaper. They specialize in finding the right people for the job,” Lana explained.

Speechless, Brett just nodded his head.



Biting back a grin at Brett’s look of astonishment that she’d agreed with him, Lana cleaned up the boxes from lunch and sat back. “Can we go for a long walk?”

Blinking, Brett nodded again.

This time Lana laughed at him. Brett was seldom unable to talk. It was the first time she’d seen him at a loss for words.



They walked hand-in-hand down Yonge Street, pausing now and then to look in the store windows at the merchandise. Lana even stopped in a few of the stores to make purchases.

As usual, Brett was scanning the crowds with caution while he waited

outside one store until she came out a few minutes later, grinning.

Handing him a bag, she waited for him to open it. She appeared to be disappointed when he cringed after looking inside at her gift.

“What’s wrong? Don’t you like it?” she asked. She managed to look forlorn.

“Ah, it’s a real nice baseball cap, Lana. The only problem is that the Montreal Canadiens are the rivals of the Toronto Maple Leafs. I’m a Leafs’ man all the way.” With an apologetic look, he stared down at her.

Biting back laughter, she said, “Oh. I’m really sorry! Come with me then, silly.” Lana led him into the store where the cashier was happy to switch the hats. Brett bought one for her, too.

Putting the hat on her right away, Brett nodded with satisfaction. “Now you’re an official Leafs’ fan.”

“Well, you know I’m not one for baseball, Brett, but I did have fun that day we went to the *Spacedome*.”

As she looked up at him with innocence in her eyes, it took Brett a moment to figure out what she was talking about.

“Lana, the Leafs are a *hockey* team. We saw the *Toronto Blue Jays*, a *baseball* team, at the *SkyDome*.”

Seeing that she was struggling to keep from laughing, he grabbed her around the waist, pulling her close. “You sneak! You know exactly which sport is

which *and* the name of the stadium where we saw the Jays play! You've been playing dumb all along, haven't you?"

Laughing, Lana took off her hat and made sure the front peak was bent at the correct angle then pulled her hair through the hole in the back so she had a ponytail.

Fluttering her lashes, she told him, "My favorite player is Tai Dome. He's a great one for ending up in the penalty box. I like that in a man." Lana winked.

"Why, you little monkey! You played Jessie and I the whole time we were at the game, didn't you?"

Lifting a brow, Lana asked, "Brett, do you honestly think that my brother would allow me to grow up not knowing all about sports? He made me watch games with him every week and quizzed me until I knew them like the back of my hand. We used to place bets on who'd win and the loser would have to do the other's chores for the week. I seldom lost!"

Laughing in delight, he bent to kiss her, but their hats crashed together. He pulled her cap off, turning it to put it on backward then did the same with his own. Finally, he kissed her right there on the street.

A teen in a passing car yelled out, "Hey, you two, get a room!"



The rest of the afternoon went smoothly. Her call to the headhunters had

already pulled up a few prospects. They'd also located a couple of corporate lawyers to consider for temporary replacement of Linda's job. Lana felt much better about Linda now that things were beginning to move along. The psychiatrist Lana conferred with assured her that she had done the right thing by confronting Linda and getting her good medical help.



At the apartment Brett ordered dinner from a local Italian restaurant. She was delighted with the flowers, candles, and wine he'd had set up before they came home.

"When did you find time to do this when you've been glued to my heels all day?" Lana asked.

When Brett only grinned and winked, Lana clued in. "Jessie! Why, you sneaky boy, you!" She gave his butt a swat.

"Hmm, keep that up and we won't get to eat dinner." Wiggling his brows, he leered at her.

"You'd *better* feed me, buddy! I'm absolutely starved."

"What about our big lunch today?" he asked in mock surprise.

"Huh! In case you didn't notice, you were the one who ate most of it. I didn't eat half of what you put away." She shrieked when he tickled her.

Their evening was wonderfully romantic, especially when Brett put on a CD

of Louis Armstrong, the sexy, sultry tones of the horn setting the atmosphere.

Lana counted her lucky stars that he had kissed her that first day in the lobby. It seemed like such a long time ago, yet it was only a few weeks. She'd never met anyone who had become so close to her in such a short time.

Over dinner, Lana asked him about his family. She was curious about him and wanted to know everything about his life before she'd come along.

"Since we're engaged, perhaps you should tell me more about you. Do I have to prepare for in-laws from hell, or will they adore me and make you serve me hand and foot?"

"Sorry, babe, but they'll just have to adore you like I do. My mother's name is Lucy, my father is Darren, and they divorced when I was ten years old. I have a twenty-five-year-old sister named Ember. She's single and used to have the *hots* for Jessie when we were growing up."

Brett brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. "They all live on the outskirts of Toronto. Mom lives in the east end; Dad's in the west end. He remarried but didn't have any more kids."

"I'm sure I'll love them, Brett. My family lives a couple of hours east of Toronto in the country. Brandon is my twin brother. My parents' names are Paula and Mark. They've been happily married for thirty-five years." Lana smiled gently. "They still have their fights and at least once a year they plan on getting divorced

for all of five minutes, but they always make up. I admire that about them.”

“So that’s where you get it.” Brett smirked playfully.

“Get what?”

“Your feisty attitude. You could take on Mohammad Ali in the ring; you’re such a tough cookie. I can barely stand after a battle with you.”

Taking a playful swing at him with her fist, she snickered when he pulled back, raising his brow. “I rest my case!”

Laughing, Lana leaned over and tangled her fingers in his shirt, pulling him closer until their lips met. “Poor baby!”

Running the back of his knuckles gently down her cheek, he said, “We’ll have to get our families together for a meet and greet once this crisis is over.”

Brett pulled her closer, his lips hovering above hers while he stared into her eyes. “After all, we have to start our wedding plans and we should invite them, don’t you think?”

Feeling a little breathless, Lana nodded. “Yes, I think they’d like to meet the man I love. My family thought I’d be alone forever.”

Shaking his head slowly, Brett said, “I still find it hard to believe that no one scooped you up before now, and boy howdy am I ever grateful for that!” His lips claimed hers as the trumpet played a slow, sexy melody.

Before he could make her lose herself in him, Lana pulled back and ran her

hand down his cheek. “I’ll be right back. Save my spot.” Standing, she left the room.



A few minutes later, Brett felt her distress and rushed to the washroom door to ask her what was wrong. He could hear her cursing.

Concerned, he was about to force the door open when she yanked it open and threw herself into his arms, her body stiff with frustration.

“Lana, what happened? Are you all right?” Lifting her chin with his knuckle so she would look at him, he waited for her to tell him. When she didn’t answer right away, he picked her up and carried her back to the living room, sitting on the chair with her on his lap while he held her.

She kept her face buried in his chest for a moment then growled before taking a deep breath.

“I know it might sound silly to you, but it’s just that...I thought maybe we were...” She put a hand on her forehead. “I thought I might be pregnant since we forgot to use the condom that night, but...but I’m not.” She put her head on his chest and sighed.

Relief flowed through Brett. Not because she wasn’t pregnant, but because it wasn’t a serious problem.

“Don’t worry about it, Lana. I would’ve loved to have a child with you right

away, but I'm just as happy having you all to myself. I love you." Kissing her brow, he held her close.

"Oh, no!" She sat up. "This means that we can't..." A blush rose over her cheeks. "I mean, the candles, the wine and flowers, I wanted to..." Letting out a big sigh, she fell silent.

Brett hugged her close. "It's okay, kitten. I think I can keep myself under control for a few days, but when we are back in action, look out!" he growled.

Soon he had her laughing until she began experimenting on him and all humor died as he discovered that she could still make him lose control. Brett had no complaints.

Chapter Twenty-One

To Break the Mighty Pen

Lana spent the rest of the week interviewing candidates for the two positions, with Brett riding shotgun beside her. He was actually quite good at judging a person's character, and could spot a liar a mile away. By the end of the week both positions were filled and Lana was relieved to be able to focus solely on Roger's job.

She was hesitant at first to take over Roger's office.

"Lana, you're now the president of Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing. It's your right to take over Roger's office. He'd expect it of you."

"I guess you're right. It's just hard to let him go, Brett."

After a lot of thought, she let him talk her into it and made arrangements to have her things moved and Roger's things packed away. She kept his portrait on the wall facing her new desk in remembrance of him.



On her back porch, M.J. Redman stood in the dark watching the stunning vista before her. The full moon was bright tonight, breathtaking in its perfect

beauty against a black velvet canvas unspoiled by clouds.

It was well after midnight and she'd been working on her manuscript since early morning. Sometimes she just couldn't stop writing or leave the computer, even for a short time. She found it exhilarating, pouring her heart into her writing.

Smiling to herself, she thought about the disturbing scenes she wrote, specifically the sex scenes and murder scenes. Her family and friends used to think she was the equivalent to a nun and would never do the sensual things she wrote about in her novels. She figured they were right to a point, but she sure could dream about having a lover like the heroes in her books. If only dreams like that came true.

Exhausted, yet thrilled, she rubbed her bare arms, trying to dispel the chill. She'd just finished writing her ninth novel, *Killers Don't Fly*.

The murder scene had been difficult to write since M.J. was a peace-loving woman who had never known a violent day in her life. Writing her character's violent demise was disturbing. Even knowing that real people did kill, she still couldn't understand why.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if people didn't kill, didn't hate, didn't hurt others? What an amazing world this would be.

The unknown murderer who was killing Brinkman-Bonnette Publishing authors had intimidated her enough that she wanted to quit the firm. However,

after talking to Lana Anderson, M.J. decided to continue with them for a while longer. It was a great company and the people she had dealt with since her first release were excellent and competent. Someone would catch the creep and stop his reign of terror, she was sure of it.

Taking another sip of her wine she put down the glass. Even though it was late, she decided to take a walk down to the bluffs as she usually did to clear her mind.

She lived in Scarborough, a suburb of Toronto next to the lake. Her home was a mere one-hundred feet from the edge of the cliffs. M.J. never went close enough to peek over the side to look down on the rocks and crashing waves below. Erosion had made standing near the edge dangerous.

There had been too many accidents with kids and adults falling over the side. There had even been fatalities. The beauty of the night called to her as she left the porch. She was dressed in her flowing white nightgown and robe. Her long dark hair was unbound, hanging to her waist.

She wasn't concerned about meeting anyone. It was late and people seldom used her property to stroll along the jagged cliffs. She was fairly isolated, her nearest neighbor being hundreds of yards away.

She loved the peace surrounding her. The sound of the waves crashing on the rocks was a soothing balm that helped her clear her mind so she could write.

Anyone seeing her walking the bluffs would have thought she was a specter that night, the wind moving her robe and gown in ghostly waves as though she were ready to fly away. But there were no people around she could see. Insomnia kept her up many nights as her muse kicked in. That was when she did her best work.

Being an author was a lot of fun, and a lot of work. It was harder to write proposals to sell the books than it was to write the whole book. It amazed her how difficult it could be to fit an entire story into a brief outline, yet writing hundreds of pages flowed like water from her fingers and mind.

Since joining the authors' association, M.J. had met many excellent contacts. Getting published was a lot easier now than it had been a few years before when she was just starting out.

Smiling, she remembered her excitement when she'd finished her first manuscript and felt the agony of waiting to see if anyone would buy her book. It sometimes took months to get just one reply. She was glad those days were behind her.

Coming closer to the bluffs, M.J. stood in silence soaking up the earthy smell in the air. Her eyes were closed as she communed with nature. Not surprisingly, her mind started filling up with ideas for her next novel. Shaking her head, she smiled, confident there were many more novels in her brain yet to come.

Lost in the sound of the waves crashing upon the rocks below, she didn't think to scream when the hand came over her mouth and she felt something prick her arm. There was no time. It happened too fast. She slowly fell to the ground, supported by her attacker.

A dark figure turned her on her back and straddled her hips, speaking in a singsong voice.

"Now it is time to play with the prey. It's time for the author to see the error of her ways," the killer sang.

There was no need to hold her down since the drug worked fast. Staring up at the person perched on her body, M.J. was stunned that she couldn't move yet she could see, hear, and feel what was happening to her.

Lying completely still now, her limbs like dead weights, she felt terror building, worse than she could ever have imagined the characters in her story would experience. Her heart began to beat faster, her breathing meeting the pace. Eyes wide with the realization that this was the killer, the one who was murdering the authors, she struggled to cry out, but her entire body was paralyzed. Only her mind and eyes were functioning.

A gloved hand circled around MJ's neck, squeezing just enough to make the author's eyes widen in terror.

"You have been judged, and you must be punished for writing such filth in

your books. Killing people is wrong. You should know that, *author*.”

