



Extrasensory Elements

Book 2

I B Jumpin'

Franny Armstrong

Red Rose Publishing

Extrasensory Elements Series

Book Two

I B Jumpin'

By

Franny Armstrong

Dedication

This story is based on the exciting life of my beloved brother, professional skydiver, Richard Minnis (aka Thumper) who lives for the thrill of the moment, never surrendering to obstacles. His bravery astounds me.

Also, to my son, Bill Armstrong, who has taken flight with his Uncle and learned to spread his wings in life, never backing down from a challenge.

I admire my men and thank them for allowing me to live through them vicariously with my feet planted firmly on the ground.

Thanks 'Thumper', for your expertise

My Love Always

Franny/Mom



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Chapter One

In Like Flint!

The woman trembled in his arms as Brandon looked over her shoulder through the door. He barely heard her frantic intake of breath as the wind whipped over their bodies, calling to them. Still, he stood there and held her in place, while the excitement climbed. The seconds ticked by at the slowest of paces.

Unsure and panicked, she tried to turn and face him but he held her still in his strong embrace. Adrenaline pumped through his veins like a rocket on liftoff as he waited for the beep.

When it sounded, he tensed, let out a primal yell at the top of his lungs, and pushed her out the door with him.

Her screams drifted away on the high winds as she attempted to grab at him but was unable to. The grip he had on her was too powerful and the harness held her locked in place.

He shouted close to her ear so she would hear him. "Open your eyes. You'll love it!"

"Noooo," she shrieked.

“Come on, sweetheart, it’s not going to take long. This is your final chance. Open them!”

The minute she opened her eyes and looked down, he could tell since she relaxed against him, her arms spreading wide as if feeling for the ground.

“Oh, my God!”

Brandon yelled, “Yihaaa!”

Surprised, she screamed then began to laugh. “This is amazing!”

The familiar feel of euphoria as the high velocity, 120 mph winds distorted his face was something Brandon looked forward to each time he jumped. Always a professional, he listened for the second beep from the altimeter inside his helmet and prepared for the next step.

Weightless, they floated for an endless moment in time while below them rested a world covered in glorious blues and greens. Unusual patterns dotted the landscape of farmer’s fields and forests as far as his eyes could see.

She yelled over her shoulder at him, “I’ve never seen anything so beautiful before, Stomper. I think I love you!”

Used to women literally falling for him when their adrenaline was up, Brandon laughed. When he heard the final beep, he shouted, “Ready? Here we go!”

At her nod he pulled the ripcord. Suddenly they were yanked upward. Their descent slowed as the wind captured the thin material of the canopy that held them aloft.

She hollered in delight as they floated toward the ground at a fast clip. There were no attempts to cling to him now. The harness around her waist and chest kept her close to his body, but she didn't seem to notice since he kept her safe in his expert hands.

The altimeter beeped again telling him their altitude. He began to guide the chute to their landing spot. Within five minutes from the moment they jumped from the plane, they were twenty feet from the ground. Brandon pulled back on the ropes to flare, or slow the canopy, for landing. Their feet touched the earth with a gentle thud.

"Whoop!" The woman shouted in joy as Brandon released her from the restraints.

Once he'd removed his helmet, he laughed again as she threw her arms around him and gave him a big lip-smacking kiss and nearly knocked him off his feet.

"You are amazing! What a rush! Wanna get married now?" By the rosy red in her cheeks and the wide open eyes, he knew that her adrenaline still pumped at full speed ahead. It was what skydivers called a 'natural high'.

“Thanks for the offer, Jill, but I’m going back up in a few minutes. I have to get my gear ready. You can purchase your video tape at the clubhouse. It was fun working with you.”

Brandon gave her his most endearing, lop-sided grin then turned to gather up his chute.

The excited young woman raced off to find her friends, not upset at all with his gentle refusal. He didn’t get proposed to every day, but many women had told him that they wouldn’t have minded marrying him. He’d been told many times that not only was he handsome and fun, but he also had charisma. Though called a hunk for many years, it never went to his head.

About to repack his chute, Brandon noticed his co-jumper, Cindy Scott, running toward him, concern marring her features.

“Stomper, we have a problem,” she yelled, still running full tilt.

Before she reached him, he scanned the landing field and spotted one of the clients sitting on the ground holding his or her ankle.

“Ripper!” he snarled in disgust. The other Tandem Jumper stood over the client scratching his head.

Anger filled his gut as he threw his gear down. “Cindy, will you pack up my rig please? I’ll handle this.”

He didn't trust anyone else but her to do it for him. Packing a chute incorrectly could mean your death. After he unbuckled the harness, he set out at a dead run to where the client lay on the ground.



Brandon gave Ripper a hard stare, noting the dilated pupils and glassy eyes.

"We'll be talking later, in my office. You're grounded for the rest of the day. You might want to get out of my sight, now!"

As rage at the man burned through his veins, he tried to rein it in before he turned to face the injured person on the ground, schooling his features.

"Hi, I'm Brandon Anderson. How are you doing?" he asked, looking down at the injured foot.

"I think I'm okay. It's probably just a sprain."

It's a woman!

Hidden beneath the layers of the skydiving suit it was difficult to distinguish a gender when someone was dressed to jump. He squatted down beside her. By the tense tone of her voice, he could tell she was in pain and admired her for her fortitude since she wasn't bawling like a baby like even some of the men who'd been injured did. He knew firsthand how much a sprain could hurt.

Since her face was obscured by the helmet, he couldn't see her expression until she removed the eye goggles and looked up at him. When their eyes met, he

felt a jolt of electricity shoot through him and almost gasped aloud as recognition set in.

Well shaped dark eyebrows and thick black lashes framed the most unusual shade of light blue eyes he'd ever seen. These were the very same eyes he'd seen in his dreams! Chills of awareness rippled up his spine, his heart racing faster as he held her gaze.

She's finally here! He'd wondered for years if she was going to remain a dream, but when her gaze touched his, he knew he'd finally met *'the'* woman destined to be with him for the rest of his life.

It was a humbling experience. Brandon had always been carefree and reckless, never worrying about what would or could happen tomorrow. Women were a dime a dozen and he'd never had a problem finding company. One lop-sided grin and they practically fell into his arms. It was way too easy in his books, yet he'd gone with the flow. Until now, that is. He wasn't sad to see those days over and done with and was ready to deal with *tomorrow* now.

Her skin was lightly tanned. From what he could see under the helmet, her features were strong with high cheekbones and full, sensual lips. She had a slight bump over the bridge of her nose that suggested it might have been broken at one time, but it only gave it more character.

It was nearly impossible to see her figure under all the gear and the jumpsuit, but she looked like she had curves in all the right places with the harness holding the material to her body. He'd always thought a woman looked better with a little meat on her bones.

Curious to see if her hair was the same color as in his dreams, he helped her remove her helmet. An inky black curtain fell straight down past her shoulders. Brandon thought he was watching one of those shampoo commercials where the woman whipped her hair around her in slow motion. The fresh scent of lemons filled his nostrils. He fought back a groan, entranced and barely able to speak for a moment.

A quick glance over his shoulder confirmed that Ripper still stood where he'd left him. Brandon shot the man a glare that said 'move it or lose it' until Ripper finally walked away, a scowl on his face.

Just as Brandon finished removing the gear from the woman, careful not to hurt her further, Frisker pulled up in a Jeep.

"Let's get you back to the trailer and get some ice on that foot. We'll have Doc take a look at it." Brandon didn't give her a chance to protest but picked her up in his arms and carried her to the Jeep. The soft curves of her body pressed close to him. He cursed the fact that his groin responded instantly. Cautious of her foot, he set her gently in the front passenger seat.

Before leaving, he turned to Frisker.

“Get someone to help load up the gear, and have ‘Speed Bump’ take over my dives for the rest of the day.”

“No problem, Stomper,” Frisker said, moving off quickly to do as he was bid.

Brandon jumped in behind the wheel and began a slow drive over the rough ground to spare her more pain.



Since she had time during the short journey, Erin studied Brandon’s profile. He was very handsome with long, straight, golden-brown hair held back in a neat ponytail at the base of his neck. His clean-shaven face was angular and chiseled which made his warm hazel brown eyes stand out. The rugged appeal sent shivers of delight through her. Solid, wide shoulders topped a well-muscled body. The photos she’d seen of him didn’t do him justice.

Impressed with the way he’d handled the medical crisis without chastising his co-skydiver in front of her, she also noticed the way the others deferred to him. He held their respect and was looked up to as a leader. Not one to let looks deceive her, she held back her judgment about his personally.

Concern in his eyes, Brandon glanced over at her. “Are you okay?”

She gave him a slight nod and remained silent, turning her head away to study the drop zone field where she noted the placement of the buildings and the

surrounding area. There was a thick forest nearby as well as a swampy area she had noted from the air.

The zone was set up with neat efficiency; the trailers lined up in neat formation around the clubhouse. She wondered if this man was responsible for the layout of the place, which appeared to be efficient.

Neither of them said a word until Brandon pulled up at a large trailer. He ran up the steps to brace the door open, shouting at a young woman who was walking past the trailer.

“Grumpy, go get Doc, please!” Though a request, it sounded more like a command as the deep timber of his voice added strength to his words.

His use of the nicknames amused her. As the adrenaline from the jump faded, the injury began to make itself known, throbbing and swelling around her shoe.

I knew I should have followed my gut instinct about that idiot I jumped with and waited for another Tandem jumper to bring me down. He was so stoned he could have killed us both.

Since Erin had seen many people on the streets of Toronto high on dope, she'd recognized the look in the man's glassy eyes. He didn't smell like alcohol, so she figured it had to be some kind of drug he was on. His hands wandered where they shouldn't have during the jump, but she put up with it and brushed them away numerous times. Erin would much rather have broken his nose but held

herself back. At least with the injury, she now had a way ‘in’ with the skydiving crowd.

When Brandon came back, he gently lifted her into his arms, careful not to bang her foot. Once inside the trailer, he set her down on the large bed. It appeared to be his personal trailer from the looks of the belongings she quickly took note of. Before she could question him, there was a knock on the door and a scruffy looking woman with short spiked hair, peeked in.

“Looking for a little medical attention, Stomper?” she asked with a big grin on her face.

Brandon smiled wryly. “Come on in, Doc. This is...ah...” With an adorable smile, he tilted his head and placed his hands on his hips. “I just realized that I don’t know your name.”

“Erin Bond,” She waited for him to say the usual stupid comments like: ‘*Are you related to the infamous James Bond, 007,*’ but he just nodded and moved back so that Doc could look her over.

While Erin reclined on the bed, Brandon knelt on the floor and held her leg up as Doc carefully removed Erin’s boot.

To keep from crying out, Erin clenched her teeth together. It was difficult to keep her pain to herself but figured that just as well since it would make him feel obligated to let her hang around for a while. She didn’t tell him that she was a

professional skydiver with more than six thousand jumps behind her, but pretended it was her first.

“Oww,” she cried, trying to pull her foot away from Doc’s ministrations.

“Doc, go easy will you?” Brandon said in a calm tone.

Doc winked, “You of all people should know that it hurts to have your foot examined after a nasty sprain. Except yours is usually broken!” She snickered, shooting Erin a grin.

Surprised, Erin looked at Brandon in question.

His grin took her breath away. Strong, sharp, white, neatly aligned teeth flashed across his tanned face.

“My nickname is Stomper because I’m always getting stomped on. The gang says that I’m like a crash test dummy.” With a deep chuckle, he ruffled Doc’s spikes which didn’t budge from their stiff form.

The elf-like woman laughed at him. “Klutz is more like it!”

“Now that’s the way to build a girl’s confidence in a man.” Erin grinned at them.

He appeared to be offended as he protested, “I’ll have you know that *I...am a professional!*”

Erin could tell by the twinkle in his eyes that he was kidding with her.

“Professional *crash test dummy*, you mean,” Doc muttered, as she pressed the ankle with efficient, tender hands.

Throwing back her head, Erin let out musical laughter and almost forgot about her foot until pain shot up her leg.

“Ouch, damn, that hurt!” Her amusement faded as she cringed.

“Welcome to my world,” quipped Brandon.

They looked into each other’s eyes for a long moment. The breath left Erin’s body as she was mesmerized by his energy. *I’ve never felt such a strong attraction to a man before. What is it about him that makes my mouth water?*

Doc muttered sarcastically, “Lucky I’m not in the room...sitting right in front of you two—or anything.” It took them a minute to register what she’d said then all three chuckled.

“Well, I agree with *Doctor Know-It-All-Because-He’s-Done-It-A-Million-Times* here. You have a nasty sprain, my girl. Ice it, take some Aspirin, and keep it elevated. Try to stay off it for a few days—That’ll be five hundred dollars!” Doc sat back with a grin, and held up her palm.

Stunned, Erin stared at the woman with her jaw dropped open.

“Pardon me?”

“Get the hell out of here, Doc. You’re such a nut!” Brandon snorted with laughter as he escorted Doc to the door.

She gave Erin a cheeky wink. “Let me know if you need anything Erin— What a pushy old fart he is! You’re putting your life in your hands with this one.” Doc pointed her thumb over her shoulder at a grinning Brandon, and then snickered just before the door swung closed behind her.

The sound faded as she moved away from the trailer. Erin smiled when Brandon turned back to face her.

“She’s awesome.”

“Some days, I wonder how I’d ever survive without her.”

Hmmm, does that mean medically or as in a relationship? She hadn’t noticed any personal interaction between the two. More like brother and sister.

Her sources said that he was still single and loving it. He was also the man that Erin needed to get close to if her mission was to succeed, so she relaxed and let him take care of her.

A nasty, swollen mess of colors had begun to show on her foot. Brandon gently propped it up on some pillows.

“I’m just going to call up to the clubhouse and get some ice down here. Are you hungry? They make awesome burgers, and the fries are fresh, not frozen.” His gentle eyes met hers, and her stomach flipped which surprised her.

“Sounds like heaven to me. I didn’t realize how hungry I was until you said the word ‘burger’.” She cringed, gasping as a surge of pain rushed from her foot up her leg.

“Let me call up first then I’ll get you some Aspirin. Don’t go anywhere, okay?” he joked.

There was no way she was going anywhere for a while with the injury. Erin chuckled, lying back on the pillows. While he moved away to make the call on his cell phone, it gave her an opportunity to look around the small room. There were newspaper articles and magazines stuck up on the walls. Each one was about Brandon and showed him jumping in one tournament or another.

There was a photo of a large circle of divers holding hands during their freefall. She too had done the fancy stunt called a *Boogie*. The combined adrenaline rush from the jumpers always gave her a natural high when she participated. She’d always been super sensitive to people’s emotions and personal energies. Not only could she single out the ‘good guys’ from the ‘bad guys’, but she was able to sense when someone was lying. It was a definite asset to have in her line of work.

Most people could sense others staring at them or strong emotions like anger, even though the person smiled as though nothing was wrong. Erin was able to go a step further. Some people called her psychic, but she didn’t really believe in what she considered nonsense. It was just gut instinct in her book!

Finished the call, Brandon came back to the bed and carefully sat on the edge of the mattress, holding out a bottle of Aspirin and some water.

“I hate it when people just hand me the pills. Who knows what they are or where their hands have been?”

Erin accepted the pill bottle first and took out two tablets. Snapping the lid back on, she popped them into her mouth and took the water from him.

“I appreciate that. It really grosses me out when I see people leave the bathroom without washing their hands. When I go out to eat, I try hard not to think about who’s handling my food.”

Brandon stared at her, his mouth slightly open. After a moment, he shook his head. “I thought I was the only super-hygiene nut on the planet—That’s just weird.”

Pleased that she and Brandon were getting along so well, Erin smiled at him. There was a knock at the door, and a frowning Grumpy handed Brandon the burgers and fries he had ordered.

They spent the next few hours talking and getting to know each other. She was ‘*in like Flint!*’

Chapter Two

Vixen To Virgin

After they'd eaten, Brandon left Erin alone for a while so he could attend to business. The final jumpers were done and everyone was packing up for the day. All the customers had left in high spirits. It had been a successful day, except for what had happened to Erin.

Ripper stood in the office leaning against the desk with his arms crossed in defiance. He stood close to six feet tall, wiry, and arrogant. His spiked, muddy brown hair and matching brown eyes mirrored his bad attitude. Brandon wanted to deck the man so badly that his entire body was stiff with tension, fists clenched until his knuckles were white.

"You son of a bitch! I gave you fair warning the last time that if it happened again you would be out of here before you could blink. You're fired! Pack up your things and get the hell out of the drop zone before I pick you up and throw you out." Brandon's voice was low and harsh.

Staring back at Brandon through narrowed eyes, Ripper waited a moment before he spoke. The two men hadn't got along since the first time they'd met and even less now.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about. She only hurt her foot 'cause she's a newby. We landed just fine."

The man's unfounded defiance only fueled Brandon's anger. He tried his best to keep his temper under control, and replied, "You know exactly what I'm talking about. You were high on more than adrenaline today. You were stoned. I don't give a damn if you want to kill yourself, but the customers are our responsibility and you've endangered them for the last time. Now get out!"

Although Brandon's voice was calm and in control, Ripper acted like he'd physically attacked him and took a swing at Brandon. His expression turned to surprise when he found himself lying flat on his back, holding his jaw in his hand.