Wanting to tell the bastard she knew that killing was wrong, she tried desperately to speak. The irony of the murderer’s statement was not lost on her. She wasn’t supposed to kill people in her make-believe novels, but it was just fine for this idiot to kill a number of authors!

Her chest rose and fell faster. She wanted her imaginary hero to come and save her like they did in her novels yet she knew there would be no one to stop her demise. Tears leaked from her eyes, the only evidence of her regrets. She didn’t have a hero in her real life. She was going to die.

“All of you authors will perish because of your foul minds. I have to kill you now and it’s your own fault!” Yelling at her, the killer only stopped when M.J.’s eyes widened even more as she tried to speak out.

Gray eyes narrowed. “You need to be *more* afraid! Your last moments should be more terrifying than any other moment in your life or in your books! Do you know how you will die?” the voice taunted. “Think about how you killed the victim in your novel. You drugged them then threw them over the cliffs, letting their bodies smash to pieces on the rocks below.”

Unable to struggle, M.J. felt helpless. Whatever the killer had injected into her arm paralyzed her. More tears flowed down her cheeks. It was becoming difficult to breathe as her lungs slowly numbed, unable to process her air supply.

When tears slid down her cheeks, the killer smiled. “Yes, you are sorry now. I can see that, but it is too late! Mother would be proud of me now.”

With a quick look around, he dragged M.J. up to a standing position, even though she had no strength in her legs. She was as limp as a rag doll. Supporting her, the killer began to drag her toward the cliff. She couldn’t move a muscle to stop it from happening.

A cold panic clawed at her stomach with each step closer. The scream sounded only in her head when her body was held steady at the edge and he spoke again.

“I release you from your guilt and set you free now. No more will you kill others. No more will people read about your evil murders.”

One last quote was spoken, “*I must be cruel, only to be kind.*” Into the night the killer shoved M.J.’s shoulders, sending her flying over the edge.

The waves covered the sounds of her body smashing onto the rocks, the silent scream in her mind unheard.



Staring over the edge, seeing the white-clothed body silent and still at the bottom of the cliff, the killer smiled. *Another one has paid for their sins. Now it is time to concentrate on Lana.*

Humming, the killer moved away from the cliff, disappearing into the dark

while planning for another day and another successful act of justice.



“Let’s go up the cabin this weekend,” Brett said after work on Friday.

“I don’t know, honey. I just feel like staying at your place while we look for a bigger house. I’m going to sell mine once it’s rebuilt.” It was time for a fresh start with Brett by her side.

“All right. Let’s spend the weekend shopping for real estate. I have a friend in the business who will help us.”



Neither Brett nor Lana could decide on a place over the next couple of days. It was strange how if Lana was charmed by something, Brett found a reason why they shouldn’t buy it and the same thing happened when Brett was interested in a place.

“You seem to find something wrong with every place we’ve found,” he teased.

Laughing as he tickled her, Lana was quick to point out his pickiness too.

“You said that you didn’t like the color of the bathroom toilet and sink in that last one!”

He chuckled. “They were boring.”

“They were white! That’s standard for a bathroom.”

“I have excellent taste in bathroom facilities *and* in women.” Pulling her close, he kissed her.

“Okay. I guess I can’t complain about that. Where are we headed next?”

“Shelly found another one near the bluffs that looks interesting.”

“Fine, let’s go meet her there but then you are taking *both* of us to lunch.”

“Do you think I’m made of money, woman?” he growled playfully.

“Maybe not, but I’ll call your mother and tell her you made me pay if you don’t!”

At that, they spent the entire ride to the home laughing and joking with each other. It was an amusing day, even though neither of them could agree on a place, much to the annoyance of the real estate agent.



It was Sunday when Brett got a call from the precinct. There had been another author murdered.

Lana went cold with the shock. She’d begun to believe the killer had stopped the spree since her broadcast on TV. She was wrong.

On the local news, the anchor said, “Renowned author, M.J. Redman, was murdered in the same manner as a character in her novel. She was drugged and thrown off the Scarborough Bluffs. Her neck broke on impact.”

The killer was back in action!



Bedlam reigned at the firm. The new replacement lawyer called to tell Lana he had chosen a position with another firm. The new CEO was on the phone immediately asking for reassurances that by accepting the position, she wasn't accepting a death sentence.

Lana was able to retain the woman only by promising to keep the position open until after the killer was caught or up to thirty days, whichever came first.

Once again, Lana had to call another emergency meeting to try and calm the staff. Deanna was in tears. Even Anna, the rock, was shaking.

Young Jeffrey Reed, the twenty-six year old manuscript proofer who hadn't been concerned before, told Lana that his parents wanted him to quit. He held tough though, choosing to stay with the firm.

Finally, in a desperate attempt to calm the group, Lana told them to take the rest of the week off with pay, excusing them from work for the day.

Moments later, Lana and Brett were the only two left in the office.

"Here's the latest quote. The killer left it on the cliff held down by a small rock.

"Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?"

Once she'd read it and handed it back, swallowing hard, he continued.

“We think, as in the other notes, that he wants Brinkman-Bonnette authors to stop writing murder scenes.”

Lana was beyond being upset and terrified. She was now furious. By the time Brett had calmed her down enough to chance using the elevator, the corridor was littered with office supplies. Luckily, the staff had all left the building so they were not there to witness the results of her gift.



At the apartment Lana paced back and forth in the bedroom. It was the only room that was “Lanatized” and therefore nothing further would get broken while she fumed.

Having gone to the living room to use the phone, he checked on his surveillance teams. The final two suspects he had culled from the employee list had both been missing when the murder occurred. Apparently the two had known they were being followed, managing to escape for the whole evening and not returning until the early hours of the morning, evading the team’s careful watch.

After asking the police chief for more surveillance backup and a warrant to search each of the homes for evidence, he paced the carpet. He was frustrated there still wasn’t enough evidence to detain the two for suspicion of murder. By the time he hung up the phone, his hands clenched in anger.

Heading to the bedroom, he found Lana just as agitated, still pacing back

and forth, twirling a strand of her hair. When she saw him, she threw up her hands. “Nothing?” she cried.

Shaking his head he just stood in front of her, as furious as she was. Brett felt helpless, unable to do anything to tip the scales toward capturing his suspect. He doubted he could get the warrants without some solid proof of motive or intent to murder.



Throwing herself back on the bed, Lana stared at the ceiling.

“What the hell are we going to do? I can’t just fire everyone because they *might* be the killer. Besides, that wouldn’t stop him from killing anyway.”

Turning her head toward him, she caught his unguarded expression. A light dawned in her eyes.

“You know who it is! Don’t you, Brett?” she accused.

He didn’t say anything, turning to leave the room rather than answer her. She realized he’d hoped to avoid the coming confrontation.

Lana was right behind him. She pulled at his shoulder making him turn to face her. “Who is it?” she demanded. At his continued silence, she cried out. “Tell me who the hell it is, Brett. I have a right to know!”

Running his fingers through his hair, he shook his head. “I can’t, Lana. I’m obligated to keep the information quiet so we don’t tip the murderer off.”

“Oh, really, and you think I would be stupid enough to confront that *madman*?” She snapped with grating sarcasm. Watching his face, her eyes widened as a flash of pain raced through her heart. “You *do* think I would screw it up, don’t you?”

“Lana. Listen to me. If you can’t always control your emotions enough not to break things, how do you expect to be able to look a potential killer in the eyes and pretend you don’t know?”

Even though she knew he’d tried to be gentle in how he explained why he kept it from her, the crash behind him proved how upset she was.

She turned and ran back to the bedroom, slamming the door behind her. While she tried to catch her breath, hurt by his lack of trust in her, her mind whirled with thoughts of escaping the nightmare that was her life.

When Brett entered the room and tried to talk to her, she ignored. She stood looking out the window with her arms crossed over her chest. When he put his hand on her shoulder, she pulled away. Her mind was in such turmoil she couldn’t sort out what she was thinking.

Catching him off guard she swung around fast and shoved him, sending him sprawling on the bed. Lana ran, slamming the door shut then sliding the lock into place before he could stop her.



“Lana!” He pounded his fists against the hollow manmade wooden door.

“Lana, open this door!” Cold terror crawled up his spine when he realized she’d left the apartment, hearing the door bang shut behind her. “Oh, my God! No!” He rattled the door handle in his fury but was unable to open it.

His cell phone was still in his pants pocket so he called Jessie.

“Lana took off. I’m locked in the bedroom. I need your help, Jessie. Send someone to get me out and put out an A.P.B. on her. Lana has just placed herself in serious danger!” He hung up and searched for something to break the door open but there was nothing left after making the room safe from her gift.

“Damn it!” he said, punching his fist into the door. It went right through the low-quality fiberboard. Encouraged, he did it again and soon was able to reach the lock.

He raced out the front door at a full run, trying to tune into Lana to see where she had gone while speed-dialing Jessie.

“I’m out! I’ll search the streets near the apartment. Let me know if you find anything.” Once again hanging up, he tore off down the street looking for signs of her passing. Jessie had sent her picture out. The entire force would be watching for her.

Looking up and down the road, he hoped she would be as easy to track down as she was the last time, but there was nothing broken or flashing to

indicate she'd been there. Lana was gone! Brett felt a cold, cruel fear greater than any he had ever known before because this time...she was on her own.



Smiling with pleasure, the killer watched as Lana ran from the building. It was the perfect time to catch her while she wasn't expecting trouble. By the look on her face she'd finally lost control, tears flowing down her cheeks. Since she was wearing a track suit and sneakers, it would be difficult to catch up to her, but the killer moved in anyway, stalking her with determination.

Disguised, the killer ran at a brisk pace down the sidewalk on the opposite side of the busy street. Wearing a jogging suit, a wig, a baseball hat, and sunglasses, it was easy to move along at a fast pace without being recognized.

Lana was moving so fast that it became a challenge to keep up with her. No problem! She would run out of steam soon enough, then it would be even easier to give her the justice she deserved.

Seeing a police cruiser moving down the street, the gray eyes watched, slowing the pace. It looked like the cops were looking for someone. There was no way it could be Lana Anderson, could it?

Jogging past the car, the killer ran faster now. Lana was out of sight, but where did she go? *We traveled at least eight blocks. She wouldn't go to the office, and her friend isn't at home. That one's shackled up with the Asian cop and is out of reach for now. I'm still angry*

that one got away, it's regrettable, but Lana will pay for it in the end.

Running a few more blocks, realization set in that the quarry had slipped out of reach. There was another cruiser moving slowly down the street. They definitely were looking for someone. It was time to admit defeat. Lana was in luck—this time.

The jogger moved off down the road, disappearing into the crowd.



Staring into space, Lana sat on the park bench, shaking, her feet drawn up and her arms wrapped around her knees. She wanted to rent a car and go to see her parents but she didn't want them in danger too. She couldn't go home. She didn't have one anymore. A strangled sob escaped as she remembered how poor Tina had been brutally hurt.

There was no way she was going to go to Jessie's place to see her friend and bring the killer's wrath down on them, too. The office was definitely not the place to go. Memories of the night the killer had attacked her there flashed through her mind. If only she hadn't been so afraid and had faced the maniac then, this might all have been over and done now.

Lana thought about renting a hotel room but Brett would track her down in no time since she'd have to use her credit card. Suddenly she realized she'd forgotten her purse when she ran from the apartment. Knowing he would be

furious with her, and he had every right to be, she was irate with herself!

Remembering her promise that she wouldn't give him a reason to fear for her again, she let out a sob. Here she was, sitting in a park looking out onto Lake Ontario where anyone could attack her, not just the killer.

Feeling fury burn in her mind, she dared them to try it. Her temper was so great she was certain they would expire just from touching her arm! When she thought of Brett, her heart ached. He didn't believe she could act normal in the face of the killer, and he was right, she thought in dismay.

Seagulls flew in uneven circles around her, looking for food. A couple jogged past while a teen skateboarded in the other direction. Lana had been sitting there for the past hour. Her shaking subsided leaving her thirsty and drained. It was exhausting being so upset.



Dropping her head on her knees, she stayed that way for a long time until she *felt* him near her. Not bothering to raise her head, she muttered in abject misery, "Not only can I not face a killer without giving myself away, but I'm lousy at hiding too!"



His anger died a quick death at the waves of agony coming from her. He

didn't want to fight with her anymore, understanding how she felt as his mind touched hers.

Walking over to her, he sat down and leaned back, slouching on the bench without getting too close. They sat without talking for some time. She still hadn't lifted her head. His heart ached when she sobbed.