As he shook his hand out to relieve the pain, Brandon stood ready for Ripper to attack again.

Instead, Ripper slowly climbed to his feet and surprised Brandon when he began to laugh.

"You have no idea what you just did, pal. Consider yourself a dead man." Ripper straightened his jacket and dusted his pants off. As though he knew he

couldn't take Brandon, Ripper curled up his lip, his eyes narrowed again. "You'd better remember this face, buddy, because you're definitely going to see it again."

"Don't count on it. The only reason you are still standing here right now and not sitting in a jail cell under drug possession charges is that I'm giving you the chance to run. Don't bother trying any of the other drop zones to look for a job. I'm going to make sure you're banned for life from working on any of them."

Prepared to fight if necessary, Brandon opened the door, keeping his gaze on Ripper while Frisker entered with another man.

"Make sure this piece of slime leaves the zone immediately." Brandon moved away from the door. With his thumb, he pointed back over his shoulder. "Out!" he barked.



Though he grinned, Ripper shot Brandon a look filled with pure venom and left the room with a carefree swagger. *Anderson will get his.* Confident, he promised himself that it would be soon. *I'm going to make sure that I'm there to watch while my friends take care of Anderson, that's for sure.* He kept walking, climbed in his car and roared out of the driveway, leaving the two men dogging his steps choking on dust.

Suddenly sniffing, he rubbed his itchy nose, needing another hit. The last one was wearing off. Once he'd taken care of that, he had plans to make.



For the next hour, Brandon called each of the parachuting clubs throughout Canada and the USA. Ripper would find that he was unwelcome at any professional association. Endangering customer's lives was taboo in the skydiver's circles and jumping while intoxicated or stoned was not tolerated. This was the first time Brandon had seen the proof rather than hear it from another party.

He knew that there was a serious drug problem in the field and did his best to keep his group clear of it, but sometimes abusers slipped by him. After giving them the chance to make good and stay clean, it was unfortunate and very frustrating for Brandon when incidents like Erin's accident happened.

Diligent in making sure everyone followed the rules set by the associations his crew had an exceptional record for safety. Although he was considered a daredevil Brandon never took chances with his own life, or anyone else's. Safety came first above all else. He believed it was much safer to jump with his crew than it was to drive a car on the highway in Toronto. The odds were definitely in favor of the jumpers.

After he'd closed and locked up the office, Brandon headed back to see how his guest was doing, excited about spending the rest of the day with her. She fascinated him like no other woman had ever done. It was difficult to clear his mind of the anger he felt with Ripper, but he did his best. Although he usually

stopped at the clubhouse for a beer with his crew, he found he was looking forward to spending the evening with his beautiful roommate.

He took her keys out of his pocket and searched for her car in the lot. She was going to have to stay for a few days, but luckily had brought a suitcase with her. Erin told him that she was from Toronto, but not much else about her personal life. When he said he would bunk with Frisker for the next few days, she wouldn't allow him to. She said she didn't mind sharing the trailer if he didn't. *Who in their right mind would turn down the chance to spend a few nights with Erin?*

Spotting her black Pontiac Grand Prix, he opened the trunk and pulled out her bag. The moment he touched the handle of the suitcase, he stopped cold in his tracks as a vision overcame him like a tidal wave. The world faded away as he became caught in the grip of the images that hit him hard.

It was unmerciful in the intensity as the flashes of insight flew through his mind. He gasped when it was over, dropping the bag on the ground. Resting his shaking hands on the trunk to keep from falling to his knees he panted, trying to regain his breath.

It took some time for him to recover and clear his mind. His hands still trembled when he finally bent down to pick up the bag. An urgent need to get back to his trailer rushed through him. He moved at an unsteady yet brisk pace

until he was in front of the door. After he took a deep steadying breath, he schooled his features and entered his summer home.



Erin had kept busy while Brandon was out taking care of business. Luckily she had her cell phone with her and was able to reach her contact. Pleased with her progress the man filled her in on more background regarding the staff.

Prior to her arrival, Erin had studied the case files on the entire group but hadn't been able to pinpoint which person she should focus on except for Brandon Anderson. He was the most important player and her ticket to integrating with them.

As decided by her superiors, she'd be the one to join the crew when they left for Puerto Àngel, Mexico in a few weeks for the winter, unless her mission was finished before then. An undercover R.C.M.P officer would remain unknown to her, yet he...or she, would be monitoring the situation the entire time. When the time was right, the officer would step in as well as be the liaison to the Mexican government and Consulate.

The strange attraction she felt toward Brandon surprised her. She seldom felt an urge to sleep with a man and preferred to keep them at arm's length. As an orphan, she'd never remained in one place for long and eventually put up barriers to protect her heart as friends were hard to keep. Erin was a loner. When she did

want a man, she dove in head first and kept her emotions out of it. Erin heard someone coming up the steps outside. She slipped her cell phone into the pocket of her jacket, relaxed her body and pretended to be asleep.



Cautious to be quiet, Brandon entered the trailer. His breath caught at the sight of Erin. She lay on her back, relaxed, and incredibly beautiful. Her foot was still propped up on the pillow with the ice bag covering it. The trailer was filled with her scent, fresh and lemony, which filled his senses.

Slightly parted moist lips that begged to be kissed took his breath away as he wondered what it would feel like when he kissed her. He had no doubt that he would, he just didn't know when. At the rate he was going, with his heart beginning to race and his pants shrinking by the minute, he figured it would be soon. Very soon!

Erin blew out a gentle sigh, stretched, then took a deep breath and moved her head, her chest rising and falling, mesmerizing him. He swallowed a lump in his throat and licked his lips. Man, she really was his dream come true.

Shudders raced through him as he shook himself to force his brain out of his fantasy world. He quietly set the suitcase down on the floor and moved to the small kitchen area then pulled out a bottle of water from the fridge and chugged the entire thing down as he attempted to satisfy a thirst that was unquenchable.

“Hi,” she said in a voice husky from sleep.

Brandon nearly spit out the water. She had caught him in mid swallow. Coughing, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Sorry,” he choked as he tried to catch his breath. “I was trying to be quiet and not wake you. How are you feeling?”

Erin gave him a sexy look and stretched, her breasts straining against the stretchy material of her tank top, apparently unaware of how tempting she was. Brandon looked away, trying to pull himself together, and covered his face with his hand.

“Is something wrong? You look like you aren’t feeling well. We could get Doc to come over and check you out if you like.”

“No—” his voice cracked and he had to clear his throat before he could continue to talk. “I’m fine, thank you, just fine.”

“Oh. Well, then would you mind helping me? I need to—” Erin indicated the washroom.

He stared at her for a moment and then he got it. “Oh. Ah, sure I think we can manage to get you there okay.”

With her arms reaching up to him, Brandon gently pulled Erin to standing on her good foot and put her arm around his neck. Reaction to her closeness was like wildfire through his body as she fit like a glove to his side.

He stopped in his tracks when she was standing full height. He was only a few inches taller than her at six foot two. It was unusual to find such a tall woman. Her lips were just inches away and he stared down at them for a moment as a rush of desire hit him. Her scent was driving him beyond distraction.

When he realized what he was doing, he looked into her eyes, feeling a heated attraction between them. He nearly groaned as his groin responded.

“It’s nice to meet someone tall for a change. My neck won’t hurt.” Brandon cursed himself for what he’d said and swore under his breath, his face flushing with warmth.

He hoped that Erin didn’t understand what he meant, relieved when she turned toward the bathroom without a word. They were in close quarters so it was no surprise when she accidentally brushed up against him. Biting her lip, she groaned in apparent pain. When he sucked in a breath as her breast caressed his side, she coughed, moving along with him slowly.

Instantly he stopped. “Are you okay, Erin?”

She kept her eyes lowered and nodded. “I think I can take it from here, Brandon,” she said, her voice husky.

Looking down he found that his hand was resting on her hard belly and yanked it away suddenly as if it had been burned.

“Oh, sorry. Sure. Ah, I’ll just be over there by the bed—ah living room.”
Damn, he felt like he was back in high school about to lose his virginity. Never had he reacted to a woman this way before. He released her carefully and backed up until she was able to move into the small room and close the door behind her.

He heard a strange noise come from behind the door that sounded suspiciously like a snicker but thought that his mind was playing tricks on him. She was in pain, not having fun. He felt a sudden urge to have a cold shower and eyed the bag of ice in consideration. *I should just stick it down my p—*

“Oh...oww!” Erin cried out.

Rushing to the door, he asked, “Erin, are you okay?”

“Sure I am, Stomper. I’m sorry but there isn’t a great deal of room in here and I banged my foot. I’m fine, honest.”

“Good. That’s good. Great.” He felt like a bumbling idiot as he stumbled over his words. She threw all his senses out the door.



With her hand over her mouth Erin fought back laughter. Brandon was so cute, acting like a teen. She’d bet her life savings that he was no virgin since he was thirty two, yet he was definitely acting like it. That first moment when their eyes had met, she’d felt a shock go through her. The attraction was mutual. That made

her mission much easier, yet...it could prove to be more difficult than she'd thought at the same time.

She was sure the not-so- innocent question about calling the doctor had stumped him. Erin had to hide the laughter she felt inside while she relished the reaction he was obviously having to her body.

Now that she'd dealt with her needs, Erin stood on one foot and washed her hands. She used the paper towel to turn off the tap and open the door with it before throwing it out.

Brandon nearly stood on top of the door. She saw that he had noticed her use of the paper towel to prevent touching germs on the taps or door handles after washing up. She smiled, and asked, "You do it too?"

He nodded then without a word put his arm around her again, hers over his shoulder as he helped her back to the bed.

Just as they made it to the edge of the mattress she started to fall, locking her arms around his neck and pulling him down on top of her. Her eyes closed into a tight squint as she fought the pain that washed over her in waves.

When Brandon tried to get up, she stopped him. "Please...don't move for a minute," she begged in a husky whisper. Tears escaped as she panted for breath, while she did her best to find control of the agony. Even so, she was aware of every muscle as his body pressed against her.

For the next few minutes, Erin held Brandon in place. She sensed his battle between his libido as his hard member pressed against her hip and his alarm for her apparent agony. The surprised look on his face when she turned her head, opened her tear filled eyes, and laughed pleased her. Stunned, he looked at her as if she were crazy.

“Sorry, Brandon, I laugh when I’m nervous. The pain is better now.” She stared up at him but made no move to remove her arms.

When Brandon lowered his lips to capture hers in a tender kiss, she let him know without words that she wasn’t going to say no. A deep moan escaped her when he captured her lips once again, tongues exploring. His hands roved up and down her side as she pulled him closer and gave him back what he offered.

Finally, he lifted his head and stared at her as though stunned. Tingles raced up her spine as the electricity between them practically sizzled.

She could tell by the look in his eyes that he felt like a cad for taking advantage of her. Erin ran her thumb over his lower lip, amazed that he had such power to make her lose her thoughts as well as control of her body.

In a voice husky filled with desire, she murmured, “That was nice. This is a terrific hospital, *Doctor Know-It-All*.”

Brandon still watched her as though stunned that she was okay about the kiss. Something magnetic and magical had happened between them. Erin wondered if he felt it too and studied his face.

He brushed her tears away with his thumb. “I’m sorry Erin. I should have more restraint. Didn’t you feel—”

Erin pulled his head down for another mind-bending kiss and he melted like butter on a hot grill. She was just as surprised as he was at the strength of their attraction, but forced herself to focus on her mission.

When he suddenly froze and pulled away, moved off the bed and backed toward the door, she was awestruck. *Is he turning my invitation down? How weird is that?*

The door slammed behind him as though the hounds from hell were on his heels. Erin lay staring after him in complete confusion for a few minutes until her throbbing foot drew her attention. She moved back onto the bed, propped her foot up again and placed the ice back on it.

Erin wondered when he’d return so she could stir the pot a little more. Before long she was sound asleep.



Flying out of the trailer, Brandon was furious with himself for losing control with Erin. *Damn it anyway, she’s an innocent bystander and because of me, she’s in a great deal of pain.*

To top it off, since the minute he met her, he'd been as randy as a rabbit, and acted like a fool. Brandon walked faster, heading away from the trailers. He needed to burn off some serious energy, his anger building as he chastised himself. He'd known the woman only a matter of hours and just look at him! He wanted to make love to her as if she were the last woman on Earth. Bloody hell!

Growling out loud, Brandon took off running as fast as he could across the landing field. Thoughts flashed through his head while he punished his body, until finally losing steam and falling to his knees. Sweat poured into his eyes while he gasped for breath.

The world receded slowly as another vision hit him, immobilizing him as he dropped to the ground. The sun dipped down out of sight as darkness surrounded. With sightless eyes he stared up at the sky, flashes of images raced through his mind and his body shook with chills.

Standing before him, her glossy black hair blowing in the wind, Erin was crying, tears flowing unheeded down her cheeks. Her fists clenched together in helpless fury. There were no sounds, just images. Then Ripper appeared, Erin kneeling at his feet as he held her by her hair in a cruel grip. He was laughing, pointing at Brandon. The next image popped up and he saw a small plane, a jungle, and a man in a white suit with a white straw hat. Suddenly, the man's jacket was covered in bright red blood. Brandon looked down, seeing his own hands covered in blood.

Something struck him in the face and felt darkness swallowed him. In the next image, Ripper stood above him with a gun pointed at Brandon's heart. A feeling of despair, anguish, and fear flowed over him. Though he tried to cry out, he was unable to voice a word. Without her, he didn't want to live. He wanted to save her, but it was too late. Too late!

She was running toward him, her gun drawn, when her body jerked forward and a red stain spread over her chest. Her eyes flew wide open in surprise as she fell to the ground just a few feet away from him, but he couldn't reach her, his body immobile. Helpless, he watched as her eyes closed and death claimed her in that moment. Only in his mind could he scream out his grief, he lay there and waited for the end.

A triumphant Ripper laughed at him, his mouth moving as he said something Brandon couldn't hear just before he aimed the gun and pulled the trigger. Brandon felt a pain burn in his chest just before darkness closed slowly around him. He was going to die!

As he came around, Brandon gasped and grabbed his chest but there were no wounds. He lay in a sea of darkness but soon realized that he could hear crickets and frogs. With a ragged breath he panted and struggled to calm his racing heart, the coolness of the night air caused his body to shake.

He figured he must have been lying on the ground for a few hours, and was chilled to the bone. Slowly he pushed himself to his knees and paused for a few

minutes. With an anguished groan, he climbed to his feet, every muscle in his body screaming in protest.

Gradually, he made his way to the clubhouse, the weight of his vision pressing down on his shoulders. Erin was in danger. That's why she had come into his life! He had to find a way to protect her. Damn the visions! He wasn't going to lose her before he even had a chance to share his life with her! *Or maybe I should send her away to prevent the inevitable.*

As he dragged his tired, aching body up the stairs, he listened to the country music coming from the bar. As soon as he opened the door, he looked around for Cindy. The minute he entered, she was by his side. She had a knack of knowing when he needed her help. Although she wasn't psychic, she had a sense about him and was always on hand to help him.

"Another one? It looks like it was a bad one this time."

Having seen the end results before, Cindy knew about his visions. She had been witness to them countless times and knew how much they took out of him. Supporting his arm, she walked him to the office at the back of the building.

There was a large shower in the bathroom that opened into his office. He kept extra clothes handy just in case he needed them since years before when a rookie student had jumped alone, freefalling as it was called, and hadn't paid attention to the instructors. He'd ended up in the swamp.

Watching him from above, Brandon had followed, landing close by. By the time the rescue team made it to the location, Brandon had pulled the kid to safety. They were both okay, but covered head to toe in swamp mud. The shower had been pure heaven that day, just like it would be today.

“Thanks, Peanut,” Brandon said. She was turning to leave when he stopped her. “Peanut?”

“Yeah, Stomper?” Cindy waited for him to speak.

“I just wanted to tell you that I appreciate everything you do for me. You’re my hero.” Brandon winked at her even as he shuddered from the chill in his bones.

“Thanks, Brandon.” Flushed with pleasure, she ducked her head. She always got embarrassed when Brandon told her how much it meant to him that she backed him up. He knew that she seldom got praise for the things she did for the crew at the zone. Without another word, she left the room and closed the door tight behind her.

Brandon had a long hot shower before slipping into track pants and a T-shirt that sported a large photo of him during a jump with the words *I B Jumpin’* in large blue letters above it. It had been a gift from Cindy for his birthday.

Before heading back to the trailer and all that temptation, Brandon stopped to have a couple beers with the team. He had banned smoking from the building, telling everyone that it was for their own good to keep them healthy and in top

form. No customer would want someone hacking and coughing on their necks during a jump.

Finally giving in to the inevitable, he headed back to the trailer—back to Erin. Thinking about the images in his vision, he shivered. The thought of watching Erin die before his eyes and helpless to stop it was tearing him apart. But how could he change it? It was a glimpse into the future and therefore could be altered, but he had no idea where they had been in the vision or who the man in white was.

Exhausted, Brandon moved up the steps and opened the door, careful not to wake Erin. Relieved that she was asleep, he studied her for a few moments then slipped past her and crawled onto the bed beside her. He prayed that his foot wouldn't hit hers in the night. Lying down fully clothed, he pulled the blanket over his body and fell into an exhausted sleep within minutes.

Chapter Three

Caught On The Fly

As he woke up slowly, a warm body pressed close to his and Brandon took a deep breath to inhale the fresh scent of a woman. When his muscles hurt from the memory of his vision came rushing back. He was about to move when he realized that the woman was wrapped around his body, the sweet smell of lemons filling his senses.

Her knee lay across his crotch, which began to rise at an alarming rate. Soft black hair cushioned her head and spread over his heart while her hand rested over his nipple. He bit back a groan as he moved to kiss her then remembered that it was Erin and cold fear rushed through him. She was going to die if he didn't do something! If he sent her away, maybe her future would change.

Amazed at the twinge of pain that thought brought to his heart, he tried to move away from her so he could get out of bed. Unfortunately, when he began to gently move her knee off him she sighed and rubbed her leg against his crotch in her sleep.

A deep groan escaped and he froze, hoping he hadn't disturbed her. He was beside himself, trying to figure out how to get the hell out of bed when she moved

again, and he almost cried out. His staff was so hard he thought it would break if she moved once more.



It was hard for Erin not to snicker when she heard him groan. She was going to keep him in bed all day if she could and was looking forward to it. Another move of her knee made him gasp. With her thumb, she rubbed his nipple while her warm breath sighed over his bare skin.

His body was so tense she thought he might burst into a million pieces. Brandon breathed faster, his heart pounding beneath her ear and his penis hard as a rock against her leg.

Tired of waiting for him to make a move, she kept her eyes closed, feigning sleep and moved her hand up to his face, pulling him toward her mouth for a kiss. He stiffened while she began to nibble and suck on his lower lip.

She nearly lost it when he swore under his breath. Increasing the pressure of her lips on his, she felt him begin to give in. *One more move of my knee should do it.*

Surprised as hell when he yelped and shot out of bed, Erin lay sprawled on the mattress, jarring her foot so that she cried out in pain.

Instantly, Brandon's eyes were full of concern. He looked like he didn't know whether he should run screaming from the trailer or stay and help her.

"What's the matter Brandon, ants in your pants?" Erin snickered.

His jaw dropped. “You did that on purpose?”

Erin sighed and sat up, cringing when her foot throbbed.

“Look. I find you extremely attractive and I’d like to—” She stopped talking when he looked down at her in abject horror.

She watched as he backed toward the door but he stopped cold when she asked him, “Are you gay, Brandon?”

“Gay? No, of course not!” His voice cracked as though in disbelief that she’d even think that of him.

It was imperative that he trust her so she could integrate with the crew and do her job, yet she wanted him for more than that and wasn’t afraid to admit it. There was something about him that drew her like a bee to honey. It wasn’t even his looks so much as the energy she felt when he was near. Brandon Anderson was the kind of man she’d be happy to keep around.

Erin was startled that he didn’t appear to want her. For the first time since she could remember, she desired a man and her job took second place.

“Don’t you find me the least bit attractive?”

“I—Of course I do. I nearly go out of my mind whenever you—Arrrg—”

He ran his hands through his hair in frustration, pulling it loose from the elastic until it spilled over his shoulders. Erin’s heart did a back flip and she caught her breath.

“I...want you Brandon,” Erin spoke softer.

He stared down at her for a brief moment then spun on his heel, practically running through the door as he left in a hurry.

Stunned, Erin lay back with a flop. Why wouldn't he give in? He wasn't gay, didn't appear to have a solid relationship going, and had a reputation with the ladies. What was it about her that he didn't like? For the first time in her life, Erin felt like she had lost her sexual appeal.

“Nah! It's just not possible—Is it?”

She made her way to standing, got up and worked her way to the washroom then cursed when she banged her foot again. She felt grubby and wanted a shower, not to mention a toothbrush. Maybe that's what turned him off, though his groin proved otherwise a little while ago.

From the fridge she pulled out a bottle of water, grabbed the Aspirins and swallowed two pills. After digging her toothbrush out of her suitcase, she began to clean herself up.

Her contact was going to be disappointed in her progress if she didn't integrate with the jumpers, and she didn't have a clue as to what she should do next. An image of him made her smile. She loved that lop-sided grin. It turned her on big time!

Curses rang out in the trailer when she hit her foot again while trying to get back to the bed. She prayed that no one was within hearing when she screamed in frustration. The ice in the bag had melted and she was in no shape to find more. Erin fell back on the bed and put her arm over her eyes, waiting for him to return.



Brandon ran toward the clubhouse as if he were being chased by a herd of wannabe brides. He had no idea what to do about his unexpected guest.

The door swung open with a bang when he entered the building, his heart pounding.

“What is *wrong* with you?” Cindy asked, her eyes wide with alarm.

“I—She was—Oh, my God, I’m losing it big time!”

Even though he was a ladies man, he’d never been so off kilter with a woman before. As he lifted a hand, he was stunned to see it shook. He raked both hands through his wild hair as he shifted from foot to foot with nervous energy, shocked at his loss of control. Cindy took his hand and sat him down at a table then brought him a cup of tea.

“Drink it up boss while I get you some breakfast.”

He barely noticed when Cindy went to the kitchen to order for him. Alone in the dining room, slash bar, he held his head in his hands. *How weird is that. I never have problems with women. So, what’s the story with Erin Bond?*

By the time Cindy placed his breakfast in front of him, he was calmer. She sat down facing him.

“Do you need anything else?”

Brandon met her gaze, not trying to hide his dismay.

“Peanut. I just remembered that she needs ice for her foot, and a good breakfast. Can you take care of that—Oh, and I need you to give someone else my clients today. I can’t concentrate on tying my own shoelaces, let alone jumping out of a plane at twelve thousand feet.”

“I’ll take care of all of the above if you tell me what the hell has you so worked up. You look like you just entered a contest to the death against a ghost. What’s going on boss?” When he didn’t answer right away, she prompted, “Spill!”

Brandon took a deep breath and sat back in the chair, his hands covering his face for a moment, the breakfast forgotten. “She...*wants* me.”

Cindy snorted. “Gee, that’s a new one. I’ve never heard of women wanting your hunky body before.”

The sarcasm wasn’t lost on Brandon as he met her gaze in all seriousness until she finally got it.

“Oh. You had a vision about her and it wasn’t good right? What happened, did she fool around on you? Break your itty-bitty little heart?” Cindy rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest, as though she didn’t have an ounce of

sympathy in her whole body. With a shake of his head in denial, he clenched his fists, and explained. “She was shot and died while I watched. Then I died too.”

“No shit?” Cindy’s jaw dropped.

He murmured in agreement, “Shit!”

“Oh, my God! Can we do anything to stop it?”

“I don’t know, Cindy. I’m trying to get her to leave the zone without starting anything so the break is clean, but I’ve never felt this way about someone before. I’m way out of my element here.”

Fingering a fork, he sighed. “I’ve dreamt about her before, Cindy, many times. We’re supposed to be together, as in a *permanent relationship*. Call it fate if you will, it’s meant to be.”

The two friends sat quiet for a few minutes in silent thought. Brandon played with his eggs until Cindy spoke quietly to him.

“So, why waste time worrying about what might be, and spend some quality time living instead—Remember that country song about living life like today is your last day on Earth? It had something about skydiving, country mountain climbing, and riding some wild bull—So?” she prompted.

“So...you’re saying I should just go for it and worry about tomorrow when it gets here, right?” The relief on his expression was almost comical.

Before she let him go to Erin, Cindy made him eat his breakfast, joking that he'd need his strength. In the meantime, she packed up food and an icepack for Erin.

"Here you go, Stomper; food and an icepack. I'll check on her later for you if you want me to."

"Thanks. We should be okay for today anyway."

Brandon hugged Cindy then left for the trailer. He was apprehensive about seeing Erin again because he still didn't know if he should make her leave. Yet, like Cindy had said, he might as well enjoy the ride while he could.



Tired of staring up at the ceiling, her foot still throbbing, Erin wondered what was wrong with her. A tear escaped and she angrily brushed it aside, frustrated at the sign of weakness. Used to action, she felt like she was going crazy lying there alone.

Brandon's rejection had actually hurt! She'd never been rejected before, rather her being the one who'd done the rejecting. The proverbial *shoe-was-on-the-other-foot* now and she felt humbled by it. Failure tasted bitter.

"Am I getting too old to use my wiles?"

When she heard footsteps, she watched the door and waited to see who dared come to see the *reject*. She was surprised to see Brandon stride in and turned her head away so he wouldn't see her vulnerability.

An ache burned in her lower belly as her breasts tingled in response to his presence. She was shocked at her body's instant reaction to him.

"Hi," he said quietly.

Silence was her only response as she stared at the wall away from him.

"I brought you some breakfast, some ice, and a very humble apology." His voice was rough with emotion.

Erin turned to look at him in surprise, not expecting that from him.

What is this all about? He goes from complete rejection to humble apology in less than an hour? Maybe he's bi-polar.

"What do you mean? I thought you were...repulsed by me." Erin's voice was tremulous and she didn't try to hide it. It was amazing how deeply this man had affected her though she'd known him less than a day.

Brandon dropped his gaze to the floor and handed her the bag with her breakfast, moving to place the fresh bag of ice on her foot before he spoke again.

"You...you kind of freaked me out, Erin. I mean, it's one thing for a guy to want to jump a girl's bones, but to have a girl switching roles is a bit confusing."

He wouldn't meet her gaze as she sat up and took a piece of buttered toast out of the bag and took a small bite out of it before responding.

"So what you're saying is that you still live in the eighteen hundreds and totally bypassed the millennium?" she snapped sarcastically.

As he blew out a breath of frustration, he tipped his head back on his shoulders and stared up at the ceiling with hands on hips for a moment, counting to ten aloud. Suddenly he straightened.

"That's not what I meant, and I can't tell you exactly why I reacted the way I did. I can only say that I'm sorry, and...I'd like to start from square one again. Will you at least give me a chance to change your bad opinion of me? I'm not really such a bad guy to get to know, really."

There it was. That trademark grin of his. Man is he adorable. His photos didn't do him justice.

Out of the blue, her appetite for food disappeared. Placing the toast back in the bag, she stared up at him. He had eyes that could melt a girl's heart and she fell hook, line, and sinker for him. It wasn't just a job anymore, it was personal, and that stunned her.

Brandon stood and stared down into her eyes as though waiting for her decision, but just when she thought he'd found it, there was a loud knock on the door and Frisker yelled frantically for him to open up.

Growling in frustration, he opened the door so fast that Frisker nearly got hit in the nose by it. “What’s wrong?”

“Sorry, Stomper. It’s just that the plane is down and we have a full roster today. Super Boy is throwing a fit and the clients are all lined up building steam. They want their money’s worth.”

Shooting Erin an apologetic grin, Frisker looked back up at Brandon. “Should I tell Super Boy you’re on your way?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

After he closed the door, Brandon leaned back against the wall with his eyes shut. This time he had to count to twenty.

Since Erin knew he was ready to give in and explore what she offered, she was fine about him leaving for a short time.

“Go ahead, Big Daddy. The kiddies need your help.” She offered a wink and gave him a serene smile.

Brandon released a groan as he stared down at her then leaned forward and pulled her into his arms, cautious of her foot. Without a word he captured her lips in a soul-wrenching kiss.

“Do not...go...anywhere!” he said in a firm tone and turned, leaving the trailer on a run.

Pleased, Erin went back to eating her breakfast and thought about the things she planned to explore with him. She didn't even consider the mission, focusing on Brandon and that adorable smile, not to mention his hard muscled body that made her drool in anticipation of the fun to come.



Super Boy was about to go super nova by the time Brandon ran into the airport bay. Someone had tampered with his plane and he couldn't get it started.

"Are you sure it was vandalized?" Brandon asked.

"Damn right it was. I keep my plane in tip-top shape, and someone cut the electrical wires last night. We never had to put a guard on *Ol' Gertrude* before. What the hell is going on?" His face was blotchy with anger as his voice rose to a shout.

Brandon had a fair idea of who had vandalized the plane, but would need to call the police to have it looked into since he had no proof. In the mean time, he had to deal with the frustrated customers then get on the phone and arrange for a temporary replacement.

"Take an hour to cool off, Super Boy. I'll get you some wings to play with. That's an order," he added when the man was about to start yelling again. Brandon watched him march away, heading for the clubhouse.

Brandon put on his most charming smile and sweet-talked the clients into going over to the clubhouse for a free breakfast. He promised that he would have them in the air within the hour.

That done, he pulled out his cell phone and called his friend, Darren Pool, to ask him for a loaner plane for the day. Darren promised to have one flown over from his small airport within the hour. Brandon made sure he would send a larger plane than the small Cessna they usually used since he would have double the clients by the time the plane arrived.

Next, he called the police department and reported the crime, promising to be at the hanger when the cruiser arrived. As he thought of the treat in store for him waiting in his trailer, Brandon groaned. This was going to be one very long day.



As she released a low growl of impatience, Erin tried to figure out how to shower in the miniscule bathroom. There was barely room to lift her arms to wash her hair let alone figure out how to run the bloody water.

The long wait for Brandon was driving her bonkers. She swore as she lost her balance and banged her foot again. Then she heard a knock at the door and hoped to God that it was him.

She yelled, "Come in!"

The woman from the landing field entered the trailer and raised a brow at Erin who was holding onto the walls, trying desperately not to lose her balance again as she looked over her shoulder. *Ah, this is Cindy Scott. Single, devoted to Brandon like his right hand man...or rather woman...lol.*

“Hi, Erin, I’m Cindy. The gang calls me Peanut.” Cindy was smiling, but Erin could see she was in pain, emotional pain, and not too thrilled about being in the trailer with her.

“Oh, yes, I saw you on the air field yesterday. Nice to meet you.” Erin smiled at Cindy with genuine warmth.

“Are you okay? I came to check on you since Stomper is busy for a while.”

“Actually, I’ve got a bit of a dilemma here. I can’t figure out how to have a shower and stand up at the same time without killing myself. I’ve never been such a klutz in my whole life.” Erin chuckled.

Though Cindy didn’t appear to be happy about it, she relaxed slightly as though lowering her defenses.

“Let me see what I can do for you. I think there is an old set of crutches at the clubhouse and we have a large shower over there too. I can help you get cleaned up without you killing yourself. What do you think?”

“I think I want to kiss you!” At Cindy’s look of horror, Erin laughed again. “That was a figure of speech, my friend. I prefer the opposite sex, thank you very much.”

After giving the girl an outrageous wink, Erin turned around to face Cindy. She was cautious not to hit her foot again, and began to make her way over toward the bed. Unfortunately, when she put her hand on the edge of the counter, she slipped and wrenched her arm, hitting her foot on the edge of the bed.

Cindy bit her lip, holding back the laughter that showed in her eyes at the foul curses that came out of Erin’s mouth.

With a number of gasps, Erin blinked a few times and stood still with her eyes shut tight as she balanced on one foot until the pain lessened. Cindy moved over and gave Erin her shoulder to help her to the bed.

She let out a sigh of relief and lay back, placing her palms over her eyes as she fought back tears of pain. Without moving, she asked, “Would you mind passing me the Aspirin and a bottle of water from the fridge please, Cindy?”

As she snickered, Cindy replied, “As long as you promise you won’t kiss me.”

Laughter bubbled up in Erin’s throat and she moved her hands away. “You and I are going to be very good friends, I’m sure of it!” Erin got warm and gentle vibes from the young woman and liked her instantly.

Handing over the water and pills, Cindy smiled.

“I’ll be back shortly with the crutches and to take you up to the clubhouse for a shower.”

“Thanks, Cindy. You’re my hero!”

After rolling her eyes, the woman left the trailer.

Erin maneuvered herself so that she could reach her suitcase and put together some clean clothes to take with her. The thought of a hot shower and getting out of the tiny trailer brightened her whole day.

Chapter Four

Taking The Plunge

A Jeep pulled up a few minutes later and Cindy's welcome face peered in the doorway. She carried a set of crutches.

"You don't know how much I appreciate your help, Cindy. You saved my sanity."

Blushing, she handed Erin the crutches. "We'll have to adjust them later but we should be able to get you over to the clubhouse and back with them the way they are for now, Erin."

Since Erin had been on crutches before, she was about to start out until she realized that it would benefit her to pretend she didn't know how to use them. If she played on their sympathies and acted helpless she appeared, the easier it would be to fit in with the crew. As she stood up, she placed the crutches under her arms but made sure that she gripped them wrong and wobbled precariously.

In a flash Cindy was at her side and showed her how to place her hands then picked up Erin's pile of clothing to take with them. Together, they moved out the door.

Grumpy was walking toward the clubhouse. Cindy yelled at her. “Come and help me get Erin into the Jeep, will you?”

The woman frowned but came over to assist them and the three women worked together to aid Erin down the steps. Moments later, they arrived at the clubhouse. With Erin being at least six inches taller than either of the two women the trio made a sight to behold. Erin did her best to appear to be in pain and not very capable which wasn’t too far from the truth.

Grumpy muttered something about Amazon klutzes and left to go to the dining area for lunch.

With a hearty chuckle, Cindy looked up at Erin.

“Grumpy always acts miserable, but she’s really a nice person. She doesn’t like anyone else knowing it though.”