"I didn't have anywhere to go. I have no home. I can't go to work. I can't be near my friends or family in case I get them killed and even you are in danger because of me." Another pitiful sob escaped, and he swallowed hard.

"I might as well let him kill me. I just don't care anymore. I just want to die, Brett." Her shoulders shook with sorrow.

He couldn't take any more and pulled her into his arms, holding her close while she cried. His fellow cops stayed a distance away, watching over them, scanning the park.

Sometime later, Brett led her to a cruiser and took her back to the apartment. He tucked her into bed and kissed her gently. She lay there like a broken doll, limp, and unresponsive as she sank into depression.

Moving away from the bed, Brett left the room and quietly closed the door behind him. He had a phone call to make and he wasn't going to take no for an answer this time. He would get the warrants approved today.



Reaching out in a slow, cautious movement to answer the phone, Tina cringed at the twinge of pain in her ribcage.

“Hello?” she said in a soft voice. It still hurt to take deep breaths.

“Hi, it’s me,” Jessie said.

Her heart warmed at the sound of his voice.

“We have a problem. Lana’s in trouble. She’s hit rock bottom and Brett’s worried about her. I’m coming to get you to take you over there. Maybe you can get through to her, okay?”

“Of course it’s okay! I’ll get ready as quick as I can. Bye.” She hung up the phone. Her best friend was in trouble and Tina wanted to be there for her.

The night before Tina’s parents had visited and they’d got along famously with the Chans. When Jessie proposed right in front of everyone, both families heartily approved.

Jessie’s mother was sweet and gentle with Tina. She helped her get dressed and made her drink green tea before she allowed her to leave the house. By the time Jessie arrived, the woman had helped Tina put her shoes and jacket on and she was ready to go.

Kissing *Momma Chan* on the cheek, as the woman insisted Tina call her, she left with Jessie. She’d never been happier since being welcomed into the family with open arms.

Cautious of not harming her, Jessie buckled Tina into her seatbelt and kissed her with tender care before he closed the door. Sometime, when she was well enough, Tina wanted to test his temperament. He was just way too good to be true. It was getting close to a time for her to spice up their lives with a little “*Tina the Tiger*.” Smiling in anticipation, she watched his profile while he drove.

Such a handsome man with his exotic Asian features, straight blue-black hair, and deep dark eyes that made her shiver with desire. Her sore ribs held her back from exploring their relationship further though, and the anticipation built each day as they waited to be together again.

Knowing Lana was in love, too, Tina was surprised by her friend’s new feisty personality. Lana had always been so sweet and malleable. Tina smiled at that. Tina’s personality was the exact opposite of Lana’s, yet now they had switched roles after meeting the two men. How weird was that?

Quiet during the short drive, Tina wondered what was going on in his brilliant mind. She reached over and placed her hand in his.

He glanced over at her with a gentle smile then continued to hold her hand while he focused on the road.

Yup! She couldn’t wait to shake things up a bit.



Even though she was exhausted, Lana didn’t sleep, lying on the bed staring

up at the ceiling. She felt dead inside, completely devoid of hope. It was just as well she wasn't pregnant. If she couldn't even take care of herself, how could she expect to take care of a child? A tear rolled down her cheek, disappearing into her hair.

Her limbs felt so heavy, she never wanted to move again. Though thirst called out to her dry mouth, it was too much trouble to get up and pour a glass of water. When the doorbell rang, she didn't even care, remaining in her numb world, uncaring and dead inside.



Tina stood at the bedroom door, shocked at the sight of Lana. She looked as if the fire had been ripped out of her spirit. Having always admired her best friend's ability to be strong in the face of adversity, she found this Lana was a stranger.

Feeling Jessie's hand on her shoulder, she looked up at him. He nodded at her to go to Lana. Moving slowly over to the bed, she sat down beside Lana, not hearing Jessie close the broken door behind her.

"Well, this is a fine way to greet a friend." Tina was dismayed when Lana didn't even blink to acknowledge her presence. Fear clawed at her stomach as she carefully lay down beside her friend, her bruised and broken ribs protesting.

Brushing the trail of tears from Lana's cheek, Tina spoke softly to her. Her

voice was conversational as she spent the next half hour trying to coax Lana from her stupor.

“So, I hear you let the cat out of the bag about the sports thing. Brett’s pretty impressed that you like them.”

She’s not responding! Scared, Tina tried again.

“I hear that Brandon still has women chasing him all over that skydiving place he runs. Have you heard from him lately?”

Completely ignored me! She always wants to chat about her brother’s escapades.

“Jessie promised to bring home an extra set of handcuffs. I’m going to spread-eagle his sexy body on the bed and have my way with him. Isn’t that great?”

Nothing? Holy crap. Houston, we have a problem!

Tina was becoming more afraid by the minute at the lack of response. It was as if Lana wasn’t there anymore. She decided it was time to change tactics and use some tough love. Holding her arms over her ribs protectively, she took a deep breath and prepared to yell.

“Why, you miserable little bitch! Go ahead, feel sorry for yourself. You always were the pampered little princess, weren’t you?” Her voice rose as she warmed up.

Tina raised her voice as she heard the men running toward the bedroom,

and continued swearing and yelling at Lana.

“Isn’t that just like you? You finally get a nice guy and you have to go and screw it up! You damn selfish bitch! Why are you wasting his time, taking up space in his bed? I might as well take him on as well as Jessie since you’re so useless. I can’t believe I let you be my friend!”

Gasping in pain, she knew she couldn’t stop. Lana had blinked, the first sign that she was listening.

Looking up at the men, Tina saw Brett hold Jessie back for a moment when he attempted to run into the room and stop her. They looked shocked at the things Tina was saying, but watched as they realized Lana was listening to her.

With another sharp inhale, she continued. “Brett doesn’t need a limp fish like you when he could have a hot cookie like me. I could take on both him and Jessie, and Brett would still be more satisfied with me than he ever could be with you, you useless twit! Why don’t you get the hell out of his bed and let *me* get under the covers. I’ll strip down naked and give him the best blow job he ever had!”

Lana sucked in a deep breath and began to shake. Tina was almost there. “Go on, bitch! Get the hell out of here. You’re useless to him. Get out!” Tina tried to shove her off the bed, panting as she gasped in agony.

Feeling like she was going to pass out, she welcomed Jessie’s arm when he

ran to the bed and pulled her back gently. His eyes were wild with fear for her while she tried to suck air into her lungs.

Turning to look over at Brett when he moved to the other side of the bed, she was pleased when he continued her line of therapy.

“You know, Tina, I think you’re right. Your mouth on me would be way better than hers.”

Tina grabbed Jessie’s arm and shook her head when he was about to pummel his friend in fury at what Brett had said. Making him look at her, Tina mouthed the words, “Let him do it. It’s working.”

She could see by his expression he realized they were trying to shock Lana out of her depressed state. Brett was watching Lana like a hawk, not paying any attention to Tina.

She saw understanding in his eyes as he joined them. “I guess you could handle both of us, baby. Why don’t we get Brett to move her out to the couch so we can get started?”

Staring at Jessie for a moment, Tina was intrigued. She hadn’t expected him to ever speak like that since he was always so straight laced.

“The hell with the couch, let’s just dump her in the hallway. Why should I waste my energy?” Brett said, nudging Lana gently.

There was a loud crash in the other room. Tina grinned. It was a sound she

never thought she'd like to hear again, but it was music to her ears. Lana was coming around.

“Ha! There's plenty of room on the bed.” Tina looked at Brett, and he nodded encouragement. “Brett, we don't even need to move her. Just take your clothes off now and lay that sexy body next to mine and Jessie's.” Tina didn't take her eyes from Lana's face. The flaming anger in Lana's cheeks was an excellent sign.

Fighting back a snicker, Tina glanced quickly at Jessie who was staring at her in confusion. He looked shocked, as though somebody had switched his sweet, malleable girlfriend with a vicious tramp, and wasn't sure if it turned him on or horrified him.

Completely focused on Lana, Brett leaned down and whispered close to her ear, “Lana, get out of my bed and go find somewhere else to live. I'm sick and tired of you and all the trouble you cause.” Her eyes began to fill with tears. He yelled, “Get out!”

The dam finally cracked. Lana screamed. “Noooo! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!” Her cries were hoarse as she held her ears with her hands.

In seconds, Jessie scooped up Tina in a protective embrace, moving her away from the bed.

Brett pulled Lana's hands away from her ears. “Make up your mind, Lana, are you going to get a backbone, or do I replace you with Tina?”



With Brett holding her wrists, she couldn't hit him as rage flowed like molten lava through her veins, but she did struggle with fury. "Go to hell, all of you. I hate you. I hate you! Leave me alone!" Her neck muscles strained as she shrieked.

His body completely covered hers to hold her down, protecting her as he shouted, "Make your choice, Lana. Shape up or get the hell out. I don't want useless baggage hanging like a noose around my neck!"

"I don't have anywhere to go!" she screamed, then began to sob. "I don't have anywhere to go." She went limp, healing tears trailing a path down her cheeks.

At that Brett released her wrists, pulling her close and rocking her back and forth in a tender embrace. He whispered words of love, telling her that everything would be okay while she cried in his arms.



Taking Tina into the living room, Jessie remained silent, leaving Brett to finish bringing Lana back.

After handing Tina a bottle of water and some painkillers, he stood back and studied her with his arms across his chest, his expression one of confusion.

Tina took a sip of water to cover a smile. She could feel Jessie's shock at the

things she'd said. Silent, she waited for him to talk first.

He frowned at her. "Did you actually mean any of that?"

Gasping at the pain caused when she nearly laughed aloud, Tina asked, tongue-in-cheek, "Which parts?"

His mouth dropped open. "Who are you?"

Swallowing her laughter, she blinked. "What is that supposed to mean, honey?"

"Don't you 'honey' me, woman! You want to take on Brett and me at the same time? What the hell was that all about?" He threw his hands up in the air.

"What's wrong with that?" She opened her eyes wide, faking innocence.

"What's wrong with that? No woman of mine is going to *take* anything from another man. She gets me and me alone. And your language! I was wrong about you, you're a tramp!" he yelled.

"Thank you. It's nice to be appreciated." Enjoying herself thoroughly, she fought back a snicker.

"What?" His voice rising near to cracking point, Jessie appeared to be beside himself. Tina thought he was adorable when he was angry. His eyes sparked with life, his chest puffed up, and muscles bulged.

With a wicked wink, Tina patted the seat beside her and gave him a saucy grin.

Staring at her in horror, he jerked as though she'd slapped him across the face when she licked her lips in a slow, sensuous movement. Spinning on his heel, he practically ran from the apartment.

Gasping in pain, Tina held her ribs as laughter shook her body. *This is wonderful! I wonder how long it will take for him to cool down and realize I was just teasing him.*

With a shallow sigh, Tina stretched out on the sofa and pulled a blanket up over herself. She might as well take a nap since it might be a long evening. Grinning, she closed her eyes and was soon fast asleep.



A few hours later Lana and Brett came into the living room and found Tina just waking from her nap. She threw an impish grin at Lana. “Gee, does this mean I can’t have him?”

Lana smiled and went over to Tina, giving her a gentle hug. “Thank you, Tina. I guess I just shut down somehow. I don’t remember a lot of what you guys said, but I bet it was classic ‘*Tina the Tiger*’ material.”

“You betcha, pal! There is no way I’m going to let you take off to another planet without me.” Tina grinned, brushing Lana’s hair from her face. Turning to Brett, Tina smirked. “After seeing the craters you put in that door, I think I’ll just stick with my Jessie. He’s more than man enough for me.”

After squatting down, he kissed her cheek. “Thanks, Tina. You’re amazing.”

A short laugh ended in a gasp. “I know. All the guys tell me so.” Winking, she grinned even wider when she saw Jessie behind Brett. “Well, well. Look who came back! Does this mean you still love me, big boy?”

Jessie shook his head. “Again I ask; who are you?”

Everyone laughed. Brett ordered dinner and they spent the rest of the evening talking about anything but murder, sex, or work.

By the time Jessie took Tina home, everyone was exhausted. The girls hugged and promised to call each other the next day.

After closing the door behind their friends, Lana walked to the bedroom with Brett. They didn’t make love that night. Snuggled deep in the comfort of his arms, she reveled at the wondrous feeling of being held. She had a very deep and healing sleep until late into the next morning.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Plotting the Chapter's End

The first suspect was infuriated when Jessie handed over the warrant to search the premises, but finally stood back and let the police in.

Searching the office area with particular care, Jessie asked his team to be extra thorough while looking for paper matching the killer's notes. Since the notes had been hand written, they also confiscated all blue pens and gathered samples of handwriting.