Erin laughed. “Not many people are what they appear to be. We all wear masks for protection.” She felt like she’d given something away, so she looked over at the shower stall and changed the subject. “Wow. Now *that* is a shower stall. You could fit four people in it!”

“When you’re done Erin, I’ll get some lunch together for you. We can prop your foot up on a chair and that should do you until we get you back to the trailer. Unless you’d rather we find a different place for you to stay?”

Cindy turned to get towels for Erin from the cupboard. Erin got the impression that Cindy wanted her to stay anywhere but with Brandon.

“That would be great, Cindy. I don’t mind staying with Brandon though. Thanks again.” Erin patted the woman’s shoulder.

“There are only two things I ask in return,” Cindy said, turning back to Erin with a surprisingly serious look.

“What’s that?”

“One: Stop saying thank you every two minutes, and two:—” she paused and looked down. “Don’t hurt him. Please.” Cindy’s face flushed and she looked uncomfortable. Erin could feel the pain flowing from her.

Her hand still on Cindy’s shoulder, Erin squeezed it gently to make her look up. Staring her in the eye, Erin replied, “One: I can’t promise I won’t thank you for helping me because I always tell someone when I appreciate them, but, I will try to keep it down to a minimum, and two: I don’t ever plan on hurting him. I’ll do my best to make sure that never happens. I’m not that kind of person—How long have you been in love with him?”

The softly spoken question brought unshed tears to Cindy’s eyes. “Forever,” she said and turned away, leaving Erin alone, propped up on the crutches.

Erin wondered if she could keep her promise about not hurting Brandon as she shut the door then stripped down for her shower. She took Cindy’s words

about Brandon seriously. Unrequited love sucked. Cindy didn't seem the type who would be involved with the people Erin was investigating so Erin moved her to the bottom of the list, not willing to leave anyone out just yet.



Finally, hours after he'd left the trailer, Brandon had every crisis dealt with and raced back, eager to see Erin. When he opened the door and saw the empty bed, he turned to the washroom and called out. No answer!

"Where the hell—" He turned to look out over the landing field but didn't see any clues as to where she had gone.

Grumpy passed by and muttered to him, "The klutz is having a shower at the office." He thought he heard her mutter '*perfect for each other*', but wasn't sure. She kept going, not waiting for his thanks. He had no idea how Erin could have walked all the way to the clubhouse but left that question to be answered later. He took off at a run.



Cindy was subdued when she told him that Erin had just climbed into the shower. Brandon, for once didn't question her solemn mood.

"Erin isn't doing too well with her balance on the crutches yet." Cindy turned away and went to pick up her lunch order from the kitchen.

Brandon did his best not to run all the way to the office. Once inside, he closed the door quietly behind him, locked it, and went to the bathroom door. He was just about to knock to see if she was okay when he heard her cry out. Not concerned about propriety, he threw open the door and stopped in his tracks. Her curvaceous figure was outlined in the frosted glass, steam curling up in the air around her.

She was magnificent in that few seconds but he didn't take the time to admire her since she looked like she was about to topple over. He rushed forward and slid open the door behind her then stepped in fully clothed, catching her just as she was about to fall.

Erin let out a scream when his arms surround her, preventing her fall. As soon as she turned her head to look over her shoulder at him, she relaxed.

"Oh, hi, Brandon, what's up?" She grinned, apparently not concerned about her nudity.

Speechless, he kissed her. His sexual frustration had built up to such a high degree over the last twenty-four hours that he couldn't stop himself. The steam billowed around them as his clothing and boots soaked up the water that poured over their bodies. He pulled her naked body tight against him as his arms came around her waist.

When he lifted his head, he looked into her dazed eyes to see if she really did want him. There wasn't a hint of rejection. If anything, everything appeared to be just perfect with her. As his head lowered for another kiss, she put her fingers on his lips, and stopped him.

"Don't you think you might be just a little more comfortable without those wet clothes?"

He could only nod and step back. Once he made sure she was steady on her foot, he backed out of the shower and stripped down as fast as he could. After he locked the bathroom door, he grabbed his wallet for a condom and went back into the shower.

She stood with the water pouring down her back, her black hair clinging to her silken skin. Her hands were propped on the wall and the door to either side of her at shoulder level as she stood on one foot, holding her sore foot up. She looked like she was ready to eat him for dinner, her light-blue eyes holding his gaze with wild hunger.

All he could do was whistle, amazed at the perfection of her body. Her stomach was firm and her legs so long that he thought they just might reach her shoulders. She obviously worked out as he did.

He shuddered as he watched her gaze slide over him head to toe, checking out his body too. When her eyes lingered on his rock hard staff, a slow grin lit her features.

“Yum!” Her gaze lifted, her eyes burning into his with simmering passion.

Brandon placed the condom on the shelf, picked up the bar of soap and slowly began to lather her satin skin, biting back a moan when she threw her head back with her eyes closed, her lips slightly parted.

With both hands he cupped her breasts, massaging the golden brown nipples with his thumbs, his heart racing. Her moan made his staff jump in response.

His arms slid around her as he embraced her and lathered soap over her back in small circles then moved his hands down over her buttocks. Unable to help himself, he cupped her cheeks, pulling her hips closer until their bodies met and they both gasped as his hardness pressed into her pelvis. Her breasts were crushed up against his chest as her arms slipped up to encircle his neck.

Erin pulled his head down for another kiss her tongue tangling with his. With her other hand she stroked his chest, pausing to run her nails lightly over his nipples then her fingers moved lower, sliding over his stomach and down further, to cup him. One finger slid up the length of his staff, and he shuddered.

Wild with desire for her, he pulled her hand away and lifted his head, his groin filled with aching need. “You’re killing me, Dark Angel. Wait just a second okay?”

Before he could grab the condom, she put her hand on his wrist. “I’m sorry Brandon, but I have to ask. Do you always practice safe sex?”

“Since my first time. I’m just as strict about that as I am about washing my hands—You?”

After a quick nod, she whispered, “Ditto. Hurry...please.”

Her eyes burned with sparks of passion. That was all the prompting he required.

Looking around her, she asked, “How—”

Without a word, Brandon lifted her up and turned her so that her back was to the wall. He slid home in one hard thrust that made them both cry out. An incredible sensation roared through his body like lightning, taking his breath away. She wrapped her long legs around him, careful to keep her sore foot out of the way as they began to move together in unison.

At first, he started out slow and ground their hips together in a blissful rhythm. His hands cupping her bottom as he held her tight to him as his mouth commanded hers to surrender to him. Shuddering, he felt like he was on fire as shocks of lightning raced through his veins.

She panted as he rained short kisses as he moved faster, his lips and tongue melding with hers. Her moans had his heart racing as he kept up a fast pace and her hips rocked against him in perfect sync.

Suddenly, her head flew back and she cried out, her arms tightening around his neck, her legs holding him tight against her in a death grip as she began to pulse around him.

He too was ready, kissing her hard as he thrust up into her and followed her over the precipice, his groans mingling with her muffled cries.

Holding her close to him, he stood still, nesting within her and breathing hard. Their foreheads touched while the water pulsed around them. The steam had become so thick that they could barely see each other.

Brandon was stunned when the moment was brought to an abrupt halt as she started to laugh. He could feel her body vibrating around his member.

“You are the strangest woman I’ve ever met!” He stared at her in confusion.

Laughing harder now, she explained. “I’m sorry but I’ve never had such an unusual and amazing day in my whole life. I can’t walk, and I was trying to fit into that dinky little shower in the trailer without any luck. Cindy came along and saved me, bringing me here. Now I’ve just had the most amazing *shower* of my entire life, and I’m so afraid to let go of you because when I do, my damn foot is going to send me through the roof.”

Brandon joined her in laughter. “How about we get you back on one foot, cleaned up, dried off and dressed, then we’ll feed you, *without* sending you through the roof!

After a blinding smile, she gave him a quick peck on his lips, and nodded. “Works for me! I’m starving.”

Once he’d helped her get her good foot on the floor, he slid out of her and gently lowered her other foot, making sure she was supported safely before letting go. He took the condom off and threw it in the garbage then turned back to soap himself off.

It took them a long time to get completely dressed and out to the dining room for lunch since Erin was playful and kept distracting him. He had to force himself to be strong.

“If you don’t behave, you won’t get *dessert!*” He gave her a leering grin to let her know just what *dessert* would be.

She released a chuckle and grinned. “All right, task master. I promised to behave.”

Brandon carried her to the dining room for lunch, finding it nearly empty. Apparently, they had taken a *very* long shower.

After propping her foot up on a spare chair, Erin and Brandon ate and talked about anything and everything. Lunch ended up taking just as long as the shower.

Finally, Brandon lifted her once again and carried her back to the trailer, leaving the crutches and Jeep behind.



Sad eyes followed the happy couple. Cindy had finally accepted that he was beyond her reach. A lone tear trailed down her cheek. She jumped when Frisker put his hand on her shoulder, standing silent beside her as he too watched Brandon and Erin disappear into the trailer.

Frisker turned her to face him, staring into her eyes. “Just for the record—” He put his arms around her and kissed her hard then simply walked away.

Stunned, she placed her fingers on her lips and stared after him. She had never noticed him being interested in her before so she figured that he was just being nice and shook her head. *Frisker could have just about any woman he wanted. Why would he even bother with me?* All she could do was watch as he disappeared behind the trailers she shivered, her lips still tingling.



Super Boy was still working on the plane late in the day. The hanger was dark except for the floodlight he had shining on the engine of the Cessna.

He muttered under his breath, did a final check and adjusted a bolt to make sure it was as tight as it would go. Always meticulous in the care of his 'baby', he took pride in his safety record and the low number of mechanical issues.

As he recalled the day Brandon gave him his nickname, Superboy grinned to himself. Brandon said it was because he was in the air more than any other team member. He was their hero and they depended on him to keep them all afloat and safe.

Jon sighed and wiped his hand on an oily rag, ready to call it a night. *Finally, we're ready to go for the morning's lineup of clients. Now they'll be safe as can be.*

A sound behind him made Jon look up, but before he was able to see anything, pain exploded behind his eyes and he sank to the ground, unconscious.



In the middle of the night Brandon started awake when there was a loud knock on the door and someone yelled his name. From a sound sleep, Erin shot up like a rocket, searching the bed for something. They had only just fallen asleep after exhausting themselves as they'd explored their new relationship.

"Hang on a sec," Brandon yelled.

Erin held a hand over her racing heart then reached out for her clothing, but Brandon stopped her.

“I’ll take care of it. I think I can fight them off by myself.” He chuckled at the way she’d over reacted.

For a moment, she’d been prepared to take on whoever was out there and protect him before she realized where she was.

After he threw on track pants, Brandon opened the door. Frisker stood on the deck and by the look on his face, it didn’t look like what he had to say was going to be good.

“Boss, you’ve gotta come quick! Super Boy got socked on the head in the hanger. He’s been out for a few hours. Looks like our vandal, but we can’t figure out what he tampered with yet.” Frisker seemed to be having a difficult time catching his breath like he’d run full tilt all the way to the trailer.

An angry frown marred Brandon’s face. “I’ll be right there. Did anyone call the cops yet?”

“No, we thought we should tell you first.”

Brandon raked his fingers through his tousled hair. “Does Super Boy need Doc or an ambulance?”

“He made his way to my trailer so I left him there and came to get you. I’m on my way to get Doc next.”

“Get going then. I’ll head right to the hanger and call the cops on my way. Thanks, buddy.” Brandon shut the door as Frisker took off like a shot.

Erin had heard the entire conversation and seen Frisker's panicked expression.

"Trouble? Would it be about that guy you fired? The one who helped me smash up my foot?"

Brandon sat on the bed and pulled on his shoes. He grabbed a T-shirt and his cell phone before replying.

"That would be my first guess, but the cops have this thing about having evidence and won't arrest a man on someone's 'say so'." Brandon shook his head. He leaned over and kissed her gently. "I'll see you in a few hours. Save my place, okay?" He tried to give her a smile, but it came out more a grimace. The door slammed behind him as he took off.

For a few minutes, Erin sat there and waited to make sure he wasn't coming back before she dug her cell phone out of its hiding place. Hitting the speed dial, she waited. A gruff voice answered.

"Hey. Things are escalating here. There's been more vandalism. The pilot got hit over the head. Anderson's gone to check out the hanger."

The man didn't complain about Erin waking him up in the middle of the night. There was a brief pause. "Do you think this is related to our case? It seems petty compared to what's going on."

“I have a hunch it is related in some way, but I’m pretty sure it was that idiot, Ripper. It’s like a vendetta or something. Brandon’s on his way over to the hangar to meet the cops right now to see if anything was damaged. Frisker said he hadn’t pinpointed what was tampered with yet.” Erin was calm, her voice still husky with sleep.

“Let me know what you find out. How’s the integration coming?” he asked in all seriousness.

A tender feeling warmed her insides as she thought about Brandon’s gentle touch, but she spoke in an impersonal voice. “I’m in. I can milk this foot thing for a few more days then let him know I want to stick around. I don’t think there will be a problem.”

“Excellent.” He paused again. “Be careful Erin. Things could get dangerous from here on.”

“I have a feeling that the worst of it won’t happen until we reach Mexico. That’s where the main player is located. Does our contact down there have everything ready?”

“Yes. As far as I know he’ll have a package waiting for you when you arrive. His code name is Turtle.” He chuckled as he added, “He chose that name because he hides things, like a turtle in its shell.”

“Turtles have no room to hide anything except their bodies in their shells,” Erin added dryly.

“Loosen up, Erin. I’ll be waiting for your call. Goodnight.”

After she’d placed the phone back in its hiding place, Erin pulled out a novel that Cindy had given her and sat back while she waited to see what Brandon would have to say.

Chapter Five

The Jump Into Truth

When Brandon finally returned to the trailer he was exhausted and very frustrated. All he wanted to do was curl up into a ball and sleep for a week, yet when he noticed that the lights were still on, all exhaustion evaporated. Erin was waiting for him.

He opened the door quietly in case she had fallen back to sleep but found her propped up reading a novel, her welcoming smile a balm to his soul. She was so beautiful, sitting in the soft light, a thick strand of her silky black hair curling just below her naked breast.

“Hi,” she said, her voice low and husky.

“Hi,” he replied, swallowing hard as her sultry tone washed over his senses.

Erin put the book aside and patted the mattress next to her.

Brandon groaned and did a comical crash-dive onto it, landing face down with his head next to her hip. She giggled, running her fingers through his loose hair.

“You’d have made an exceptional medieval knight with your big muscles and long hair.”

A snort escaped Brandon. “I can only imagine that scenario.”

His clean-shaven face enhanced his chiseled features, especially when his hair was pulled back. After he released a deep, exaggerated breath, Brandon turned his head toward her and pretended to fall asleep with a fake snore.

Erin’s giggle ended in a protest. “Oh no you don’t! I want to know what’s going on. You stay awake or no *dessert* for you for a week!”

Without opening his eyes or moving, Brandon smiled, “Now that’s cruel! You might as well just shoot me.”

He tensed suddenly as flashes of his vision went through his mind. The image of Erin as she fell forward, a bullet ripping through her back, reminded him that she had to leave. It was imperative that he prevent her from getting any more comfortable at the zone. She had to return to her own life, so that she could *keep* her life.

“Come on, tell me!” she urged, tugging his hair gently.

His response was evasive. “Just talking to the cops, lots of questions, no evidence, plenty of frustration—all the usual crap.”

She ran a finger down his cheek, and asked softly, “Is Super Boy all right?”

Brandon lifted his head to gaze into her eyes, and nodded. “He’s got a hell of a headache, but Doc says he’ll be fine. He didn’t get a concussion, but blacking out is always dangerous. Frisker is staying with him for the rest of the night to make sure he wakes up every half hour, just in case.”

He was beginning to trust her and believed she really did care about his friends at the zone. The feelings she aroused in him were a surprise. All he wanted to do was spend his every waking minute in her presence. Somehow she made him feel complete, like he’d been missing out on something in his life before she’d arrived.

“So what did they vandalize this time, the plane again?”

Brandon wouldn’t answer but pulled her head down and kissed her at an attempt at distraction. Erin responded with heated passion. Though he had changed the subject for now, based on what little he knew about her, she wasn’t going to give up that easy. At his groan, she lifted her head.

“Oh, does that mean you are too...tired to play?” she asked in a sultry voice.

“Hell no!”

Brandon sat up to remove his clothing then threw his arms around her and laid her down next to him then seized her lips once again. He shuddered when her fingers moved slowly over his stomach and on down to his curly nest of hair and

teased with exquisite torture and slowly traveled up the length of him. She laughed low in her throat when he sighed in contentment.

Brandon's fingers moved to tangle in her hair, with tender care, clutching the strands behind her head. He held her to him, while his tongue explored her mouth, mating with hers in a sensual dance.

Sensations like electric shocks raced down his body, building passion to a burning fervor. A gasp escaped as he pulled back for a moment and gazed into her eyes, finding desire ablaze. Unable to help himself, Brandon tugged her closer and continued his sweet assault. Erin wrapped her arms around his neck, giving him equal passion in return.

Once he'd set her hair free, Brandon smoothed his hands over the long silken strands down her back. His arms encircled her waist to bring her closer to his chest. He hissed against her lips as her soft breasts met his naked skin and she shivered in response.

Brandon moved his mouth over her cheeks, nibbled on her earlobe and scraped his teeth gently on her neck sending shudders through her until her hips lifted off the bed.

She laughed low in her throat. "That tickles." Then her hands roamed over his back, kneaded and gently scratched his skin.

As he continued his teasing play on her neck, he chuckled.

“You are enjoying this way too much,” she said, snickering as she squirmed and laughed while she tried to avoid his lips and tongue.

He hid his pleased grin as he licked along the vein that rode close to the surface of her skin and felt her pulse race. The journey continued along her collarbone as his lips took over, suckling her velvety skin.

In an abrupt change of mood, he pulled back, breathing hard. The images had returned. He took her by the arms and set her away from him then sat on the edge of the bed, his back to her as he fought to catch his breath.

“What’s wrong, Brandon? Did I do something to upset you?”

He shivered and sat quiet without answering right away.

“I have to go outside for a few minutes. I’ll be back,” he said, threw on his track pants and grabbed his cell phone before leaving the trailer, barefoot.



Brandon made sure he walked far enough away from the trailer that Erin wouldn’t hear what he had to say. He hit the speed dial and waited for the phone to ring.

“Hello, Brandon.” A woman answered, her voice drugged with sleep.

“Hi, *Stink Bomb*. Whatcha doing?”

“I *thought* I was sleeping, but I could be wrong. Maybe I’m just dreaming, *Brain Donor*,” she chuckled and spoke quietly to someone in the background.

His twin sister, Lana, had always been there for him when the visions got out of hand. She didn't let him down this time either.

"I—" He choked, unable to talk, he was so upset.

"Spill bro! What was it this time?"

He knew she referred to his visions.

"I've met someone and she's different than anyone I've ever known, you know? It's like we connect on a different level. She's the one I've dreamed about for years now. When I saw her eyes, I knew it was her. The problem is...she's going to die." Brandon was pacing in agitation, running his fingers through his hair.

"How?" Lana asked, her voice suddenly tense.

Since his sister knew he wouldn't tell her about the woman in the middle of the night if the death was a normal one, he blew out a deep breath and plunged ahead. He had a gut feeling that the vision was going to happen soon.

"She gets shot in the back and—" He stopped, unable to continue.

Lana waited for him to finish what he was saying but when he remained silent, she prompted, "And?—What are you not telling me, Brandon?"

A deep sigh escaped him. "I think I die too."

Silence greeted him. He could feel Lana's distress and wanted to kick himself for upsetting her, but she was the only person he knew who understood

his struggle with the visions, the only one who could help him make sense of the terrifying, flashing images.

“I’m sorry,” he said, subdued. “I shouldn’t have called you.”

“No. Don’t hang up. I’m just...shocked, that’s all—Can you...can you change the outcome?”

“I don’t know, Lana. I’ve never tried to alter something this big.” Brandon sighed again. “Lana, I...”

“You were a boy scout once. Maybe it’s time to use those same skills now. You know, always be prepared! You’re aware of what could happen, so just meet it head on.”

“I’m trying to get her to leave and go back to where she came from. It’s hard. Part of me wants to hold onto her and never let her out of my sight while the other part wants her to leave and not look back. It would be better to have her alive and not ever see her again rather than see her die in front of my eyes.” His voice was a whisper now.

“Brandon. After what Brett and I have just been through, I don’t agree with that at all. If I thought I’d lose him forever one way or another, I’d choose to keep him with me and spend every moment together making the most of it.”

He recalled that a few months before, Lana had nearly lost her life when a psychotic killer had kidnapped her and tried to kill her. Brett had saved her life, and now they were about to get married.

Brandon realized that her outlook made sense. He should still try to get Erin to leave, but until her foot healed, he could make the most of their relationship, no matter how brief.

“Thanks, *Fruit Loop*. I think I know what to do now. I’ll see you in a few weeks at the wedding—I’m really sorry I woke you,” he apologized.

“Listen to me, *Corkscrew*, you call me anytime, and I mean *anytime* you need me. Helping my little brother is in my contract under ‘*sister to the brother duties*’.”

She’d always been firm about him calling her, but he knew that she only teased him to lighten his worry. He especially hated to be reminded that as his twin she’d been born first and she took great pleasure in reminding him, over, and over again.

“Brandon, do you think it would be a good idea to tell her what’s coming?”

A bitter laugh escaped him. “Sure, right after I show her my ‘*certifiable nut*’ license. She ought to love that one! Lana, you know that most people don’t believe in psychic ability, and they run like hell if you tell them you’re one of ‘those’ people.”

“Suit yourself, *Dweeb*. Just promise me you’ll call me if you need me? I don’t want to have to come looking for you! Oh, and if you’re able to, why don’t you bring her to the wedding?”

“Okay, *Poopy Pants*—Thank you. Love ya. Say hi to *Pig Whistle* for me.” Brandon felt much better. Lana had always been able to calm him down after a bad vision.

“Good night, *Night Walker*. *Pig Whistle* sends his regards. See you in a few weeks, but *call* me if you need me. Promise?” she insisted.

“Sure thing, *Liver Lips*. G’night.” Brandon was smiling when he hung up. He was about to head back to the trailer when he looked up and saw Erin silhouetted by the trailer lights. She was standing a bit unsteadily, leaning against the wall of the nearest trailer, holding her foot up. Her chest rose and fell rapidly, the exertion of hopping on one foot apparently taking its toll on her.

“What are you doing out here, you nut? You could hurt yourself more,” he said gruffly.

“I—I didn’t know what to think when you ran off. I was worried. Are you all right?” she asked, concern in her voice. She was breathless and he could tell she was in pain.

Without answering, he strode to her side, slipping his phone into his pocket. He picked her up in his arms he carried her back to the trailer while she curled into his chest, her head resting on his shoulder.

Once he had her tucked back into bed, he checked her foot, propping it up. Once he'd placed a fresh icepack on the swollen purple ankle and gave her a bottle of water with the Aspirin, he sat down beside her.

"Thank you."

Brandon waited until she had taken the pills then put the pill bottle on the counter. He knew he had to come up with some kind of explanation for her. With his hands cupping his head, elbows on his knees, he sat silent for a while, trying to think of what to say to her without sounding completely certifiable. It took him a minute to formulate the words.

"I'm sorry about—" At a loss for words, he sighed. Brandon couldn't look at her. His emotions were just too raw.

A gentle hand touched his arm.

"Is it me? Did I do something wrong, because I can't for the life of me figure out why you are upset with me? Everything was going just fine, and then you—" She fell silent.

He turned to face her, not trying to hide the pain in his eyes. Picking up her hand, Brandon said softly, “No Erin. It isn’t you at all. I just have—There is something—Oh, damn it anyway!”

He stood up quickly and went to the fridge to get a bottle of water and chugged most of it down then put the container in the sink. Hands braced on the counter, he dropped his chin to his chest.

“You’re scaring me, Brandon. What’s wrong? Please tell me!”

Without looking up, Brandon decided it was time for a hard dose of the truth. “I’m going to tell you, but first promise me that you’ll keep an open mind. I’m not a nutcase, I swear it—And I seldom tell anyone what I’m about to tell you.”

He turned back to face her. “Will you try to keep an open mind?” At her nod, he continued. “If, after I’ve told you, you want to leave, I’ll get Frisker to take you anywhere you want to go...anywhere...away from me.”

Her eyebrow rose. To her credit she didn’t show alarm at his dire words. At a slow nod, she said, “Shoot.”

With a grimace at her use of the word, Brandon blew out a heavy breath and dove in feet first, expecting the worst.

“I’m...psychic and...I get visions of the future.”

To his relief, she didn’t react like he’d thought she would but stared up at him without blinking.

“Okay, is that it?”

Since her reaction was good so far, he continued.

“Sometimes when I touch things, I get visions of what will be. When I lifted your suitcase out of your car, I had one. The other night when I freaked out and ran out of here, I had another. It was bad, Erin, very, very bad.” He waited to see if she believed him and what her reaction would be.

“Though I don’t really believe in psychic ability, I’m willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Go ahead and tell me about it.”

Relief loosened the knots in his stomach and he relaxed a bit. Sitting down on the bed beside her, he waited for her to cringe at him being so close, but she just lay back and waited, her expression guarded.

“I don’t know where it happens, but I saw a forest, a man in white with blood on his shirt, and...” Shoving his hair back, out of his face, he sighed. She didn’t interrupt him so he kept going. “I saw you running toward me with a gun, you looked...protective, like a cop. Then you were shot in the back and dropped to the ground face first—You were dead, Erin!”



Stunned when Brandon referred to her as a cop, she stared at him, cautious to guard her expression. His vision could very well come true in her line of work.

She waited for him to continue since the look on his face said that there was more to say, but he had stopped talking.

“What else?” she asked, her voice a husky whisper.

Brandon’s tone filled with bitter resolve. “I die too—Ripper kills me with a gun.”

A sudden lump in her throat had Erin swallowing hard. She fell quiet for a few minutes as she absorbed what he’d said and averted her gaze as she tried to make sense of what he was saying. It had been shortly after he’d brought her the suitcase that he had run from the trailer. It was possible that he really did have visions and what he saw could come true, but she was having a hard time accepting it as fact. She needed proof to believe it. Her entire career was based on fact.

“You said that only a few people knew about your...gift.” He nodded. “So who were you talking to on the phone outside?” she asked.

An adorable grin lit his face up and his eyes softened.

“I called Lana, my twin sister. She’s gifted too. She’s a telekinetic and can move things with her mind.”

“Get out of town! No way.” Frowning, she shook her head in disbelief.

“Absolutely. She said to tell you about my visions, and afterwards, if you still stuck around with her nutty brother, she wants you to come to her wedding next weekend.”

Erin was amazed. “Wow. I get to meet the family after only a couple of days. Tell me that isn’t a commitment!”

Her flippant attitude had him frowning, serious all of a sudden. “Would that be such a bad thing?” He acted like he was afraid of what she was going to answer.

Shaking her head, she sighed. “Not in my books. I’d like to stick around for a while...with you.” Tilting her head, she added, “That is, if you promise to stop running from me every time you get a vision. You’re starting to give me a complex.”

Taken aback, Brandon just stared at her for a moment. “Erin, you have to understand what could happen to you. It could mean your death if you don’t leave. I have no way of knowing when this could—will happen.”

Erin let out a most unladylike snort. “We’re all going to die someday. Why waste the moments we do have together worrying about what *could* happen?”

Apparently stunned, his mouth dropped open. “Lana just said the very same thing.”

“Hmm...I like your sister already—So! Where do we go from here?”

“Depends,” his eyes flashed with passion. “Are you tired after staying up most of the night? Would you like to just...go to sleep?” Brandon raised a brow.

She gave him a suggestive smile but didn't say a word. She didn't have to. It was dawn before they fell asleep again, but neither of them complained.



The entire crew was present later that morning when Brandon stood in the hangar trying to figure out what the vandal had tampered with. It was an hour earlier than they usually met for their daily meeting to get their instructions and client lists arranged for the day.

They were going to work together to try and figure out what had been done during the break-in the evening before. Each member was sent to a specific area to search for anything unusual. The creep had hit Super Boy over the head for a reason, but what? The plane had already been thoroughly inspected and everything checked out fine.

As he studied the hangar, Brandon tried to put himself in the place of the vandal. Since he figured it was Ripper, he wondered what lengths the man would go to, to get back at Brandon for firing him. Hurt the company, hurt his job?

His eyes narrowed in concentration, Brandon moved over to the parachute rack. He would ensure that everyone checked their own chutes meticulously, but the client chutes were out in the open, not under lock and key. It only made sense to target them for tampering.

With a gesture, Brandon waved Frisker over and explained what he was going to do. “Keep the others away in case I get a bad vision.”

“No problem, Stomper.”

Frisker and Cindy were the only two people on the team who knew about his gift and they guarded the secret carefully.

The first rig gave him no issues. The second; nothing. The third...Suddenly in his mind, he was freefalling. His heart accelerated at the heady feeling. At first he was euphoric, but then, when he pulled the ripcord, the chute didn’t open. Pulling the reserve chute didn’t work either. Panic set in and he fell faster, screaming in his mind, falling faster as the ground moved at an amazing pace toward him. Just before he hit the earth, he was yanked out of the vision and found himself on his knees, gasping for breath.



“What’s wrong with Stomper?” a crewmember shouted.

“Nothing. We’re just looking for something on the ground. Keep searching your designated areas, please.”

Frisker turned back to face Brandon.

“Tell me what happened.”

Sweat poured off his face, his body shuddering in reaction as Brandon replied.

“The rig is bad. He screwed with the ripcords. The next jumper would have died.” Brandon gritted his teeth, a vein throbbing in his temple from the severe headache that accompanied the use of his gift.

“Shit!” Frisker always believed every word Brandon spoke when it came to his secret knowledge of the unknown. “Do we check the rest?”

Nodding, Brandon said, “Yes, but first, let’s get the gang to take all the pro-status chutes and their own outside and repack them. Make sure they’re in perfect order. I have a feeling that the bastard wanted a client to die. It would hurt us more.”

Barely able to stand, Brandon moved off and acted as though he was looking for something else, while Frisker organized the repack and had the gang take the rigs out to the field where they’d have more room.

During the course of the next hour, Brandon found two more chutes that had been tampered with. All three people would have died in the next jump. The owners would have been up for some hefty lawsuits. All jumpers, whether new or pro, signed standard forms before they jumped, stating that they wouldn’t sue the company for any accidents or injuries. But three deaths in one day would have been out of the ordinary and would not be considered part of the agreement.

The team was responsible for making sure that the chutes and equipment were in perfect working order. A new jumper wouldn’t know how to pack a chute

and so depended on the team's expertise for their safety. Brandon's knees buckled in exhaustion as he grabbed the shelf to keep from falling.

After one vision, Brandon always felt weak, but going through the terror of nearly dying in the three separate parachute visions, he was beyond exhausted. Frisker took over the repacking and managing the jumps for the day and Brandon stumbled back to the trailer. He needed sleep. Sweat poured off him, even though it wasn't a warm day.

He had to go home.



When Erin saw Brandon come through the door, she thought he was ill and cried out in concern. "Oh, my God! Brandon, what's wrong, are you hurt?"

He shook his head, his face white as a sheet as he stood there shuddering. "Sleep," was all he could manage to say. Dropping like a rock onto the bed, he fell into a deep sleep.

Since Erin had already dressed and was prepared to go to the clubhouse, she got out of bed and stared down at him, not sure what to do.

"Brandon?" she cried, brushing his damp hair from his sweat beaded brow. "Brandon, wake up!"

Cindy had come by earlier and they'd made plans to get her to the office for a shower. Hearing the Jeep pull up, Erin waited until Cindy opened the door, and

cried out frantically, “I think we need to get Doc in here. Something’s wrong with him!”

In her entire life, Erin had never felt as helpless as she did at that moment. Her heart lurched as she thought of his strange illness. What if he died? She’d only just met him. All her life she’d lost one person after another until she’d built up a protective wall around her heart so she’d never feel anything about anyone. Brandon had somehow gotten past it.

When she placed her hand on his sweating forehead, she found his temperature was normal.

At a touch on her shoulder, she looked up to see Cindy put her finger to her lips. Then, she picked up Erin’s pile of clothing and supported her until they were outside.

“We’ll discuss it in a bit, but not here, not now. Come on with me.”

Reluctance to leave Brandon, Erin hesitated.

“I’ll explain later. Let’s go, Erin!”

Her foot didn’t hurt as much that morning, so Erin was able to move around better and hopped to the Jeep with Cindy supporting her. She was shaking, her fear for him building as she looked back over her shoulder at the trailer.

“Are you sure we can leave him like that?”

She'd never been so out of her league before and was stunned at how much Brandon meant to her in such a short time. It didn't sit well with her usually tough nature.

"It's happened before, Erin. He just needs sleep."

After they'd climbed into the Jeep, Cindy started it up and drove to the clubhouse.

With her gaze on the trailer as they moved away from it, Erin decided to put her trust in the woman. After all, Cindy knew Brandon very well. Erin took a deep breath and turned to face forward, determined to find answers. Cindy was going to tell her what was going on, and that was final!

Chapter Six

The Integration

After a quick shower, Erin dressed and rushed to the dining room on the crutches, nearly falling in her haste. When she saw that Cindy wasn't there, she called out to the man behind the counter.

"Have you seen Cindy?"

He shrugged then nodded at the exit. "She said she would be back shortly and that I was to take care of you until she returns. Have a seat, Erin."

Frustrated, Erin moved over to sit at a table closest to the rear of the room so she could see anyone entering or leaving the building. She sat with her back to the wall and propped her throbbing foot up on the chair beside her.

A few minutes later, the same man brought her a club sandwich and a glass of water.

"Cindy picked your lunch for you. Are you okay with this, or would you prefer something else?"

"That's perfect, thanks."

"What would you like to drink?"

“How about a keg of beer?” Erin said in mild sarcasm, nodding at her aching foot.

A wide grin lit his face as he chuckled. “I could manage a bottle of beer or a glass of draft, if you’d like, even though it’s early. My name’s Tucker.”

Offering him a smile, Erin held her hand out to shake his. “Hi, Erin. Tucker—Let me guess. You like to ‘tuck’ into your food, right? Since everyone else at the zone seems to have a nickname, I’ve made a game out of guessing why. I figure yours has to do with food.”