Leaving no stone unturned, the team was still unable to find one shred of evidence as well as no leads. The entire house was in disarray by the time they left. The suspect slammed the door in outrage behind them.

The second suspect's home also failed to yield any evidence and was left in similar shape to the first one. Jessie was very uncomfortable when this suspect shed tears, shaking from head to toe in distress.



When Jessie told Brett about the searches, Brett was livid.

“How can there be no evidence at all? I'm sure I know which of the two

people the killer is. Just because the type of paper and pen used on the notes wasn't present at either residence doesn't mean I'm wrong," Brett growled.

"There wasn't a scrap of proof that supports the information in the background check you received, Brett," Jessie argued.

"Two dead ends, and now we're right back at square one! We have to nail that killer. I want to set up a trap to lure them in, but I have to speak with the Chief for approval first before I can deploy it." His frustration grew even more at the setback.

The danger to Lana increased by the minute. She'd been through so much Brett feared for more than her life, especially after her temporary breakdown.

He wanted to spend the rest of his life with her, but was she strong enough to survive the psychological terror the killer had put her under? A shiver crawled up his spine at the thought of what could happen to Lana—or to her mind!



"It's time to begin the final plan. Once she's out of the way there'll be no more novels, no more publishing firm. Lana Anderson holds all the cards and now is the moment to topple them. It'll be a few more days until the chance presents itself, but it's worth the wait. The end results will justify the delay."

With leather gloves on, the killer wrote out the final quote.

"There will be no need to kill after this. All of the authors will have the

message by then and they'll stop writing their murderous words."

Images of the old-fashioned claw-foot bathtub, bubbles, and gray accusing eyes flashed through the killer's mind.

"Mother will rest once it is finished. Soon there'll be no more pain for her. Having the cops search through the house was infuriating, but it doesn't matter, I was prepared for it. They didn't find the secret compartment with the supplies for the notes. They were so stupid. Show them a few tears and they believed me innocent, the fools!"

Picking up a photo of Lana taken at an office party standing beside the killer, the murderer chuckled. The picture was slowly ripped down the middle, cutting Lana in half.

"You are dead this time lady, *dead!*"

The torn pieces of the photo landed on the table. The supplies were carefully placed back in the hidden compartment and the gloves removed.

"Once Lana's dead, there'll be no need for the supplies, but it won't hurt to keep them for a while longer, just in case."



Since Lana needed a distraction, Brett took her to a movie and dinner. The romantic comedy picked up her spirits and the quiet dinner after, followed by a few drinks, mellowed her out by the time they returned home.

As they walked arm in arm along the sidewalk, Brett said, "I want you to remember that my home is your home. Even when your place is rebuilt I'm keeping you with me...for good. We're getting married and we might as well begin living together officially now. After all, we're already living in my apartment."

With a wry grin Brett thought about the day they'd "Lanatized" the place. Just about everything was either bolted or glued down. Brett had even ordered backup dishes since Lana's moods varied so often.

"Okay, if you insist." Staring up at him, love shone in her eyes.

With a leering grin, he hugged her closer. "My main reason for having you move in with me permanently is so I can train you to be a good wife."

She responded with the usual punch in his stomach, making him laugh.

They still hadn't found a new place to live. Lana now preferred a house rather than a condo, and Brett was game for whatever she wanted yet they procrastinated, living day to day until the case was resolved.

"Let's go to the cottage for the weekend."

Shaking her head, she said, "I'd rather not. I want to stay here and work on my files. I brought my laptop home. Until the new staff starts we're way behind."

"Lana, the new staff will help you get caught up."

"I'd just rather stay here. Please?" She avoided his gaze.

He couldn't read her mind as to why she wanted to stay in the city since she

was getting better at hiding her thoughts from him, yet agreed that it would be safer than the cabin.

“All right, kitten. We’ll stay here.” They arrived at the apartment, making a cautious approach to the door. Since there was no sign of the killer, Brett opened the door and let her in.

“Great, I’m going to hit the shower.” She kissed him and went inside.

Although he wanted nothing more than to join her, Brett had a few calls to make.

Lana had been in bed for twenty minutes before he entered the bedroom, his hair damp from his shower.

Smiling, she waited in a relaxed pose, wearing a new pink satin and lace negligee and lay on her side propped up on her elbow. Her hair was artfully arranged over one shoulder and she was playing the part of seductress, successfully.

Striding to the bed naked, Brett sat and tried to pull her close but she wasn’t having any of it. Slipping off the other side of the mattress, Lana swayed her hips in a sensual, exaggerated move, dancing away from the bed. She hadn’t said a word yet.

Raising his brows, Brett waited to see what kind of game she had in mind. It was his turn to lie on his side, leaning on his elbow. Lana gave him a stirring look

as she moved in a slow, graceful stroll to the walk-in closet.

After disappearing inside for a moment, she came back out wearing his police hat and dangling his handcuffs from her slender finger. Since going undercover, he seldom wore his uniform.

Leering at her, he asked, “What have you planned for me tonight...*officer?*”

“Depends, my captive, have you been a good boy...or a bad boy?” She was speaking in a low, silky voice, letting the cuffs swing back and forth on her finger. Her other hand rested on her hip.

“Maybe you’ll just have to come over here and see for yourself.” He spoke in a bored tone.

Her hips swung in a slow, sexy, swaying motion as she ambled over to the bed and climbed on, allowing him to view her ample cleavage. Pushing him back on the pillow she straddled him, adjusting the satin gown over his hips. His skin tingled as the material brushed over him, cool and silky. Still swinging the cuffs, he waited while she studied him carefully.

“I think...that maybe you are a *bad* boy and I should restrain you so you *will* behave. What do you think of that?” Her eyes burned with desire.

“Please feel free to, ah, restrain me if you think you need to. I’m your prisoner but I can’t promise to be good. At least, not ‘good’ in the sense of *behavior*.”

Adjusting the large police hat, Lana leaned over and cuffed one of his wrists

to her own; right hand to left. Now they were bound together, facing each other.

Brett moved both of his hands leisurely up the satin gown following the contours of her body. Slowing when he reached her breasts, he cupped them, rubbing his thumbs over her swollen nipples through the lace.

He watched, transfixed as Lana threw back her head, her eyes closing as she moaned. Her arm followed his as he reached higher. Caressing her collarbone and sliding his thumbs slowly up her neck he cupped her face, pulling her down for a slow, thorough kiss.

Wondering which one of them was the prisoner, he groaned as Lana moved her hips suggestively. His kiss became heated as he kept her mouth hostage. She moved again, making him harden even more against her lower belly.

Giggling when Brett rolled her onto her back and his hat fell into her eyes she lifted it from her head, placing it on his, then straightening it.

“Mmmm, I always wondered what it would be like to make love to a man in uniform, even if it is just one piece of his uniform.”

Brett offered a wicked grin. “We have a slight problem, kitten.”

Giving him a questioning look, Lana waited.

“How do we get your nightgown off with the handcuffs in the way?” he asked.

“We don’t. It’s time to improvise.” Lana ran her free hand backward down

the side of his face in a gentle caress.

Game for whatever she wanted, he kissed her palm then trailed more over her soft cheek, to her ear...her neck...the open “V” of her gown. Moving to her breast, he suckled her nipple through the satin and lace, causing her to moan and squirm. Her rose-fresh scent made his senses spin out of control as he ravaged her smooth skin.

His hat brushed over her skin through the silk as he moved down her body, bringing more moans from her.

With her free hand, Lana cupped the back of his nape, pulling him closer. Her bound hand gripped his wrist as his fingers roved over the satin in sensuous circles. She gasped.

Caressing her bare leg, he trailed his fingers slowly up until her creamy inner thigh was revealed. Lana jerked her hips as he touched a sensitive spot on her nub, his finger sliding into her as she writhed and cried out.

Kissing her tummy over the satin, Brett smiled when she gasped for breath. Moving down again his lips replaced his thumb, making her scream out her desire.

Tongue teasing her sensitive nub, Brett kissed and sucked at her. As he moved his finger faster in and out, she suddenly shrieked, her hips jerking with convulsions. Smiling in satisfaction, he winced when she knocked the hat away, grasping his hair hard as she rode the waves of ecstasy.

Looking up Brett didn't see his usual condom floating above his head, so he prompted her in a husky growl, "Lana, can you—"

There it was. He smiled and quickly put it on. Entering her in one swift move had them both groaning with blissful relief. Seeking access to her mouth, he claimed her lips, all the while moving his hips in a deliberate, steady rhythm.

The walls of her channel flooded with heat, bathing him with sweet nectar. Her body tensed as she began the rise to a second heady peak of abandonment. Lacing their fingers together while he moved at a leisurely rate, he didn't want to rush this one, preferring to give her every bit of pleasure he could. Kissing her neck, he nibbled, licked, kissed, and nuzzled her softness, never losing his rhythm.

Watching as Lana's eyes widened suddenly and she cried out, gasping for him to hurry, he picked up the pace. He was close, so close. Thrusting his hips, he increased his speed, their hands still entwined beside her shoulders. He groaned, his hips pumping faster and faster as he filled her completely, feeling that inevitable journey coming.

When Lana began the flight, Brett was right with her, hard and fast to the finish. When her eyes rolled back, she cried out at the same time as he did.

The journey was complete as they fell from the stars gently, slowly, until they landed together, replete on the shores of their passionate embrace.

Brett rolled them over, cuffed hands resting on his chest. They rested for a

few minutes in silence while their breathing slowly returned to normal.

“That was—” Lana began.

“Amazing, awesome, wonderful, stupendous...” Brett quipped, his chest shaking.

Laughing, she cried, “How can you be so flippant at a time like this? Don’t you think it gets better and better every time we make love? Or is it just me?”

“Lana, every minute with you is an adventure. Being with you is like having chocolate dessert every day, only it gets more delectable each time. I look forward to being together like this every day and sometimes I can’t stand waiting even a minute to hold you.” Brett ran his thumb across her lips.

“My, my, you certainly are eloquent when you aren’t joking. Maybe I should keep you around for a while.” Lana licked his nipple then sucked on it, rolling it between her teeth.

“God, woman, are you trying to kill me?” He groaned, feigning exhaustion.

Still suckling, her eyes met his. “I hear a lot of men die in bed with their women. Better be careful, lover boy, or I might be a widow before I even get a chance to marry you.” Smiling, she went back to her ministrations.

“Ohhh...” He was just about to replace his condom when he heard the doorbell. “Nooo, say it isn’t so!”

Lana laughed when he tried to get up and couldn’t leave her because of the

handcuffs.

Brett panicked, suddenly remembering something vital. “I don’t have the key with me.”

Laughing, Lana looked at the cuffs and they fell away.

He raised an eyebrow in surprise. “I’ll be right back, and then you have got to tell me about that maneuver! Don’t move a muscle.” He kissed her quickly before grabbing his robe, then left the room.

Opening the front door, Brett saw there was no one in the hall and wondered if Lana had inadvertently rung the bell without knowing.

He was about to shut it when he noticed a note on the floor. After another look down the empty hallway, he picked it up with the sleeve of his robe and closed the door, making sure it was locked securely.

“Confess yourself to heaven; Repent what’s past; avoid what is to come.”

Deciding it was best not to show it to Lana tonight and spoil their precious time together, he hid it on top of the fridge and noted the time on the kitchen clock. Midnight, the witching hour. He wondered if one of the suspects would be found missing, and made a quick call to have the surveillance teams check.

He’d have to call Jessie in the morning to get an analysis but he knew they’d find nothing. Putting on a poker face, he went back to the bedroom.

Lana was sitting up in bed waiting for him. “Who was it?”

Grinning, Brett teased, “You probably.”

Giving him a questioning look, Lana waited for an answer.

“There wasn’t anyone there. I think either you accidentally rang my bell or some kid was playing games.”

Lying down beside her, he acted as if nothing were wrong. Unfortunately, Lana read him like an open book now and she was sure something was up.

“Tell me,” she said.

Sighing, Brett shrugged. “Well, I was about to look for another condom when we were so rudely interrupted and—” He turned and fished through the bedside table drawer. “Voila!” Proudly he held up two condoms.

Lana raised a brow.

“It might be a very long night,” he growled. Gathering her close, he kissed her to distraction until she finally forgot about the doorbell.

He made sure she was thoroughly distracted—all night long.



Making coffee the next morning while Brett was in the shower, Lana was reaching up for a dish when she noticed something sticking up at the top of the fridge. Since she was tall it wasn’t too difficult to see, but she had to use her gift to get it to move toward her hand.

She shuddered when she saw the note. Now she knew why Brett had done

his best to distract her last night, though it was a very nice distraction. He was always so protective, keeping secrets from her to prevent her from worrying, and it was beginning to tick her off, royally!

Lana sat at the table with her coffee and cereal, leaving the note propped up on the table. She wasn't hungry at all but wanted to make a point with him.

A few minutes later, Brett came into the kitchen whistling. He winked at her, and poured a coffee. She watched as he glanced up at the top of the fridge and froze, seeing the note was gone. She remained silent behind him while she let him figure out that she'd found it.

Taking a deep breath, he slowly turned around.

"Busted!" he muttered.

With her arms crossed, she stared up at him, tapping her foot while waiting for an explanation.

"Look, Lana, I just..." he began.

"You just wanted to protect me. I get it. But I'm really getting tired of it. Brett, I'm not a child or a weak-minded fool. Give me a little credit will you? I need to know about things like this. It's all about me now and I need to be prepared. Now, I know I was 'off the wall' the other day, but I'm done with that. I am a strong woman and I can take it. So just give me a break and maybe a little of that truth we talked about."

Though her logic was solid, she was unable to hide the way her hands still shook slightly.

Sighing, Brett ran his hand through his damp hair.

“Lana, please trust me on this. It’s not because I didn’t want you to know. It’s just that last night...well, you were so happy and relaxed. I didn’t want to spoil the night for you. I’m really sorry.”

A small smile escaped as she dropped her eyes to her plate. “I understand, Brett. I really do. But we need to work together on this. You’re keeping secrets from me as a cop. I can accept that for the most part. What I won’t accept is if you are hiding things or lying to me.”

Going down on one knee, he picked up her hand. “I promise you, Lana, if it isn’t police business then I’ll always tell you the truth. You don’t have to worry about me lying to you. I just won’t. Please, can you just trust me in this?”

She looked into his eyes and found truth. Nodding, she leaned over and kissed him. “All right, Brett. Get yourself some breakfast before you keel over from your workout last night.”

Laughing, he pulled her close for a deep kiss then ate like a starved man, drinking three cups of coffee before he was done.



After breakfast, he called Jessie about the note and they made plans to meet

at the precinct later that afternoon. *Lana will just have to come with me.* There was no way he was leaving her alone, especially at the office.



The phone rang while Brett was in the shower. Lana had to take a deep breath before answering it. Then an image of her brother flashed in her mind and she relaxed, picking up the receiver.

“Hi, Brandon.”

“Listen, *minx*, I told you before to stay out of my brain. How are you? I’ve been getting some pretty serious vibes from you lately.”

“I’m fine, *goofball*. Why did you wait three weeks to call me, eh?” Lana laughed.

“I was in the Bahamas getting some serious sunrays and prepping for a surfing contest. Figured I’d find the roughest waves I could then afterwards, sip on piña coladas with some sexy chicks.”

Giggling now, Lana teased, “Well, you’re in big trouble now! Tina has a man and is engaged to be married. So am I for that matter.”

“Get out of town! *Pumpkin face* finally fell for it? Hope the guy has lots of vitamins so he can keep up with her.”

Tina had had a crush on Brandon while they were all growing up. He used

to tease Lana saying her buddy scared him to death, though Tina treated him like a bothersome mosquito. Tina never hit on Brandon since she didn't want him to know that she'd liked him.

Snickering, Lana cried, "Now watch it, buddy. Our guys are cops and they could come looking for you!"

"Holy crap, I just *have* to meet these guys!" Brandon suddenly got serious. "*Lana pie*, I'm worried about you. I've heard about the murders and I was thinking I should..."

"Absolutely not!" Lana finished his thought. "I don't want you, Mom, Dad, or anyone else near me until this is resolved. It's too dangerous. Tina almost..."

She had to swallow the sudden lump in her throat at the image of Tina slamming into that wall. "She nearly got killed because of me and I don't want you anywhere near me."

"Is she all right?" Brandon asked, his voice subdued.

"She's still recovering from some broken ribs, but *Tina the Tiger* is still alive and kicking." Lana took a deep breath. "Brandon, I love you. I don't want anyone else to get hurt. Please, stay away?"

Sighing, he assured her he'd back off. "I'll be watching and waiting. If I feel you're in trouble, I'll fly in there so fast you won't know what hit you! Got it, *Pooh Bear*?"

Lana smiled at his constant changing of nicknames. They used to have contests to see who could come up with the most names. He always won hands down.

“Brett is watching over me like a hawk and Jessie is taking care of Tina. Don’t worry, *peanut brain*, I’ll be just fine. So, you wanna come to my wedding, or what?” Lana changed the subject.

“What kinda food you gonna have, *hoola brain*?” he quipped.

Laughing out loud, Lana winked at Brett as he came into the room. “You’d eat any kind of food I served and still be hungry for more, *pork belly*.”

Brett’s brows lifted.

“Let me talk to him since he’s obviously standing right there.” Brandon was always in tune with Lana.

“Are you going to be nice to him, *jelly belly*?” she asked with a grin.

“Not for a minute. I’m going to give him crap and threaten to punch his lights out if he doesn’t take care of you properly. I love you, *stinky bum*. I’ll talk to you soon. Stay safe, you hear me?” Brandon was serious now.

“I promise on your smelly big toe, *budmiester*.” Lana laughed her goodbye and handed the phone to Brett. “Good luck, *me bucko*. Your new brother-in-law is on the phone.”

Brett looked like he was going to the gallows until Lana elbowed his

stomach gently at his silliness.



Picking up the phone, Brett slipped his arm around her. “Hey there, Brandon, am I supposed to start making up names for you now?”

Brandon laughed. “Not yet, buddy. I’ve got to check you out first. Do you know any detectives I can call so I can dig out your family skeletons?”

Liking Brandon right away, Brett joked, “I was thinking the same thing about you, buster! You got a record yet?”

Her brother suddenly became serious, very serious.

“How dangerous is this business with my sister?”

“Very. She’s a tough kid, though. I’ve got it covered.”

“Maybe I should come home.”

“No,” Brett said firmly. “That would just make it even more difficult. Like Lana said, just stay away, Brandon.”

“Swear to me you’ll keep her safe.”

“I swear I’ll do everything in my power to keep her safe. I love her.”

“That’s good enough for me. I look forward to meeting you, *butt head*.”

“Butt head? What kind of name is butt head?” Brett asked, trying to lighten the mood as Lana watched him with intensity.

“It’s a good name for a start. Don’t worry I’ll work on a whole new list of

nicknames for you for when we meet in person. I'll keep in touch."

"Good. We'll call if anything comes up. We're close to resolving the case."

"Resolve it quickly then. Make my sister safe so I can dance with her at your wedding. I've gotta go. Goodbye, Brett."

"Bye," Brett said, hanging up the phone.



Lana sat on the sofa waiting patiently for Brett's comments on how wonderful Brandon was.

Sitting down beside her with a woebegone expression, Brett sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, a sure sign of his agitation. Lana stared at him in confusion. She thought their conversation had been smooth and friendly.

"What a creep. I think I'll get Jessie to run a make on him." Brett shook his head, his expression serious.

"What?" Lana squeaked. Then she saw his lip twitch and jumped on him, putting her hands around his throat. "Why, you skunk! You *love* my brother, admit it!"

Brett laughed and began tickling her until she shrieked with laughter. Then he kissed her.

"He's 'way cool', *babe!*" he said, mimicking a surfing dude.

"You'd better like him, buddy! He's the only brother I have for you to play

with!”

Tickling her again, Brett told her to get ready to go out. They had to remain at the precinct for the day.

Letting out a little scream when his palm met her butt as she walked away, she rubbed her burning cheek and grinned at him before leaving the room.

Lana didn’t fight him about waiting at the precinct, bringing her laptop with her. She had a mountain of work to do anyway, and figured she’d spend the time wisely while she waited.



Setting Lana up in a conference room, Brett helped her get logged on to the Internet. He said his meeting would take about an hour and kissed her before exiting the room, leaving her with a smile at his tender assault.

With her back to the door, Lana spent the next half hour catching up on long overdue work on her laptop. When she received notification she had mail, she noticed an e-mail from someone called *Author’s Demise*.

A shiver went up her spine, but she opened the e-mail and froze. It said, “*Blood will have blood. Leave the building and go to the curb. Someone will pick you up. I will set off a bomb to destroy you, your boyfriend, and the whole station if you don’t do it without telling anyone. You have five minutes.*”

About to panic, she realized Brett would feel her thoughts so she quickly banked them and left the computer, opening the door. There was a guard outside and she told him she just needed to use the facilities. He pointed down the hall and followed her.

A water cooler and some vending machines sat across the hall from the ladies room. Needing a distraction, she concentrated on them just as she was about to enter the ladies room. The cooler began to spew water while the vending machines started spitting out pop cans and chocolate bars.

The guard ran over to help stop the water from spilling all over the floor, leaving Lana to quietly walk out the front door, escaping into the sunshine.

She moved to the curb thinking that even though Brett would be angry with her for endangering herself, she *had* to follow the instructions for the sake of all those people. There was a cruiser at the curb and a cop with a thick moustache standing beside it. He nodded toward the rear door. She looked around before getting in. No one noticed her escape.

Once she was inside the cruiser, the cop leaned in as though to help her with her seatbelt. Instead he held a cloth over her nose and mouth, making her breathe in a strong chemical that made her light-headed. Although she struggled to remove the cloth, she soon found herself fading into darkness.



Laying Lana down on the seat out of sight, the cop closed the back door of the cruiser then drove away quickly, leaving the station intact.

It was time for the final chapter.



Brett stiffened in his seat.

“Something’s wrong with Lana!”

He heard a lot of noise and ran out into the hall. Jessie and the chief followed him. Brett felt a chill spiral down his spine. He ran to the conference room, fear clawing at his gut.

Seeing the guard who’d been assigned to Lana down by the vending machines amongst a great deal of chaos, Brett hurried over to him.

“Where’s Lana?” he asked, his tone harsh and lethal. It looked like the results of her gift.

The guard pointed to the ladies room. Brett was sure Lana had used the machines as a distraction so she could leave, but why?

Running to the washroom he threw open the door shouting Lana’s name. As he’d expected, there was no one in there.

“Brett!” Jessie yelled.

He turned and saw Jessie wave to him by the conference room door, his face serious. Another chill washed over him as he ran to the room.

On the computer screen was the message Lana had received and Brett went wild.

“Search the building. Get the bomb squad in here and get some people outside searching the streets to see if anyone saw her leave,” he shouted, then raced outside to see if she was still at the curb. Gone!

“Oh, my God!” Brett tried to pick up on Lana’s thoughts but there was only silence. There weren’t any lights or machinery malfunctions on the street in either direction. He had no idea where she’d gone, or even if she was still alive. Brett didn’t know what to do or where to go as his rage built into a towering inferno. He wanted to hit something, or someone.

Jessie came up to him. “Come on, Brett. We have some work to do if we’re going to find her in time.”

“I can’t feel her, Jessie. It may already be too late.”

His shoulders stiff with cold determination, he followed Jessie inside.

Chapter Twenty-Three

‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’

The soothing movement of a car vibrated beneath her as Lana began to come around. She couldn’t remember why she was in a car, though. Her limbs felt so heavy she couldn’t sit up right away.

Brett? Where are you Brett? As she was sending out a mental call to him, she wondered where he was.

Pushing herself up slowly, she realized she was in a squad car being abducted by a cop! A sign passed by the window and she caught the words: MUSKOKA 31 MILES. She sent Brett the message and prayed he would know where she was.

The cop looked in the rear view mirror and, seeing her awake, pulled the car over. Lana hoped to escape when the door opened but was too weak to fight him. When the cloth was placed over her face again, she slipped back into oblivion; her last thought was of Brett.



Racking his brain to try and figure out where the killer would take Lana,

Brett paced back and forth in the conference room. All of the evidence from the murders was up on the board. He and Jessie were trying to put the pieces together like they had on so many cases before. They were unable to get a trace on the e-mail account used to send the message.

It had been nearly an hour since Lana disappeared and Jessie was just about to ask a question when Brett felt her.

“Muskoka 31 miles,” he murmured. Brett swung around to Jessie, crying, “I need an airlift, Jessie. The killer’s taking Lana to the cabin. I’m sure of it.”

Brett ran from the room. He had to persuade the chief to permit an airlift so he could catch up with them. Finally, he could do something! Grim with purpose, he tore off down the hall.



Groggy, Lana was only vaguely aware when the cop pulled her arm around his neck and moved her up the steep steps to the cabin door. She considered screaming but didn’t want any of the neighbors to get hurt.