His big grin flashed at her as his cheeks flushed. “Ah, no. Actually, it’s ‘cause Brandon can always tell when the wife and I have...ah...been *alone* together, ‘cause she’s always tuckered out afterwards.”

Throwing her head back, Erin laughed in delight. She got good ‘vibes’ from him. He seemed like an honest character. “Sorry I asked!” she joked. “Let’s skip the beer. I’ll have a cola if you don’t mind.”

“No prob. Did he give you a nickname yet?” Tucker asked.

Erin was about to say no when she remembered that Brandon had called her something the night before. “I think it was *Dark Angel* or something like that.”

Tucker scratched his head. “That one’s got me. Guess you’ll have to wait until he tells you why he called you that to figure out its meaning. He names

everyone and it's always for a good reason. Says he's been nicknaming people his whole life."

Now it made more sense. When Brandon had been on the phone last night with Lana, he'd kept calling her all kinds of goofy names. Erin hadn't been able to hear much of what he'd said, but she did hear him talk about being psychic. She was sure that he didn't know she'd been listening.

Starved, she picked up her sandwich and began to eat. Her stomach protested aloud from the late meal. She practically inhaled her food and was nearly done by the time Tucker brought her cola.

"Gee, I wish everyone had a healthy appetite like you, Dark Angel. You could keep me in business." His large belly jiggled when he laughed. "Would you like dessert?"

She graced him with a brilliant smile. "I'll take anything that's loaded with chocolate, my friend. Just bring it on!"

Tucker chortled. You've got it. We have Black Forest Cheesecake."

"Oh, God! No wonder your wife is so content! You're *the man!*" she teased.

She heard Tucker's laughter long after the kitchen door closed behind him. She snickered then turned back to finish her sandwich.



When Cindy stopped by the airstrip to speak to Frisker, she stood patiently while watching him organize the next group of jumpers and get them and loaded on the plane.

She touched her lips as she thought about his warm lips on hers and wished that it had been a real kiss and not only because he felt sorry for her. When he turned to face her, she dropped her hand, her face flushing with heat again.

Frisker gave her a warm smile and a wink while he helped the last client climb into the plane then closed the door tight. He slapped his hand on the side of the plane twice and yelled to Super Boy that it was all clear.

Confidence in his stride, he walked over to Cindy and took her hand to lead her away from the runway. Together they waited until the plane climbed into the sky before his warm brown eyes met hers.

“Good morning,” he said in a deep, warm voice.

Cindy felt tingles go up her spine. “Hi. I...ah...I was wondering if you could tell me what happened in the hangar? Stomper’s in rough shape and Erin wants me to tell her why, but I don’t know the details. I won’t tell her a thing if I’m not supposed to.”

“I know you won’t—Brandon said he told her about his gift. He said we could spill.” Frisker ran his finger down her cheek as he brushed aside a wayward strand of hair, and she shivered as tiny shocks flickered through her body.

“What happened this morning? Did you figure out what the vandal did?”

He nodded though his eyes never left hers. “Stomper used his gift and found three client rigs that had been tampered with. If we could prove it, we could get the guy for attempted murder. Stomper had me hide the chutes and keep them under lock and key just in case we need them for evidence later. The cops didn’t find a thing last night.” He tipped his head, giving her a slow, sexy grin. “You smell good.”

Her face flamed with fire and she frowned. “You can stop it now, Frisker. I don’t need your pity.”

“What do you mean by that?” He was clearly confused about her statement.

“I know you were just trying to make me feel better when you...well...at the clubhouse.” Cindy dropped her eyes so he wouldn’t see the unshed tears. She felt humiliated by his obvious sympathy for her.

Anger hardened his voice. “What the hell do you mean by pity?”

Mortified, Cindy turned to leave, but he grabbed her arm in a gentle restraint. With his other hand he lifted her chin, forcing her to look at him.

A tear escaped and her lower lip quivered as she tried again to pull away. “I know you were just trying to make me feel better. You can have any woman you want and you’ve never even looked sideways at me before. Why now, except out of pity because I love someone I can’t have?” Cindy sobbed.

“What are you talking about? The only reason I haven’t made a move before now is because I knew how you felt about him. I figured that yesterday you might have finally figured out that he was wrong for you and just let him go. I won’t take what isn’t mine, Cindy, and you obviously prefer him to me.” Frisker’s voice was even deeper now. Burning anger simmered in his eyes.

“Don’t—Don’t lie to me! You never, *ever* looked at me in any way but friendship before now. Ever!” she cried.

Frisker lost his temper and tugged until she was held tight against his hard chest then his lips claimed hers in a bittersweet kiss. She didn’t fight him but held onto his shirt and kissed him back, her knees going weak. He poured out so much passion in that kiss it left her gasping and trembling.

When he pulled back abruptly, he stared down at her. “Does that seem like pity to you?” he growled.

Then he let her go, turned and walked away, his stride stiff with anger.

Stunned at the way he’d acted and the wild passion that had flared up between them, tears dampened her cheeks as she watched him go, her heart pounding like it did when she jumped at twelve thousand feet.

No, that sure didn’t feel like pity to me. A sob escaped as Cindy turned and ran toward the clubhouse, swiping at her tears.



Once Erin finished the delectable dessert, she sat back with a teacup in hand, enjoying the hot brew. In his file, it said that Brandon drank only tea, never coffee. That suited her fine since she preferred tea too. She was amazed at how many things they had in common. It was not a problem pretending to like what he liked.

She frowned as Erin realized that in only three short days she had become attached to him. That was not a good thing in her opinion, feeling anything but detached and impersonal—*Boy am I in trouble!*

Two young adults entered the dining room. Erin remembered reading about them in the files.

Brian Deans. The young African-Canadian, was twenty-three years old, he stood about five-nine and weighed around one hundred and fifty pounds and sported a couple of eyebrow piercings. His main job as a certified rigger was packing chutes and he was in training to be a tandem jumper.

Carla Browning, a beautiful Asian girl, was twenty-one, stood no more than five-foot-six, and weighed one hundred pounds sopping wet. She looked anorexic and had nose and belly piercings. Her job was to do anything that the jumping staff required. Basically, she was a gofer. She was training to be a rigger.

When they looked up and noticed Erin sitting alone, the couple came over to her. Carla spoke first. “Hi, I’m *BLT* and this is *Chute*. So, how’s your foot?”

Erin offered a warm smile. “Hi, I’m Erin. No official nickname as yet. The foot’s still sore but mending. Would you like to join me? It’s lonely sitting here all by myself.”

Pleased at the opportunity to mix with the staff, Erin preferred to keep her new nickname to herself until Brandon officially called her Dark Angel in public.

Carla looked up at Brian and he nodded. “For a few minutes we can, sure. We have to eat fast and get back out there so the next group can get loaded after the plane is refueled.”

“We saw you land the other day. That was pretty rough. I’ve never seen one of the guys mess up like that before.” As though belatedly realizing that he probably shouldn’t say anything about the unprofessional jumper, Brian flushed and looked down at his hands. Carla shot him a surprised look.

They each took a chair and Tucker came out to take their orders. He wasn’t as friendly with the couple as he had been with Erin and she studied his expression. Before leaving to go back to the kitchen, he gave Erin a warning look.

Interesting!

The three chatted for a while. Erin asked them about their jobs on the crew. They were both happy to provide whatever information she asked of them.

“So, how did you get your nicknames?” Erin gave them a warm smile.

Brian snickered and looked over at Carla. “Well, my nickname is Chute because I’m a rigger so I pack chutes, but Carla here,” he grinned, “...every day she eats the same thing. Bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches! BLT’s!” He laughed.

“The boss notices everything about people. I hope he gives you a cool name. Don’t be surprised though if it has something to do with you hurting your ankle. He usually works on first impressions.”

Carla was giggling now. “He’s such a cool boss.”

Apparently BLT has a bad case of hero-worship based on the look in her eyes.

Tucker came out with their meals and the pair excused themselves, moving away to a table by the front window. Once he had finished serving them, Tucker came back to Erin’s table.

“Hey there, Tucker. You are my hero! Any guy who can dish up an awesome chocolate fix like you did gets to be at the top of my ‘*Top Ten Heroes*’ list. I can’t wait to meet your lucky wife.”

The way she complimented him made his cheeks flush with pleasure and his chest puff up with pride.

“If you ever need another chocolate fix, then I’m your man! Did you get everything you needed?”

“More than enough thanks. What’s the deal with the kids?” Erin knew that he would know what she meant by the question.

“Punks. Don’t get me wrong, they’re nice enough, it’s just that I don’t trust the ground they walk on. There’s something fishy about how they act. Not every time they come in here, but sometimes, if you know what I mean.”

“Do you mean like drugs or something?” she asked, widening her eyes on purpose in an expression of innocent surprise.

“Who knows? I just think they bear watching, that’s all.”

“Oh.” Erin took a quick glance over at the doorway. “Any idea when Cindy’s supposed to come back for me?”

“She should have been back by now—If you need to get back to the trailer, I could round up someone to take you,” Tucker offered.

Although Erin wanted to get back to see how Brandon was doing, she also planned on finding out from Cindy what was going on.

“Thanks anyway, Tucker, but I think it’s best if I wait for Cindy—She’s my new bodyguard!” Erin gave him a saucy grin.

With a bellow of laughter, he picked up her dishes and went back to the kitchen.



The dining room was beginning to fill up for lunch hour when Cindy finally came running into the room. She looked flustered, her hair wild and her eyes a telltale red. She’d been crying.

For a moment Erin watched the young woman as she headed toward her then waited until Cindy sat in the chair across from her before she asked, “Are you okay?”

Out of breath, Cindy answered, “Fine. I’m fine—Everything is...just fine!”

The sob that escaped when she spoke told Erin better than words that Cindy was ready to break down and cry. “Cindy, I have to get my gear together. Can you help me back to the office?”

Though distracted, Cindy handed Erin her crutches and moved off to open the office door.

Once inside, Erin locked the door behind her. “Have a seat, Cindy. You look like you’re going to fall down.” Erin sank into the small sofa and waited for Cindy to sit beside her.

Hesitant, the girl sat on the edge of the seat, looking at anything but Erin.

“I’ve got excellent ears, a soft shoulder, and I know when to keep things to myself if you want to talk about it.”

Like a dam bursting, Cindy couldn’t hold back her sob and began to cry, her shoulders shaking.

Erin handed her a tissue. “Things can’t be all that bad, Cindy. Tell me what’s going on. Maybe I can help.”

She trembled and shook her head, her face flushed red. “You wouldn’t understand—Oh, God, I’m so embarrassed.”

Patiently, Erin waited a few minutes while Cindy let the tears out. Whatever it was, it looked like the poor girl’s heart was broken. Erin hoped it didn’t have anything to do with her crush on Brandon.

Once she’d blown her nose and her tears slowed, Cindy threw herself back on the sofa, slumping with her hands covering her eyes.

“I’ve had a crush on Brandon since the day I met him. I know that we’ll never have a relationship, but yesterday when I saw him carrying you to the trailer, I realized the cold hard truth of it.” She took a shuddering breath and continued, “Frisker caught me crying and he...he...” Sucking in another deep breath, she continued in a quivering voice. “He kissed me.”

Not sure where Cindy was going with the statement, Erin asked, “Did you want him to kiss you?”

“No, I...Well, maybe I did, but I didn’t think so until you asked.” Cindy sat up and turned to Erin. “You have to understand, Erin, Frisker is a ladies’ man. He always has been. He never looked sideways at me until yesterday, and when he kissed me...” She had a faraway look in her eyes. “It was good. So damn good! I’ve never felt like that with anyone in my whole life. He made my toes curl, you know?”

As she recalled the way Brandon kissed her, Erin nodded. “Yeah, I do— So...what do you want to happen with him now? Are you interested in having a relationship?”

Pain flashed in Cindy’s eyes. “But that’s just it. Today I told him that I thought he had kissed me out of pity and he got so angry—I’ve never seen Frisker get angry before. He’s always had an easygoing personality and never lost it with anyone, no matter what they did wrong.” She turned to meet Erin’s gaze.

“I think I’ve ruined any chance I might have had. I didn’t even know I wanted him until he kissed me again.”

“He kissed you again? Today?” Erin smiled.

A look of wide-eyed apprehension crossed her face. “He sure did, but he was so angry at the time. I think I blew it, Erin—Oh, shit! What the hell is the matter with me? I totally blew it!” Her face crumpled and she cried again, broken-hearted sobs shaking her body.

Gently Erin pulled Cindy into her arms and held her, rocking back and forth while she patted Cindy’s back to sooth her. She whispered calming words, telling her that everything would be okay.

Finally, the tears subsided and she gently pulled away from Erin.

“I’m so sorry, Erin. I can’t believe I lost it like that. I never lose it.”

“Everyone loses it once in a while, Cindy, even me.” Erin brushed a strand of hair away from Cindy’s face. “Feel better now?”

With a shy smile, Cindy nodded then her expression became serious. “Do you think I screwed it up, Erin?”

Erin snorted and shook her head. “Cindy, if I know men, and I like to think I do, I believe you’ll have no problem working it out with Frisker. He obviously wouldn’t make a move on you while you liked someone else. And I can’t see any reason why a whole ton of guys wouldn’t line up just to talk to you, let alone kiss you—Give him a chance, I think maybe he’ll be more persistent than you might expect.”

“There’s a dance at the clubhouse tonight. Maybe he’ll dance with me.” Cindy looked uncertain but hopeful.

“I’m sure he will. Why don’t you come over and get ready at the trailer and I’ll give you a hand. We’ll make his mouth water!”

For a moment, Erin’s wicked smile made Cindy laugh. Then a somber expression stilled her response.

“You’d help me?” she asked, hopeful.

“Oh, yeah, I always help my best friends, especially when it comes to landing a man!”

Cindy looked stunned. “Best friends?”

As she placed a warm hand on Cindy's shoulder, Erin looked her in the eye.

"Cindy, even though you were heart sore about me dating Brandon, you helped me and took care of me. I think that was very unselfish of you. The fact that you didn't take out your frustration on me for it tells me that you're the type of top quality friend that I would be honored to have as my best friend—What do you say?" Erin held out her small pinky finger with her eyebrow raised.

This was her chance to bring Cindy close enough to gather more information about the crew, yet Erin couldn't help but like the girl and felt a twinge of regret about the way she gained Cindy's trust.

"I'd love to!" She held out her pinky too and they created their own pinky handshake, both women chuckling. Cindy's dilemma was on the road to resolution. Now it was time for Erin to get deep into her own investigation.



Since Cindy hadn't eaten her lunch and the dining room was full, she had Tucker bring her sandwich to the office. Erin was impatient to get back to Brandon, but in front of Cindy, she made sure she appeared calm and relaxed so she could gather information about the people at the zone.

Erin waited until Cindy had finished her meal before she broached the subject of last night's vandalism and Brandon's apparent illness.

Relaxed and content as she sat back on the sofa, Cindy got down to business. “Last night, three rigs were vandalized. Brandon used his gift to find out, and that’s why he’s so wiped out.

“Vandalized to what extent?”

“If Brandon hadn’t checked them using his gift, three clients would have died. The ripcords were cut from the main chute and also from the reserve chute. They wouldn’t have had a prayer of surviving.”

As Cindy looked down at her nails, she visibly shuddered.

“That would have been murder.”

Cindy nodded.

“Tell me about Brandon’s reaction to his gift.”

Taking a deep breath, Cindy cautioned, “You realize that what I’m about to tell you can’t go any further than this room? It could be dangerous for Brandon if the wrong people found out about his gift. He said that it could be used for crime or worse. Brandon only uses it for the benefit of others. Lana is the same way with her abilities.”

“I understand. I swear to you Cindy, it won’t leave this room.”

After a moment of gauging Erin’s promise, Cindy nodded.

“When Brandon touches things, he gets images. Sometimes they’re of future events, sometimes of the past. The problem is that depending on the strength of

the vision, it really takes a toll on his body. It ranges anywhere from a simple headache, to near paralysis where he is out of it. When he comes around after a bad one, and that can take minutes or even hours later, he's exhausted and needs to sleep to recover."

"Wow. Based on how bad he looked earlier, I'd say it was a bad vision then, right?"

Sympathy for Brandon filled Cindy's eyes. "Erin, he found three chutes. That means he did it three times. He would have experienced the person jumping and falling all the way to the ground to the point of death before he came out of it— Have you ever had a dream where you're falling then your body jerks so hard that you wake up?"

Erin nodded. "Shit. That would be like he died three times himself! I can't even imagine how terrifying that must have been. Will he be okay?"

"Sure. He just needs to sleep." She looked up at the clock. "I think he's been down long enough now. Let's get him some food and go check on him. He'll need to eat, and drink a ton of water."

Practically leaping to her feet, Erin swore like a trooper when she forgot her bad foot and stood on it. "Oh, shit that hurt!" Black dots flashed behind her eyelids as the pain washed over her. She fell back down on to the sofa.

With a grimace of understanding, Cindy placed her hand on Erin's forearm in support. "Why don't you let me get his lunch together while you take a few minutes to catch your breath? You're white as a ghost."