Stumbling on a rock, Lana tried to delay the inevitable, but the cop just pulled her along in silence. Once at the top of the stairs, Lana was dropped into the lounge chair on the deck while her captor used a large fishing knife to break open the door. It didn’t take long and soon they were staggering together into the living room.

Since she was too weak to fight, Lana pretended to black out again to buy time. The killer pushed her down on the sofa, dust rising at her sudden weight. Lana tried not to cough or sneeze but rather keep her face free of all expression, her eyes closed and relaxed.

I'm at the cabin, Brett, in Muskoka. Hurry! Lana tried desperately to give Brett her message. Her head was so muddled she wasn't sure if it worked or not. Besides, they were such a long way from each other, she didn't know if he would receive her call.

She could hear the killer moving about in the cabin. The sound of water filling the bathtub and eerie humming came from the washroom. If she'd had the strength, Lana would have run, but she couldn't move much at that moment. She needed time for the drug to wear off and for Brett to arrive.

Brett? Lana doubted he would get here in time since she hadn't roused enough from the drug to see the sign until they were close to the cabin. She hoped that Brett had heard her, wishing once again she could hear his thoughts.

I love you, Brett. No matter what happens, I love you. Unsure if she would ever see him again, she fought to keep from crying.

A tear escaped, slipping down her cheek. At that moment, the killer came back into the room. "So, you're playing possum. Nice try. Come on, Lana, your bath is ready."

Realizing it was hopeless, she opened her eyes. The room wobbled in front of her as she looked up at the ceiling. The ugly, hanging, antler lamp blurred then came into focus, its hideous antlers spiked out in all directions. Turning her head she saw the distorted figure standing a few feet away, waiting for her to speak. That voice was familiar, but who was it?

The killer stepped closer and squatted down in front of Lana. Smiling, the cop peeled the moustache off and removed the police hat.

Recognition dawned. “Deanna? What—”

Deanna laughed. She was suddenly in a very friendly mood and quoted MacBeth in a singsong voice: “*False face must hide what the false heart doth know.*”

“Why are you doing this? Why did you kill all those people? Why did you kidnap me? I’ve been nothing but kind to you. Why?” Lana asked, her voice shaking.

“Why, why, why?” Deanna mimicked. “It doesn’t matter now. Your bath is getting cold, Lana. Come on, up, up. Let’s get you out of those clothes.”

Lana shivered, remembering the plot from the novel she had deliberately used to lure the killer.

Surprisingly strong, Deanna pulled Lana to her feet. The room spun in an alarming kaleidoscope of colors. Nausea churned in her stomach.

Practically dragging her, Deanna kept humming while she forced Lana into

the bathroom.

Once there, Lana fell to the floor beside the tub. Deanna barely noticed. “Okay, darling, strip down and we’ll get you into the nice, hot bath. I’ll go and get you a drink. I know how you love to drink. While you relax, I’ll read you a nice story.”

Shaking her head, Lana backed up towards the toilet. “I’m not getting into the bath, Deanna. Listen to me. You need help. You’re ill, Deanna, mentally ill. I can help you. We can...”

“There’s nothing wrong with me! It’s you who aren’t playing your part. Don’t make me angry. You have to follow the script.” Deanna’s voice was hard and cold now.

“What script, Deanna? Show it to me so I can follow it.” In desperation, Lana tried to distract her.

“Everyone knows the script, Father. You just have to follow it now. Mother will make it all work out. Now get into the tub.” Deanna sounded like she was talking to a child, coaxing Lana into following her orders.

“You called me ‘Father,’ Deanna. Tell me about your father. What happened to him?” Lana thought it must have been something horrendous for her to kill all of those people.

“You will not ask me about that. We don’t talk about that...ever!” she

shrieked.

Lana tried again. “But Deanna, how can we help your father if you don’t talk about it?”

“No!” she screamed as her eyes widened with madness. “Take off your clothes now or I will cut them off!”

Watching in horror as Deanna pulled out the fishing knife, Lana moved backward as far as she could go, cringing when Deanna moved toward her.

Holding up a hand in surrender, she spoke in a calm voice. “Okay, I’ll take them off. I’ll take my clothes off, Deanna.” Moving slowly, Lana climbed to her feet and began to undo her shirt buttons.

Deanna backed up, her eyes glazed as she spoke in a singsong voice. “Call me ‘Mother.’ You have to call me ‘Mother’. It’s in the script.” She went back to humming and quoted another verse from Shakespeare: “*Tis a fault to Heaven, A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, To reason most absurd.*”

Terrified, Lana took her time removing her clothing, hoping for enough time to plan an escape. Deanna didn’t seem to notice. Unfortunately, the woman still held the large knife, so trying to fight her for it was out of the question. Deanna was taller and a lot stronger than Lana, the drug making her weak.

Abruptly, Deanna stopped humming and refocused on Lana. “You’re still dressed, Father, take them off, *now*,” she growled. Her eyes hardened as she took a

threatening step forward. Lana hurried and soon stood naked, doing her best not to show her fear.

Brett, please come quickly!

“Get into the tub, Father. I’m going to go and get you a drink now.” Deanna wandered into the living room, leaving Lana standing uncertainly by the tub.

Thoughts of fleeing raced through her mind but she didn’t think she’d have enough time to escape since she was still sluggish.

Bartholomew popped his head out of his hole. Lana whispered. “Hey, buddy, do you happen to have a gun in there?” He turned around and scooted back inside. “Gee, thanks a bunch!”

Deanna was back now. “You’re not in the tub! That isn’t how the script goes. Now get in.” Her voice was harsh and firm again. She had a drink in one hand and the knife in the other.

Lana quickly stepped into the tub. At Deanna’s urging, she sat down. The water was getting cool now. Deanna handed her the glass and said in a loving voice, “Drink up, Father. I made it just the way you like it.”

Pretending to drink, Lana made something in the other room crash to the floor. When Deanna went to investigate, Lana dumped the drink into the water. Walking back into the room a moment later, she saw Lana taking the last sip and putting the glass down on the floor beside the tub, wiping her mouth with the

back of her hand.

In the cooled water, Lana shivered. Deanna was happy now and put the toilet seat down, sitting on it with a romance novel in her hands. She began to read aloud from the book.

“He lay in the bath surrounded by bubbles. His body relaxing under the effects of the drink she had poured him.” Deanna looked up at her, smiling gently.

“Soon, his eyes began to grow heavy; the drug she had slipped him was beginning to work. His reign of terror was coming to an end.” Smiling at her with insane bliss, she waited for something.

When Deanna stared at her expectantly, Lana realized that the other woman was waiting for her to play out the scene, thinking the drink must have been drugged. She laid her head back against the tub and fluttered her eyes closed, pretending she was succumbing while using her toes as she fought to pull the plug to let out the water.

Deanna sat back on the seat, her smile showing Lana she was happy that the script was working the way it was supposed to. “It’s too bad you have to die now, Lana, but you must understand that novels kill people. That can’t happen again. It’s time to stop it. You should never have approved all of those manuscripts, Lana. You were wrong to do so.”

Lana wanted to talk, to say *something*, but Deanna wasn’t going to listen

now. Focusing her gift on removing the plug, she played her part and waited.

Not exactly sure of what Deanna was waiting for, Lana looked up in question.

Leaning forward, Deanna hissed, “This is the part where you realize that I’m going to kill you, Father. Remember how you couldn’t move and Mother waited until just the right minute before...”

Standing suddenly, determination in her stance, Deanna leaned over the tub. Lana pretended to be completely stoned, rolling her head back and forth on the back of the tub. *Brett, please help me!*

Shrieking, Deanna shoved Lana under the water, screaming foul things at her. With barely enough time to take a deep breath, Lana struggled against Deanna’s strong arms. She’d finally unplugged the tub while Deanna was reading, but the water wasn’t draining fast enough. Darkness began to close over her, her final thoughts of Brett. *I’m sorry, Brett, I tried...*



The police chopper shot through the sky trying to get Brett to the Muskoka cabin in time. Brett heard Lana’s calls and kept muttering, “Hang in, Lana. Hang in there!”

His heart raced as they sped by the trees and homes. It had been an hour and fifteen minutes since she’d been kidnapped. Brett was frantic, shouting to the

pilot, “What’s our ETA?”

“Five minutes, Brett. Hang on, I’ll get you there.”

Jessie put a hand on Brett’s shoulder, nodding encouragement.

I love you, Brett. No matter what happens, I love you. Brett heard Lana speaking again and swore as helplessness settled low in his gut.

“Arrrrgg,” he cried out. “Damn it, it can’t be too late! Lana, I’m coming, please be all right!”

“There’s the squad car that’s waiting for you. I’ll drop as low as I can but you might have to jump a few feet. I don’t want to hit those electrical wires.” The pilot pulled up on the throttle and slowed to a hover near the car.

Out the door in a flash, Brett used a rope to shimmy down fast, jumping the final few feet. Jessie was right behind him.

Running at full tilt to the car, Brett and Jessie jumped in. Brett yelled, “Go. Go, but keep the lights and sirens off.”

They were only a mile from the cabin. He wanted to get as close as possible without the killer knowing. If Lana was still alive when they got there, he didn’t want her used as a shield.

“*Brett, please help me!*” came Lana’s call. Brett’s stomach was in knots. He could taste fear in his mouth. Jessie didn’t say a word. Both men prepared their guns. When the car was barely stopped about fifty feet from the cabin, Brett was out the

door in a flash and running.

“I’m sorry, Brett, I tried...” Cold terror crawled up his spine as he raced up the steps and opened the door as quietly as he could. He could hear the water splashing around in the bathroom and a woman’s voice screaming.

As Brett turned the corner, his heart nearly stopped when he saw Deanna holding Lana underwater. “Police, Freeze!”

Deanna spun around and grabbed her knife from the back of the toilet seat. When Lana came up sputtering and gasping for breath, Brett lost his focus for a second.

Grabbing Lana by the hair, Deanna held the knife to her throat. “You’re ruining *everything*! This is not in the script! You can’t be here. Go away. Now!” Deanna was shrieking at him, completely out of control, her eyes wide with madness.

Pulling Lana up by her hair, Deanna soon had her out of the tub. Her fist clenched tightly in the wet strands, she kept Lana between Brett and herself. Holding the gun pointed directly at the center of Deanna’s forehead, he fought to keep from looking at Lana to see if she was all right.

“You’ve spoiled everything! She cannot live. She is evil! Those books kill people. They kill people, you fool!” As Deanna moved the knife in closer to Lana’s throat, the blade dug in slightly, causing her to gasp in pain.

“Let her go, Deanna. It’s over now. You’re under arrest.” Brett spoke in a calm measured voice. Lana was shaking now as blood dripped down her neck, silent but her eyes beseeched his.

Brett stepped forward but Deanna shrieked, jerking Lana by the hair. “She will die, but she has to die the way the script says she must. Go away, now.” Deanna’s voice regressed to a little girl’s.

Trying to reason with her, Brett said softly, “It’s okay now, Deanna. The books won’t run anymore. You can stop now. Lana won’t let anyone publish them. Put the knife down.” Holding his free hand out in a gesture of surrender, he remained alert, the gun ready.

Confusion washed over her expression. “She won’t approve them anymore? But we have to follow the script. You can’t stop the script.”

“Sure we can. Just for you, Deanna. We can stop it just for you.” Brett cajoled. His arm was steady, the gun never wavering.

Suddenly, she panicked, her eyes roving back and forth, as though looking for an imaginary person. “No, Mother, I did what you asked me to. We can let this one go, can’t we?” Her little girl voice whined.

Brett’s eyes met Lana’s briefly, trying to reassure her.

Focusing on Brett once again, Deanna swung back to the cold adult voice. “Mother says we have to kill her. Her evil reign must stop.” Pulling Lana’s hair

back again, exposing her throat, Deanna looked over at the tub.

“Where are the bubbles? She has to have a bath. That’s how the story goes.” The child sobbed and looked at Brett in accusation. “You did this, didn’t you?” Venom dripped from her adult voice.

Keeping the gun trained on Deanna’s forehead, Brett tried again. “I want it to stop too, Deanna. I’ll make sure it stops. Don’t you want me to?”

Tilting her head, she studied Brett in confusion. “You really do?”

Nodding, Brett continued. “I can make it stop, Deanna. All you need to do is let Lana go and you and I will stop it for good.”

Mad laughter came from her. “You’re trying to trick me, aren’t you? You’re lying. How can you stop it? You’re an author.”

Nodding, Brett went with her assumption. “That’s right, Deanna. I’m an author and I never write horrible things in my books. Never! I can talk to all of the other authors and make them stop writing the evil if you want me to.”

Deanna nodded then tilted her head as though she listened to the voices again. “Mother says we have to kill her first. She did very bad things, you know. She said the authors could write bad things. Mother says that we must stop her. ‘*It is not, nor it cannot come to good*’. Hamlet knew. He knew the truth.”

Bartholomew chose that moment to come out to play, running across Deanna’s foot. Screaming, she loosened her grip on Lana for a moment.

Slamming her elbow into Deanna's stomach, Lana tore her body away from the madwoman's grasp, running toward Brett.

It all happened so fast Brett was hard-pressed to remember it later. As Lana came crashing into his arms, his gun was knocked from his hand.

Deanna shrieked and raised the knife, sinking it into Lana's back then raced past Brett into the living room. Jessie was waiting by the front door. Deanna stopped, staring at him with a confused look, her knife dripping with blood as she faced him. Carefully, Brett lowered Lana to the floor in the doorway and tried to stem the flow of blood.

He could hear Lana's wheeze as she fought for breath, though she still watched Deanna as the woman screamed at Jessie, lifting her arm to attack him with the knife. Jessie aimed his gun just as Deanna made ready to rush him. The antler lamp suddenly ripped away from its mooring on the ceiling and swept downward in a wide arc, slamming deep into her back.

Stopping in her tracks, Deanna looked over at Lana with an expression of utter surprise on her face. She gasped a few times, her eyes wide in disbelief as she slowly dropped to her knees. The child's voice whispered, "It's not supposed...to...end...like...this..." then fell forward onto her face.

When Jessie checked Deanna's neck, he didn't find a pulse. Brett was applying pressure to the wound on Lana's back.

“Grab that blanket on the chair, Jessie.” He was in professional mode and worked to keep her from going into shock, talking to her, reassuring her that she would be just fine, desperate to keep from thinking about losing her.

Opening the door, Jessie gave the “all clear” sign and let the paramedics in. They’d been called ahead of time in case they were needed.

Lying on her stomach, her cheek on the floor, Lana whispered, “Brett?”

Leaning down so she could see him, he answered, “Yes, kitten.” Terror wrenched his gut.

“I’m sorry...I didn’t want...anyone...to...die...I had...to...to...go,” she gasped with each word.

“Shhh, don’t talk now, kitten. We’ll talk later.” Brett’s heart was breaking. He had to step back while the paramedics prepared her for transport.

When she was lifted onto the stretcher she gasped, moaning in pain. “Brett?” she hissed.

“Hush, sweetheart, I’m right here.”

“Please, don’t...leave...me. I’m...af...raid.” A tear trailed down her cheek.

“Through thick and thin, kitten, I’m with you. I won’t leave your side.” Brett held her hand and looked into eyes that were glazed with pain. “Stay quiet now so the medics can work on you, okay?”

Brett gently kissed her cheek, drying her tears. He moved back a bit while

an oxygen mask was placed over her mouth and nose.

He took a very brief moment to confer with Jessie then followed her to the ambulance. The nearest hospital was forty-five minutes from the cabin. Brett didn't know if she could hold on that long. His heart nearly stopped when she passed out and he thought she'd died on him. The paramedic assured him her life signs were good.

Jessie had called for an airlift. The chopper they had arrived in still hovered nearby, so it only took twenty minutes to get Lana there and into surgery.

Shaking when he finally moved to the waiting room and bought a coffee, Brett prayed like he'd never prayed before. He wanted to pound the crap out of something; his fear and anger were so strong. The doctors would be in to speak with him as soon as they knew anything.

More than two hours later a doctor came to see him. "Ms. Anderson is going to be fine. The damage could have been a lot worse but the knife glanced off her ribcage and nicked her lung, missing any other vital organs. The stab wound would have been deeper but for the rib. She should be in the hospital for several days then she'll be released, assuming there's someone around to help her for the next few weeks."

"Oh, I think there will be an army of volunteers ready to help her, doctor. Thank you. When can I see her?"

“She’s in ICU now and you can go in for a few minutes, but no longer. Once she stabilizes, we’ll move her to her own room.” The doctor took Brett to meet a nurse who would get him into sanitized clothing and take him to see Lana.



Holding her hand, Brett felt a relief so great he almost cried. He’d never cried in his adult life, but he sure felt like it now.

Lying on her stomach, Lana had oxygen tubes secured to her nostrils, a heart monitor that beeped a constant rhythm, and an IV bag attached to her hand via a tube and needle, yet her face was the best sight he’d seen all day.

Groggy, she opened her eyes with a flutter. In a hoarse whisper, she hissed, “Brett?”

“I’m here, kitten. You’re going to be just fine now,” Brett assured her. He tenderly kissed her forehead and held her hand. “I’m staying with you, just rest now. It’s over and you’re safe. We all are.”

Lana smiled behind the mask and fell back into oblivion.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Building Dreams

Due to a slight infection, Lana had to stay in the hospital for a full week. The relief she felt at going home, in spite of the exceptional care of the hospital staff, was great. There was no place like home, especially one with Brett by her side.

Carrying her gently from the car to the apartment, Brett was careful not to hurt her. When they reached the door, he didn't have an extra hand to open it but Lana just smiled and the door swung open.

Raising his brow, Brett stated, "You didn't tell me about unlocking doors." Realization dawned in his eyes. "You mean that the whole time you were locked in the bedroom you could have just opened the door at any time?"

With a mischievous smile, Lana remained silent.

"Why, you sneaky monkey, I can see I still have plenty to learn about you." Brett walked into the apartment and went straight to the living room.

"Surprise!" The yell made her jump then moan with pain. She'd been looking at Brett and hadn't seen the others in the apartment.

Twelve employees from the firm, Tina, Jessie, and even the police chief stood waiting in the living room. Lana bit her lip to stop it from quivering at the warm

welcome.

Tina moved forward and kissed her friend on the cheek. “Welcome home, pal. We thought you’d like some good news when you finally got out of the torture chamber.”

Grinning, Lana said, “The doctors and nurses were as nice as can be.” With a conspiratorial smile, she whispered, “But damn it’s great to be home though.”

Laughing, Tina held her ribs. “Ouch!”

Brett gently placed Lana in the lazy-boy chair, putting it back into its most reclined setting. “I’ll get you a cold drink, kitten.”

The police chief came up to welcome her home and gently shook her hand. “I’m thrilled that Brett is marrying someone who can kick his butt when needed. I’m glad you’re all right, Lana.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Call me Jason.”

“Thank you, Jason,” she said, grinning.

“Hey, you never let us call you Jason, Chief!” Jessie complained.

“That’s because you are only one of my lowly minions. Lana is a goddess!”

“Gee thanks,” Jessie muttered, grinning at her.

Jason turned back to Lana. “It was a close call for you, and I’m really glad you’re okay. You were very brave to protect us all from the bomb threat. Brett was

a wild man when he found out you were missing. I don't know how he found you, but he definitely had near-perfect timing."

"I'll say," Lana quipped. "I nearly had to sic the mouse on Deanna before Brett finally arrived."

Everyone laughed. The Chief stepped back and her employees gathered around. For the next hour she was busy asking and answering questions.

Anna Warrington told Lana that since her rescue there had been dozens of new authors just begging to publish their books with the firm. It seemed the notoriety went a long way to adding to the fame and fortune of its authors. A killer, the boss attacked and saved by another author who turned out to be an undercover cop—this was the stuff of which novels were made. Business was booming. The positions for CEO as well as temporary lawyer had been filled and the candidates began work right away. Even Linda was doing well. Anna had taken over and organized the whole process.

Lana had been thinking about that during her week in the hospital and she decided that now was a great time to drop the bomb.

"Anna, I need you to fill one more position for me, if you don't mind."

Stepping forward eagerly, Anna was ready in an instant to help. Her enthusiasm proved to Lana she was making the right decision.

"What position do you want filled, Lana? I'll make it happen right away."

“Well, we’re going to need a new publicist to replace you.” Lana bit back a grin when Anna’s face fell.

“I...I don’t understand, Lana. I thought you would be pleased with my work. Are you firing me?” Concern marred her features.

“Anna, even you can’t possibly be expected to do two jobs at once. I need my new Vice President to take on more of my load since I’ll need time to convalesce.” Lana smiled.

Her eyes so wide that Lana thought she might end up fainting, Anna swallowed hard, staring at Lana in open-mouthed amazement. “You want me to run the ship for you?”

At Lana’s nod, Anna flushed red with pleasure. She looked like she wanted to escape before anyone saw her suspiciously bright eyes.

“Why, I...I’d be honored. I will be very thorough, and fair, and, ah...oh, bloody hell, Lana! Thank you!” Anna bent to hug her boss then remembered her wound, so she just took her hand and shook it gently. The staff clapped and congratulated Anna.

“I know the ship is in great hands with you, Anna. Welcome aboard.” Lana cringed as a wave of pain hit her. It was time for a painkiller.

Tina took over as soon as Lana winced. “Okay, people, the party is over and we need to get the invalid into bed. Out you go...now.” Her commanding tone had

them all hopping, including Anna who guided them all out the door in record time.

After they all left, Lana grinned at Tina. “You are brutal sometimes, but you sure can clear a room in an instant.”

With an arrogant sniff, Tina showed Lana she was proud of herself. Blowing on the backs of her nails, she then rubbed them on her shoulder. “It’s a gift.”

A laugh escaped but ended up in a groan as the pain set in. Brett picked her up and carried her to bed, Tina and Jessie following right behind them with water and painkillers.

Once Lana was tucked in and medicated, Tina and Jessie said their goodbyes and told Lana they would be back in the morning. Jessie’s mom was coming over to take care of both women for the day while the boys were at the precinct.

Tina winked at Lana and blew a kiss as Jessie led her from the room, while Brett stood silently, hands on hips, watching her.

When she started to squirm, she asked, “Why are you staring at me?”

“Five days as my prisoner and you never bothered to escape. Yet when your friends and the station are threatened with a bomb you’re out of there like a shot.” He shook his head. “You’re definitely not going to be one of those quiet, malleable wives, are you?”

Pulling her “I’m innocent” expression, she winked. “Of course I will be, my

master, whatever you say.” She fluttered her eyes with great exaggeration.

It warmed her heart to see Brett throw back his head and laugh. She’d certainly been a pain in the butt for him since he’d first met her, yet here he was, right by her side.

With caution, Brett carefully sat on the side of the bed and leaned over to kiss her. Lana yawned right afterward and he pretended to be offended.

“Oh, sure. I kiss you and you yawn. That’s nice, kitten, real nice!”

Smiling wearily, she yawned again. “Guess it’s time for a nap, master. Wanna join me?” Winking, she wiggled her brows suggestively.

Shaking his head vehemently and throwing up his hands, he backed away from the bed. “I dare not, my sweet. You might punch me in the stomach if I hurt your war wound. I’ll take a rain check for a few weeks from now.”

“If I had the energy to throw a pillow at you, I would, but...” Yawn. “For now, I think a nap is a good idea.” Lana soon drifted off to sleep.



“Keep them closed, Lana. No peeking.” Brett warned.

Chuckling, she teased, “Won’t that make it a bit difficult to see where I’m walking?”

Holding her close to his side, he murmured, “You know I’ll keep you safe.” He kept moving her forward, his large hand covering both of her eyes.

Dying to peek, Lana made something crash off to his left.

“It’s not going to work, kitten. I’m on to your tricks. You keep those eyes closed.” He snickered at her sneaky ploy.

It had taken a full month for her to be able to move around without pain from her wound. Since she was only able to work for brief periods at home on her laptop, she was thrilled at the way Anna had taken control of the firm.

Free to heal and take extra time for herself and Brett, she’d even considered taking a year off but couldn’t bear to be away from her job that long.

Letting out a little squeak when her foot hit a small rock, Lana clutched at his arm. “Can I open my eyes now, please?”

“Since you asked so nicely, sure, go ahead.” Brett pulled his hand away.

Blinking in surprise, her mouth dropped. Before her lay a huge ranch-style home that faced Lake Ontario. They were still in the city, but far enough from downtown to make it seem like they were in the country.

“What is this, Brett?” Turning to look at him, she saw love and pride in his eyes.

“Our future home.”

The home was about half built. There would still be a lot of finishing touches like landscaping and fencing to be done before it was completed. The outside walls were made of fieldstone in a soft gray, the roof a dark green sheet

metal. Scattered around the home were large pine trees that appeared to have been there for many decades.

“How on Earth did you find property with trees in the city?” she asked in awe.

“My family has owned this land for generations. We just never bothered to use it before. The day after your place burned down, I contacted a friend and told him to start building. I had already designed the floor plan before I even knew you so it was just a matter of saying the word ‘go.’”