"Sure." Erin gasped, clenching her hands on her calf just above the damaged foot. Cindy handed her the Aspirin and a bottle of water and left the room.

As soon as the door shut behind Cindy, Erin pulled out her cell and called her partner. She spoke fast as she explained the situation, emphasizing the three possible murder attempts, while leaving out the details about Brandon's gift. She hung up just before Cindy came back to get her.

Things were really getting out of hand. There were only a few weeks left before the crew would begin the exodus to Mexico. Erin planned to go with them.

If the players were putting on the pressure that hard already, then the biggest problem was going to be keeping everyone alive until they reached Mexico. Erin swore again in frustration just as Cindy opened the door.

"Still hurting you?"

"I'll be fine thanks, Cindy. Are we ready to rock? I really want to get back to see how he's doing." Relief washed over Erin when she realized Cindy assumed that the swearing was because of her foot. As fast as she could, Erin hobbled along behind her new friend on the crutches as they made their way to the Jeep.

It was going to be tricky keeping Cindy out of official business if she and Erin became too close. Trying to find time alone to contact her partner would also prove to be tough since Brandon hovered over her too. Erin had to find a way to have some time alone over the next few weeks so she could make her reports as well as investigate.

When the Jeep pulled up in front of the trailer, butterflies fluttered around Erin's stomach. She hadn't felt this nervous about seeing someone since prom night. Her concern for Brandon was very real.

Cindy held the door open for Erin, the lunch bag in her other hand.

Biting her lower lip, she gave Cindy an uncertain look before entering the trailer. She tried not to wake Brandon, but he stirred as soon as she stood beside the bed. Cindy just handed her the food and winked before leaving, the door closing behind her.

Chapter Seven

Exploring Nicknames

After placing the food on the counter, Erin locked the door and leaned the crutches against the wall out of the way. When she turned back to face Brandon, she studied him while he was in that place halfway between sleep and waking.

His color was much better, his face relaxed, all tension gone. When she had left the trailer earlier, he'd been laying on his stomach. He hadn't moved a muscle since. His broad shoulders were loose, his face turned toward her.

An unfamiliar ache in her heart surprised Erin. *Oh, shit! I'm feeling way too much for this man! What is happening to me?*

Long golden-brown hair had come loose from the ponytail holder. Erin wanted to run her fingers through it to feel the soft texture. Her foot ached while she stood there, her hands propped against the walls to hold her up. Slowly, she lowered herself to the bed, trying not to wake him.

As soon as the mattress dipped, Brandon opened his eyes. He looked confused as to where he was at first but then took a deep breath. His biceps hardened as he pushed himself up on his elbows and brushed his hair out of his

face. She swallowed hard at the sight of his arousal, his muscular, tanned body reminding her of the passionate night they'd spent in each other's arms.

"Hi there, hero!" She kept her voice soft and gentle.

"Hi there, beautiful—Hero?"

She offered him a smile as she nodded. "You saved three lives today. That's hero material."

Brandon frowned. He sat up but his hand rushed to his forehead as if he were in pain.

"Are you okay?" Erin touched his arm, alarmed.

A grimace marred his features before he opened his eyes to a squint, and explained. "One of the many perks of having visions is lousy headaches. I might email my agent to get me a raise." Brandon's ability to make jokes assured her that he would be fine.

Cautious not to hurt her foot, Erin stood up and hopped to the fridge, bringing back two bottles of water and the Aspirin. She lowered herself to the bed again.

"Are you hungry? Cindy had Tucker make you some lunch."

"Lunch? How long have I been out?" he asked, a surprised look on his face.

“Well you left here at six a.m. and dropped like a rock on the bed at seven-thirty.” Erin tried to sound flippant but her stomach flipped when she remembered how terrified she had been about his health.

Brandon pulled her close and kissed her. She slipped her arms around his waist and took a shaky breath as she caught a whiff of his now familiar scent.

“I didn’t believe in psychic ability until this morning. You scared the hell out of me, Brandon.”

He ran his hand over her hair in a soothing rhythm. “It’s part of who I am, Dark Angel.”

A snort escaped her and she pulled away, changing the subject. “Tucker told me why you named him. You are so twisted!” She laughed, and handed him his lunch bag.

With a wry grin, he opened the bag and pulled out a sandwich before responding.

“You don’t know the half of it. Some of them are so funny that I can barely call the person what I nicknamed them without laughing. Tucker’s one of them.” Taking a large bite out of his sandwich then lay back against the pillow and watched her.

Her face flushed with heat as she wondered how it was possible that he could make her feel like a young school girl.

“So what’s with my nickname?”

There was that beautiful lop-sided grin again. “Well, you have dark hair, and the day I met you, you had just fallen from the sky like an angel. Dark Angel!”

Amused, she snorted as her chuckle filled the room. “Tell me more of your nicknames. I thought I heard you call Lana a few weird names last night like *Pig Whistle*.”

He laughed aloud then took a deep pull on his water bottle. “Pig Whistle is the name I gave to my future brother-in-law. I guess I’ll let you meet him first before I tell you why I call him that. I’d like to see if you can figure out why he got such a prestigious name.”

“Okay. Does that mean I’m your official date for the wedding?” she teased.

“Oh...I guess so. Unless you’d rather I find someone else. I think Frisker wanted to go with me.” He shrugged as though bored.

With pretended outrage, Erin swatted his leg. “I think not! He’ll have to go through me first!”

“That’s just as well. He hasn’t got the legs you do and if I had to put him in a dress it might get embarrassing.”

Erin chuckled. “Now that’s a picture that I just don’t want to see thanks, not even in jest!”

“Exactly how long are your legs anyway? I’m sure they must reach your armpits.”

For a moment she tapped her lip with a finger. “Well, the average woman has a thirty to thirty-three inch inseam. Mine is thirty-six.”

Whistling his disbelief, Brandon shook his head. “See, I told you. Right up to your armpits! It must be difficult to find pants in the store to fit you.” He inhaled the last bite from his sandwich and took another swig of water.

Erin nodded. “By the time I was in high school, my mom had to make all my pants for me. She altered patterns to get the extra length. I have a friend who makes them for me now.”

“Did you grow up in Toronto?”

Before she answered, she took a sip of water.

“I grew up in a small town in the country a couple of hours east of Toronto.”

“Wow, a country girl. Maybe I should have called you Haystack or Rider.”

“Rider?” She laughed.

He smiled wickedly, “Yeah, it could be for riding a horse, or...” His suggestive wink had her giggling.

“Or?” Erin climbed over and straddled his lap, kissing him, her tongue teasing his. He tasted like fresh tomatoes and cheese.

When he came up for air, he said, “Or...maybe we should see if you can ride first before we make it an official nickname?”

She gently bit his earlobe. Pulling his T-shirt over his head, she kissed his chest, her hands moving down to undo his pants, wincing when her foot pressed into the mattress.

His hands rested on her waist then graduated up her torso, bringing a moan from her when they stopped below her breasts. In an unhurried fashion, he slipped her shirt off before his hands returned to cup her globes. Next, he undid the clasp at the front of her bra and released them, claiming her swollen nipple with his lips.

Thrilled with his touch, Erin dropped her head back, her eyes closed, and gasped at the sensations he awoke in her. Her hands slid through his long hair, gripping his locks when he moved to her other nipple.

“Oh, Brandon...that feels sooo...damn...good.” She moaned in ecstasy as sensations shot from her breasts on a wire all the way down to her tingling sheath.

When he pulled away to help her remove her bra, she felt the loss and cried out as she slid off his lap to discard her pants. Just as her hands moved to her belt, he stopped her.

“Let me,” he said in a husky whisper and turned her so she lay down on the bed beside him.

Erin's heartbeat increased its erratic pace as she waited. When his lips returned to hers, his hand cupped her cheek. Her long arms slipped up to encircle his neck. By the time he moved down lower, kissing and nibbling along her neck, she was mad with desire.

When she suddenly giggled, his unshaven face tickling her, he lifted his head to stare at her then grinned and continued his sensual assault. Her fingers laced in his hair again, her back arching under the erotic sensations. Brandon's lips moved lower now as they skimmed over her breasts, following an invisible trail down her body until he met her navel. With his hot tongue, he laved and licked, dipping into it until she moaned and shivered.

For a moment he halted his sweet attack, undid the belt and slipped the leather through the buckle. Next the button was freed on her jeans before his fingers pulled the zipper down at an excruciatingly slow pace.

Desire was close to pain as she stared down at him, her body shuddering when the decent of the zipper reached the end of the trail.

Lifting her hips, Erin assisted him while he slid her pants down over her hips. When she cringed with pain, he moved even more gently, cautious while he eased her pant leg over her sore foot.

"Are you okay?"

"Oh yeah...I'm definitely okay." Her voice was husky with passion.

When he started to remove his pants, she stopped him. “Turnabout’s fair play.”

She nodded toward the mattress to indicate that she wanted him to lie down then mounted him again. Her lips met his, burning with passion until they both gasped with desire.

His thumbs rubbed over her nipples as she held his head close to hers, panting around kisses. Finally, she released his lips and moved to tackle his neck, licking and biting gently until he groaned.

“Mmm, salty,” she whispered against his skin.

Erin continued her exploration as her lips moved in a leisurely pace over his bare chest, inch by agonizing inch. She paid special attention to his taut nipples.

Brandon gasped when her lips moved down over his abdomen and his entire body tensed as she neared his navel. While her tongue dipped into it, laved and sucked his salty skin, she watched his face. His head dropped back, his body shaking beneath her lips with suppressed need.

When she finally came to his belt buckle, she slowly undid it, her knuckles brushing over the smooth skin beneath. The scent of arousal was thick in the air, stirring her senses even more. When the button was free, she waited for him to look down at her.

With a sultry grin, she used her teeth to grip the zipper tab and began to edge it downwards, her silky black hair surrounding him like a blanket.

Hard as a rock, his staff strained against the material seeking blessed freedom. Brandon was about to stop her and move on, but she shook her head and made him wait.

The zipper had finished its decent and came to a halt. Erin pulled at his waistband, moving his jeans down slowly until he was revealed to her. His member stood at attention and she focused her eyes on it. Brandon groaned again as her tongue darted out to lick her lower lip and she ran her fingertip over his length.

A sultry, sinful look in her eyes made him suck in a quick breath and wait for her next move. She leaned down and ran her tongue at a snail's pace up his length. At the tip, she moved her tongue faster in a sweet tease. In one quick move she slid him into her mouth, deep into her throat. With a wild cry, he threw back his head, his hips rising to meet her.

Pulling out, she took his hands and placed them on the sides of her head. "You be the boss and set the pace." Her voice was deep with desire. Offering him full control, her mouth engulfed him again. She moaned as the mushroom head tickled the back of her throat, turning her on even more. When Brandon's fingers clutched at her hair, pulling her even closer, she whimpered with desire.

Both of them began to breathe heavy as she moved over him. His fingers clutched her head and guided her pace while she pleased him.

She was wet with desire and felt her moistness leak onto her inner thighs. Her excitement climbed as he tensed even tighter, his hips thrusting faster while he pumped as gently as he could. Just as he was about to pull back, close to the edge, she gripped his buttocks and made him remain her prisoner.

“I can’t...stop...Erin...Please...I.” With a shout he let go.

Erin felt him pulsing beneath her tongue and swallowed as she remained in place, sucking and pulling until he was done. She had never been so excited when taking a man into her mouth. It was the one part of having sex she’d preferred to avoid, until now!

Releasing him, she sat up and licked her lips. “Needs catsup!”

He lifted his head and stared at her in disbelief then burst out laughing.

With a wide grin, Erin took a drink of water. She was content that he’d had his release and didn’t even think about her own. His pleasure gave her pleasure.

As Brandon sat up, he winced, squinting as though his head still ached. Pulling her close, he kissed her. “Thank you for that. I’ve never experienced anything quite like it.”

“You’ve never had a blow job before?”

He winced at the words ‘blow job’.

“Erin, don’t use that term. I have had them, but never, ever, has it been so mind blowing. Maybe I should come up with a nickname about...”

“Don’t you dare try!” She laughed. “We still need to work on the Rider nickname—I never did get my ride.” Her wicked smile had him laughing.

“Well, I guess I’ll just have to get working on that.” Erin squawked when he grabbed her and held her close. He twisted and had her flat on her back before she could blink.

“Now, let’s see about that ride!” he said, and kissed her.



Later that evening, Brandon had carried Erin back from the clubhouse where they’d had dinner with Frisker and a quiet Cindy. Shortly afterwards, Brandon left her to catch up on some paperwork and Cindy showed up for some quality ‘girl’ time.

Happy to see her new friend, Erin brought her makeup bag and curling iron out and gave Cindy a makeover.

“I don’t usually wear makeup, Erin. You’re not going to make me look like a clown are you?”

“Only if you get cheeky! So, you were pretty quiet at dinner tonight. Frisker, couldn’t stop looking at you.” Her knowing smile had Cindy blushing.

“He’s still miffed at me for believing he only pitied me. I don’t think he’s spoken two words to me directly since then.” Sadness filled Cindy’s eyes. “I think I really blew it with him, Erin.”

“Don’t kid yourself kiddo! He just needs a little nudge.” Sitting back to look at her work of art, she asked, “What do you think?” Erin held up the mirror to see if she liked the makeup job.

Cindy’s eyes widened. “I look...so different. And you hardly used any makeup. How did you do that?”

“Lesson one of makeup class 101: less is more. You don’t need to dress up with a ton of plaster on your face. You just accent what’s already there. Besides, my friend, you’re already beautiful.”

While fighting back a grin at her stunned expression, Erin studied Cindy’s large amber-brown eyes looked even bigger with the black lashes thickened and full, the eye shadow subtle and well blended. They were Cindy’s strongest feature. The blush was apricot but there was only the slightest hint of it. Her lips were pouty and full with the iced apricot lipstick.

“Now, we do the hair.” Narrowing her eyes, Erin studied Cindy’s hair and tried to decide what the best style would be for her. It was auburn, cut in a short, blunt style and was full of wayward curls.

“My hair’s naturally curly. I gave up trying to do anything with it years ago. It’s always such a mess,” Cindy said in defeat.

“Hand me that bottle of pink hair gel from my bag.”

With a tablespoon sized blob of the gel in her palm, Erin rubbed her hands together briskly then applied the solution over Cindy’s hair, careful not to get it down to the roots. Then she took her water bottle and poured a bit of water in her palm and did the same thing.

“I was going to use the curling iron, but I think the hair dryer is a better bet. Lets get it plugged in while you sit tight for a minute and prepare yourself to be awed!”

Cindy shrugged and let Erin work her magic. When she was done, Erin sat back and stared at Cindy in wonder. Her whole face had changed shape just by using a blob of gel.

“I don’t know if you are going to like it,” Erin warned, teasing Cindy into thinking it was awful.

“Hand me the mirror, Erin.” Her worried expression almost had Erin laughing but she held up the mirror for her new friend.

“Oh, my God!” Cindy yelled. “Look what you’ve done!”

“So, you don’t like it?” Erin managed to appear sorrowful, hiding her smile.

“I love it! You’re a miracle worker. Oh, thank you so much Erin. I don’t know what to say.”

When tears threatened, Erin yelled. “Stop! You’ll look like a raccoon if you start crying, silly,” she laughed. Then her expression became thoughtful again as she stared at Cindy’s cloths. “You know Cindy. I realize that you all wear jeans and T-shirts at your dances, but that baggy shirt hides your figure. Let me see what I can do to fix that.”

After she dug through her suitcase, Erin pulled out a rust colored v-necked top that was formfitting and handed it to Cindy.

“It’s stretchy so it should fit you to perfection. I can’t help with the pants, but your jeans fit you just fine. Try it on.”

Cindy slipped off her baggy T-shirt and put on Erin’s top. It fit her like a glove, showing off her beautiful figure.

“Amazing! How did you ever manage to hide such a beautiful body, Cindy? You’re gorgeous. Now you get out of here and go tease the hell out of your man.”

When Cindy released a shriek and launched herself at Erin to give her a big hug, Erin laughed.

“I’ll take that as a thank you. Now go have some fun.”

“I wish you could go with me, Erin. I don’t know how to flirt and he might just laugh at me.” The uncertainty in her face made Cindy look younger.

“If he doesn’t fall at your feet, I’ll personally deck him for you—Have a nice time, my friend.” Erin winked and watched as Cindy practically skipped out the door.



The next morning, Erin waited for Cindy after Brandon left the trailer to do business. When the Jeep pulled up, she waited for the girl to enter. As soon as the door opened, she knew their game plan had worked.

“Come on in and tell me *everything!*”

Cindy blushed until her face was bright red but grinned anyway and threw her arms around Erin’s neck.

“You are amazing! At first I thought it was a bomb. He glared at me the whole night and refused to speak to me, even when I attempted to strike up a conversation.”

Erin snickered. “Did you have to club him over the head?”

“Not exactly. I was upset because he never once asked me to dance so I left a little early and headed back toward my trailer. Frisker caught up to me and grabbed my wrist, and then...well, he...” She turned another shade darker and gnawed on her lip, a pleased expression on her face.

“Tell me he swept you into his arms and carried you away!”

“Erin, I thought he was so angry at me that he hated the sight of me, but instead, though he looked furious, he kissed me. I felt like I was going to melt on the spot. He dragged me toward his trailer and I tried to stop him to ask him why, but he wouldn’t speak to me. After that kiss, I went willingly.”