“Brett. It’s beautiful!” Lana laughed. “Aren’t you glad I can’t read *your* mind?”

He chuckled, kissing the tip of her nose. “You have no idea how glad I am. This is a whole new start for us. Although...”

Looking into his eyes in curiosity, she asked, “Although what?”

“I’m really going to miss the lock on the outside of the bedroom door. I guess I’ll have to bring it with us when we move in.” He gave her a wicked leer.

Turning to him, she slowly ran her arms up his chest to curve around his neck, cringing a bit when her wound throbbed. “Hmmm, I think I’ll have to get a more solid door if I’m going to lock *you* in the bedroom.”

“Me? I was talking about you.” He pretended shock.

“Mmm, yes, you. Why don’t you show me our new bedroom and we’ll talk about it further?” Lana pulled his head down for a kiss and soon heard catcalls and

ribald comments coming from the work crew.

Pulling his head back, he grinned, “I’m not sure if that’s approval or jealousy. Let’s go look at our new home.”

Taking his hand, Lana followed Brett to the door. He placed a construction hat on her head and one on his, grinning again. “You sure look a lot cuter in that hat than the workers do.”

Adjusting the brim of the hat, she nodded, giggling as it slipped forward.

“Gee, thanks.”

“If there’s anything you want to change, now’s the time. I hope to have it ready for us to move into in one month.” He didn’t let on, but Lana could tell that he was nervous about her reaction to the design.

With a serious face she walked through the house with him without saying a word. Stopping in the master bedroom she noted the large structure in the corner of the room near the window and raised her brow at him.

Smiling, desire burning in his eyes, Brett said, “Hot tub...right in the bedroom so we won’t have to walk far from the bed.”

Winking he moved to the bathroom. There was a new, old-fashioned style tub and a separate two-person shower stall as well as two sinks and a toilet.

“If you like, I’ll bring Bartholomew home and we can dig out a hole in the wall for him.” Brett teased.

Lana only smiled at him, remaining silent.

With a concerned expression, Brett followed her around, keeping his eyes on her face. She knew she was doing a great job of making him sweat.

Although it was still unfinished, she caught the basic idea. The teal-green ceramic tiles were being finished with a teal grout and Brett told her the tub in their bedroom would be teal also. Lana only nodded and walked quickly out of the room.

Alarm marred Brett's features as he caught up with her. "Is there something you don't like, Lana? We can change it. Is it the old-fashioned tub? I know you used to love it at the cabin until..." Brett thought he knew the answer to her silence.

"Oh... Lana, I'm sorry, I'll have it removed right away." He assumed with her nearly drowning in it that day not so long ago she was having flashbacks.

Shaking her head, Lana wiped at the tears on her face. "It's not that." She accepted his hug and took a few minutes to control herself.

"What is it, Lana? You keep blocking me so I can't tell what you're thinking," Brett complained.

Smiling into his chest, Lana was really glad he couldn't read her since she had a big surprise for him, too.

"It's just— Well, you went to all this trouble and I love everything about it.

It's just a little overwhelming, that's all." She hugged his chest then pulled herself together, wiping her eyes. With a sniff, she asked. "Will you finish the tour?"

Nodding, Brett led the way and showed her the smaller room next to theirs, speaking softly in her ear. "The nursery."

Lana's eyes flew up to his. "You mean you're ready to have a child?"

"I'm ready when you are, kitten. I can't think of anything more I'd rather have in my life than your children." His kiss was sweet.

"Well," she said, "I suppose we better get home and start working on filling this room then." Looking up at him she asked, "Unless you'd like to get married first?"

He laughed in delight. The wedding was set for the next month. Pulling her closer, he kissed her with growing passion, showing her how much having her in his life meant to him. He was on the border of getting carried away when they heard a crash.

With a laugh, he let her go. She realized that being in a construction zone that wasn't "Lanatized" was dangerous. When he took her hand and walked her to the front door, they passed a worker who stood staring at the mess on the floor, scratching his head. "Now how on Earth did that happen?"

With a muffled noise, Brett moved them to the exit faster. Brett and Lana waited until they arrived outside, dropped the hard hats, and moved away from

the house before they burst out laughing. Hand-in-hand, they walked to the car then talked all the way back to the apartment about their new home and how to decorate it.



The next day, Brett woke up alone in bed. A note lay on Lana's pillow. Picking it up, he read it out loud, "*Catch me if you can. I'll send you messages to follow. Love, Lana.*"

Throwing on his clothes, he focused his mind on her. She hadn't opened up to him yet. He poured himself a coffee and made some toast. Just when he finished his breakfast she threw him the first message. "*Muskoka.*"

Grinning, Brett grabbed his jacket and raced to the car. He was on the highway heading for the cabin in minutes. The country music coming from the radio kept him company while he drove.

"*I love you.*" Smiling, he kept his foot steady on the gas pedal.

This was a time when he wished she could read his mind. He was enjoying the chase, knowing it was in fun and not danger.

Brett increased his speed. It was another ten minutes until he reached the cabin. His stomach growled since it was close to lunchtime now.

Finally pulling up to the cabin, Brett frowned. There was no sign of anyone,

no car in the driveway, and the doors and windows were shut tight. He got out and was about to climb the steps when Lana whispered in his mind again, “*The pontoon boat.*”

Anticipation had his heartbeat increasing as he raced to the docks. The owner of the restaurant where Brett and Lana had spent such a memorable evening stood there with a wide grin on his face. He held up a picnic basket.

“Better hurry, Brett! You wouldn’t want the chicken to get cold now, would you?” He smiled and winked, handing it over.

“Where is she?” Brett asked.

Shrugging his shoulders, a sneaky grin on his face, the man just pointed to the boat. “You better just get in. She said she’d give you a message when you started out.”

“Thanks.” Slapping the man on the back, he took the basket from him.

Once Brett was on the pontoon boat and headed toward the middle of the lake, she called softly, “*Head west. Hurry, I’m hungry.*”

He gunned the boat. It wasn’t a fast-moving boat but it glided quickly enough over the water to get him wherever he was going.

The chase was intriguing, making him squirm in the seat in anticipation as his jeans tightened.



Staring through binoculars, Lana smiled when she saw him approaching. He would have driven right past her but turned the boat immediately when he received her silent directions. He was nearly at the dock. Lana put the glasses down and undressed, shivering with need.



Docking the boat, Brett grabbed the basket and stopped to look up at the new log cabin. He wondered who lived there. It was two stories high. Most of the front that faced the lake was made of windows. There was an upper deck that wrapped around the second floor. Somehow it looked familiar to him.

No one was about so he moved to the front door and knocked. No answer. He opened the door and called out, “Lana?” Still no answer, but he did hear some soft, sexy trumpet music coming from the upper level as he stepped into the hall.

The main room was spacious, sporting a fieldstone fireplace along one wall. A black leather couch, accented with teal blankets and throw pillows, faced it. Black and teal rugs were scattered on the floor beneath a magnificent cedar coffee table made from a six-inch-thick slab from a cedar tree spanning three feet across and supported by the roots of a tree. It shone with a high-gloss finish.

Brett was impressed with the room, noting a large kitchen to the side with lots of cupboards lining the walls in the open-concept home. He looked up at the cathedral ceiling. There was a beautiful rustic light made from tree branches

hanging in the center of the room.

A pine fence ran across the length of the building showing more rooms on the second level.

“Come upstairs,” she murmured through his thoughts.

Hearing the music change to an even more sultry song, Brett put the basket down and climbed the stairs two at a time. He found himself standing in a large bedroom with a king-sized, cannonball bed. The large windows also overlooked the lake. The bedspread was black and teal with shiny, satin throw pillows in the two solid colors.

Hearing a splash, he moved over to the adjacent washroom and slowly opened the door, catching his breath at the vision before him.

Lana lay in a huge bathtub with her eyes closed, surrounded by bubbles. He caught the scent of lavender. Candles burned all around on the many shelves surrounding the tub.

The tub was teal, exactly the same color as he’d imagined for a cabin he’d wanted to build some time in the future.

Stripping his clothes off, Brett locked the door behind him and slipped into the tub with her. He touched her shoulder, murmuring, “You’re it!”

Lana laughed and opened her eyes. “It took you long enough! Why, I nearly turned into a prune waiting for you.”

Leaning in close, he kissed her until she was breathless. Pulling away with reluctance, he asked, “Whose place is this?”

Smiling with an innocent look, she shrugged. “Oh, do you like it?”

“Sure. I had one like this in mind years ago but never got around to building it.” Brett said, focusing on the way her nipples peeked through the bubbles and disappeared again as she moved.

“I know. Jessie introduced me to your friend the architect. He gave me the plans when I told him I wanted to build it for you.” Lana was running her fingers up and down his chest.

Brett stopped moving. “You took my plans?” he asked, incredulous.

“Of course I did. How else would I know what you like? What, do you think I’m a mind reader?” Grinning, Lana ran her finger across his lower lip.

Biting her finger gently, he held it in place using his tongue to tease and suck on it.

Groaning, Lana closed her eyes and dropped her head back. Her nipples peeked above the water again as her back arched.

The invitation was too much to refuse. Brett leaned forward and cradled her breast in his hand, kissing and sucking on her neck, careful not to leave any marks.

Continuing his sweet assault, Brett spoke in a husky voice between kisses, “So, not only...did you...steal my plans...but you...decorated it...just like...I would

have.”

Lana smiled, her eyes still closed, then whispered, “The...decorating...ah...wasn’t planned...we just seem to...ohh...have the...same...taste.” A deep sigh escaped her. Brett lifted her up, switching places with her.

Cradling her in his arms, her head resting by his neck, he groaned as Lana began to nibble and lick his neck and earlobe. He was just as sensitive as she was.

Cupping her breasts, he rubbed his thumbs over her nipples. Lana lifted her head for a moment and looked at the switch on the wall. The whirlpool jets started up.

With a chuckle, he kissed her. Their tongues dueled and their hands roved.

Lana climbed on top of him. This time they didn’t use a condom. She slid him into her, moaning as sensations rocketed through her belly. She moved her hips up and down, staring into his blue eyes, showing him the love in hers.

Placing his hands on her hips, he increased the motion, the momentum building as their needs met in a heated dance. Lana rocked her hips faster and soon he felt her pulsing around him as she cried out. Brett pumped faster and faster, groaning in the agony of true bliss.

Soon, all too soon, he joined Lana in flight. Stars burst behind their eyes. His neck strained as his teeth ground together from the strength of his release. Lana

screamed as her hips jerked then fell forward to his chest, panting for breath.

Holding her close, Brett kissed her forehead while the water pulsed around them. Lana turned the jets off with her gift. They lay like that together in the warm water for a while longer until it cooled enough to make them leave the tub.



After the bath Lana showed Brett the house.

“Strange, nothing crashed while we were making love.”

Snickering, Lana smiled slyly. Waving her hand at a shelf of knick-knacks, she said, “Go ahead and pick one up.”

He laughed, throwing back his head when he couldn’t move it.

“Completely ‘Lanatized’. Every item on the shelves is either nailed down or secured with straps.” She threw him a proud grin.

“The whole place?”

Nodding, she added, “Any room you might want to...ah, use.”

“I like the design. It’s fully...functional.” Brett wriggled his eyebrows.

Lana laughed and they dressed in the new robes she’d purchased in town. Together they headed downstairs to find the lunch basket.

Watching him as he unpacked the food, she wondered if her brother would ever find his true love. Brett looked up with a grin.

“I don’t doubt it for a minute. I’ll even bet you that his woman ends up being

someone just as feisty as you.” Brett winked.

“Huh! You wish! I bet she’s going to be sweet and malleable.” Lana and Brett both laughed, remembering Jessie’s first impression of *Tina the Tiger*.

Brett became serious and took Lana’s hand in his. He kissed her palm. “I just hope she’s like you; the greatest gift a man could have.”

Lana’s eyes filled with tears of joy. “Right back atcha, dude. Right back atcha.” She threw herself into his arms and soon the food was forgotten, again.

The End

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Author Bio:

I have written creatively since my youth. I've written for newspapers, and did technical writing as an Environmental Technologist. I also write non-fiction about health and environmental issues. As a fulltime author I am tenacious and creative with my stories, losing myself in my characters and their exciting lives. The paranormal fascinates me to no end and I think cops are hot! It's wonderful to live for a few moments as a cop, private investigator, or firefighter, to name a few characters, as I weave stories filled with danger and suspense. Many of my characters are multi-cultural; First Nation, Asian, Black, and more... I love this job!

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