“I’ll bet. Is he a good kisser? Wait...don’t tell me. It’s probably best if I don’t know anyway. What happened next?”

“Well, we had an argument.”

“Oh. That’s not good.”

The beatific smile on Cindy’s face said otherwise.

“It cleared the air between us, Erin. He thought I was still hooked on Brandon but the day you arrived I realized it was never going to happen with us so I gave up. You two are meant to be together. I can see that now.”

Erin placed her arm around Cindy’s shoulders and squeezed gently.

“I’m so glad to hear you say that, buddy. I was sure you were going to hate me for having a relationship with him since you were here first.”

“But that’s just it, Erin. Brandon and I were never more than friends. He treats me with respect and as a little sister, but that was it. Frisker said he’d only stayed away from me because he wanted to make sure I knew what I was after. He didn’t want to interfere with Stomper’s interests.”

“What happened after you fought?”

“What else,” Cindy said, then giggled. “We had wild passionate monkey sex and became an official couple.”

“Oh!” Erin exclaimed. “Congratulations, Cindy. I’m so happy for you.”

“You can’t be as happy for me as I am. Alec is the best. I’m the luckiest girl in the world.”

“Funny, so am I!” Erin snickered and hugged her new friend once again. A few minutes later they were chattering away as they drove up to the clubhouse.



It was Thursday afternoon and Brandon was taking Erin to Toronto for Lana’s wedding. He was in the wedding party but she was fine with that. They would head back to the zone on Sunday then head down to Mexico. Their plane tickets were ready and waiting. Although Brandon had tried to talk her out of going because of his vision, she stood firm in her desire to go with him.

Erin turned her head to study Brandon’s profile while he drove the Jeep. They had become so close over the past week that she was surprised. Pleasantly surprised! Her greatest concern was what would happen when he found out who she really was. It could mean the end of their relationship.

Always attentive to her needs, Brandon made sure that she was completely content with her life at the zone, and with him.

Every day he would come up with a new nickname to try out on her and she would test it with him, exploring the possibilities. Rider was definitely a name he approved of but he'd decided to try out others like Moana, Gripper, and Jiminy Lickit to name a few.

They made sure they tested out the creative names to the best of their abilities, but Dark Angel seemed to be the favored one. At least, it was the one that the others could use without making her blush!

Brandon took a quick glance over, he caught her studying him. "We're almost there, Dark Angel. How are you?"

"Well, after this morning, I don't know if I can get any better." She grinned, thinking about their latest nickname test.

He chuckled and returned his gaze to the road. "I hope I don't run out of names. It might be quite a challenge, creating new ones to test."

"I doubt you'll ever run out of ideas, but if you do, we can always go back and retest the old ones. I think I might just miss a few of them, especially Jiminy Lickit. Now that was a nickname!"

Brandon laughed with her.

"You know. I think I need to give you a nickname, too. Stomper and Dark Angel don't exactly fit together," she said, tapping her chin with a finger. "Can't have you stomping on an angel now can we?"

“Hmm, maybe tonight we can work on a new one?” He winked at her.

They pulled up to Lana’s new home. Brandon said that Pig Whistle finally had the finishing touches done on it and they’d moved in a few days before.

The bungalow was made of fieldstone in a soft gray with a dark green roof. Around the home were large pine trees. Although there were still a lot of finishing touches like landscaping and fencing to be done, it was beautiful.

“Wow. What a gorgeous home.”

“Yeah, it’s my first time seeing it,” Brandon said, distracted.

The door opened and a beautiful woman came out and waved. Long strawberry-blond hair fell down her back in soft curls. She had high cheekbones, a straight nose, a narrow face and a pointed chin. A mole rested just below her mouth to the right.

After Erin climbed out of the care and finally stood beside her, Erin realized she was only one inch taller than Lana. At five-feet-eleven inches tall, she’s always been above average. It was refreshing to meet someone who was almost at par.

Brandon caught his sister around her waist when she launched herself into his arms and spun her around while they both laughed. After he landed a kiss on her forehead, he turned to Erin to introduce them.

“Erin, I’d like you to meet *Stink Bomb*. Oww!” he cried, pretending to be hurt by the elbow in his stomach he received for teasing his sister.

“It’s nice to meet you, Erin. You can call me Lana like *normal* people do.” She sent her brother a look with daggers but her grin proved she was just kidding.

Though she bit back a snicker, Erin shook Lana’s hand. Lana turned to Brandon. “Since you have so much energy after your long drive, you can get the bags yourself while Erin and I get to know one another.”

His sister raised a pert chin, turned, and slipped her arm through Erin’s as she led her into the house. Erin peeked over her shoulder and caught Brandon’s fake woebegone expression.

The women entered the hallway arm in arm and went straight to the living room.

“Oh, Lana, it’s beautiful,” Erin said, looking around the room. There was a black leather sofa and chair in front of a white marble fireplace. Teal throws accented the room, matching the elegant wallpaper. Bow windows ran across the front of the house and skylights rested in the cathedral ceiling.

“Thank you, Erin. We still have plenty of work to do, but it sure beats living in an apartment building. We love it.” Lana smiled. She turned when a man entered the room at the same time as Brandon.

“I’d like you to meet my soon-to-be husband, Brett Colton.”

Stunned, Erin froze, struggling to maintain a calm facade. *Oh shit! I’m in big trouble now!*

To his credit, though Brett looked at her in silence for all of a few seconds, a mask lowered in place to hide his thoughts. He'd obviously seen her look of shock though Lana and Brandon were behind Erin and missed it.

"Nice to meet you. Welcome to our home." Brett moved on to meet Brandon for the first time in person and left Erin reeling.

Chapter Eight

The Cat's Out Of The Bag

An undercover cop for the Toronto Police Department, Brett Colton worked in a different division than Erin, but their paths had crossed before. He was able to think quickly on his feet, which was one of the reasons why he was so successful in his field.

For a moment, Erin thought back to a few months before. Lana Anderson. Now she remembered. Brett became engaged to her shortly after they had met while he was undercover as her bodyguard. There had been a series of murders at the publishing firm where she worked as CEO. If memory served correctly, Erin recalled that Lana had nearly died when the serial killer had kidnapped her and tried to take her life.

Unsure where to go from here, Erin followed Brett to the living room in silence while he made her and Brandon drinks. The four-some made themselves comfortable on the leather sofa and chairs and Erin sat back to study Brett and Lana in silence.

Excited to see her brother, Lana thankfully left Erin out of the conversation for a few minutes while she recovered from the shock. Brandon picked up Erin's hand and held it while he spoke with Lana.

"So, has *Pig Whistle* installed enough locks on the doors in this dump?" Brandon joked.

Startled that Brandon would insult his new brother-in-law, she watched as Brett grinned yet didn't speak. Lana jumped in right away to playfully take her brother down a peg.

"Gee, *Wimpy Wart*, are you afraid he won't protect your sorry little butt tonight while you're sleeping? I know how weak and helpless the high altitudes make you skydivers. After all, who'd want to jump out of a perfectly functional plane?" Lana's chin raised a notch.

Erin had to put her hand over her mouth to hold back a laugh while she waited to see how Brandon would respond.

He didn't let her down. "Huh! Marrying a cop won't make you safe in your own home, *Jail Bird*." Brandon leaned toward Lana and whispered loud enough for Erin and Brett to hear. "Tell me, big sister, did he remember to bring the padlock from the bedroom door at the apartment?"

Jaw dropping open, Erin stared in amazement at Lana as her face flamed. Brandon leaned over to Erin and whispered loudly again. "He had to lock her in the

bedroom for nearly a week because he couldn't get her in there otherwise." Brandon winked and turned to grin at Brett.

His face serious, belying his mirth filled eyes, Brett replied, "At least I don't have to throw women out of planes and scare the crap out of them so they'll beg me to hold them in my arms, *Skuz Bucket!*"

For a moment, Brandon's eyes widened as he stared back in surprise and fell silent. Concerned he might lose his temper, Erin was totally taken off guard when Brandon threw back his head and laughed.

Lana snickered and gave Brett a quick peck on the lips. "Nice one! You passed."

"Passed?" Erin asked, confused.

With a wide grin on her face, Lana explained. "Brett hit Brandon where it hurts and gave him a nasty nickname to boot and he didn't cave, giving Brandon the stunning comeback that he deserved. Brandon seldom meets someone who can match his wit." Lana blew Brandon a kiss.

Confused, Erin looked at Brandon. He gave her a hug then kissed her. "It's not really fair. I've been working on him via phone calls for the past few months so he's had practice."

“Huh! Nice excuse, *Weeble Wussy*! You just hate to admit that Brett can kick your sorry butt.” When Brandon gave Lana a warning look, she laughed again. “Go ahead, I dare you!”

He held up his hands in surrender then grinned as he shook his head. “Nope, you’ll conk me on the noggin with something and...” He stopped, a look of confusion on his face. “Hey, how come nothing’s floating?”

Curious, Erin wondered what he meant.

Lana and Brett looked at each other and grinned. She stood up and held out her hand for Brandon. When he accepted it, he followed her to the shelves holding knickknacks and picture frames.

Nodding toward a picture, she said, “Pick it up.”

Brandon tried to move the picture but it wouldn’t budge. He burst out laughing. “It’s bolted down!”

With a wide grin, Brett chuckled. “The whole place is ‘*Lanatized*’. I got tired of replacing my broken belongings.”

Looking over at Erin, Brandon explained. “Remember I told you that Lana is telekinetic?” When Erin nodded, he continued. “Whenever she has strong emotions...” He winked at Lana which caused her to blush again. “...things begin to fly around. They usually fall to the floor and smash when she calms down.”

She figured that her own expression must have shown skepticism because Lana made all four of the drink glasses float up into the air.

Her jaw dropped in amazement. “Holy shit!” Then she felt heat burn her cheeks at being caught cursing aloud.

Lowering the glasses, Lana grinned while they all laughed.

“Brandon, can you come help me in the kitchen? I’ll update you on Mom and Dad’s latest scheme.” Lana rolled her eyes comically.

Turning to Erin, his eyes questioned if she would be okay without him and she nodded. He winked then left her with his brother-in-law to be.

For a moment, Brett sat back with his drink in hand, and stared at Erin.

She shook her head and took a deep breath. “How weird is this?”

“You tell me, Erin. You’re on the narcotics squad aren’t you? Is he involved?” he asked, nodding toward the kitchen.

With a shrug, she sighed and looked down at her hands. “I didn’t plan on getting serious with him. I was supposed to integrate with the crew and gather information. Things just got...complicated.”

“He obviously doesn’t know. Are you going to tell him?”

“Brett, I can’t. Not yet—Thanks for not giving me away. I thought I had blown my cover.”

His expression hardened. “Don’t hurt him. I can see that he cares about you.”

Unexpected tears rose in her eyes. “That isn’t my intention, Brett. I care about him...a lot!”

With a frustrated sigh, she stood and walked to the front window. “I don’t think he’s involved at all. In fact I can guarantee he isn’t. But I have to keep my cover intact. He’s already in danger and the zone is being targeted with vandalism. It appears that the thug is trying to frame Brandon.”

“Brandon saved three people using his gift. The case now includes attempted murder, unofficially. I have to wait until we get to the drop zone in Mexico to do anything concrete about it. It’s my gut feeling that things are going to escalate down there. Sources indicate that the dealer is in Puerto Ángel and has something to do with the resort the crew will be working at. I’m part of the crew now, off the record.”

Any cop knew all too well how dangerous the undercover assignments were and also that there were no guarantees that you’d come out alive. Brett was no exception

“Lana said he had a vision about you dying?”

She nodded. “I wasn’t sure about all this vision stuff, but since I saw him after the fact and know that he saved those people, I’m willing to go the extra mile and place my trust in them.”

“So, have you got a plan to prepare for it?”

“No, not yet. I don’t know the when and where of it so it’s hard to set anything up.”

“I might be able to help you with that if you’d like?”

Erin dropped her head back on her shoulders and stared up at the ceiling for a moment before she looked back at him. “At this point I don’t seem to have a choice but to accept your help, Brett, but won’t it be a conflict of interest at the precinct? You don’t work in my department after all.”

After a casual shrug, he smirked. “Not if they don’t know I’m helping you. My partner Jessie will be in on it too. He’s completely trustworthy.”

“I’d rather go solo on this, Brett, the less people who know about the investigation the better.”

“It will be just Jessie and me. He’s a clam when it comes to keeping secrets, believe me.”

Jessie Chan had a reputation for being tough and tenacious in the precinct.

Unable to think of any other way to protect Brandon and do her job at the same time, she gave in.

“Thanks, Brett. I’d appreciate your help.”

Suddenly he tilted his head and his expression softened. “They’re coming back in.” He relaxed and acted as though they’d been talking about the weather.

Brandon and Lana entered arm in arm, laughing with each other.

Erin looked back at Brett, surprised. “How did you know they were coming?”

Lana giggled. “He can read my mind!”

Before a skeptical look could cross her face again, Erin laughed and put up her hands in a gesture of surrender. “Who am I to doubt you?” she asked, and they all joined her in laughter.



After a delicious dinner and a relaxing evening spent getting to know each other, Lana and Brett showed the couple to their bedroom.

“I don’t think you two should share a room. After all, you aren’t married and only just met,” Lana joked. “I made up a spare room for Erin, little brother, but you’ll have to sleep in this one alone tonight!”

Brandon leered at his sister then began to tickle her. “You think so, old woman?”

With a shriek of laughter, Lana gave in and pointed to the correct room. “Go on, you pervert. Get to bed and that’s an order!”

“Goodnight, Muffin.” Brandon dropped a kiss on Lana’s forehead before he grasped Erin’s hand and led her into the room. The second he closed and locked the door behind them he spun around in one smooth move to face her with a mischievous look in his eyes.

A short scream of laughter escaped from Erin. She began to back away, glancing over her shoulder so she wouldn't trip, and found her knees up against the bed. Putting her hands out in supplication, she giggled and shook her head while he advanced on her.

"Now, my pretty, it is time to make up some more nicknames." Brandon had his chin down, holding her gaze with an intense stare as he moved closer, stalking her like a panther.

Giggling louder now, she looked for a path of escape, but there was nowhere to go. She screamed when Brandon suddenly lunged at her over the last few feet and scooped her up in his arms only to kiss her with wild passion. She didn't fight him at all, but melted in his embrace.

When he lifted his head, he groaned but still asked, "So how do you like my sister and Brett?"

"Love 'em of course. Can we keep them?" She made sure her eyes were full of innocence.

"Ah, maybe. I'll have to think about it—So...lets move on to the nickname part of the evening." Brandon wiggled his brows.

With a sensual smile on her face, Erin pulled him in close as her hand caressing his cheek while her lips remained a hairsbreadth away from his. "I think we should start with...*Weeble Wussy*."

He pulled back in surprised confusion for a moment then appeared outraged.

“There is no *weeble* or *wussy* about it!” he growled and lay her down on the bed, covering her with his body.

Feeling his swollen staff pressed against her, she grinned. “I have to agree with you there. Hmmm...maybe you should show me what you mean by that?”

He obliged her long into the night.



Once Brandon had closed the door behind him, Brett and Lana heard Erin’s scream of surprised laughter and grinned at each other. Lana took Brett’s hand and walked him to their room across the hall.

As soon as the door was closed, she pushed him up against it. “Spill it buster, right now!”

A snort escaped as Brett realized that Lana knew from the start exactly what had been going on the minute he’d recognized Erin.

“So, who is she? An old girlfriend? A perp? A cop?” Lana knew him too well. There was no way to keep secrets from her and she couldn’t even read *his* mind like he could hers.

“You’ll get mad at me if I say a word.” He cupped her cheek, hoping she wouldn’t get angry with him. The last time he had tried to keep something from her, she had been hurt and furious with him.

With a roll of her eyes, Lana groaned. “Not another one of your cop secrets! I’ll bet she’s an undercover cop and Brandon doesn’t know it, right?”

Even though Brett tried his best to keep his expression neutral, she knew him too well.

“She is! Why you little sneak! Tell me what’s going on. I know Brandon’s vision showed her dying. How can we help them stop it from happening?”

“Listen to me, kitten, we have to stay out of it. You can’t even let on that you know. If we blow her cover, the whole operation will be in jeopardy. Please, Lana, lay off.” He all but begged her.

“Is Brandon in danger, like in his vision?” Her eyes were filled with concerned, all fun and games gone.

“He was in danger before she came on the scene. She’s going to help keep him safe.” It sounded good in theory, but Brandon’s vision made the statement sound weak.

Lana snorted. “Yeah, she’ll keep him safe all right, while she’s lying on the ground in front of him dead with a bullet in her back.” Her emerald eyes held fear for her brother.

As he brushed a strand of silky soft hair from her eyes, he spoke in a gentle murmur. “Have a little faith, kitten. I have a few ideas that will help her prepare for it. She’s a professional, and she knows her job. I know her rep from the precinct and she’s an exceptional cop. Her martial arts skills are awesome. She has her third degree black belt in Jiu Jitsu, and she is a pro-skydiver to boot with over six thousand jumps behind her. That’s probably why she was picked for the job.”

“I’m afraid he’ll get hurt, Brett. I love my brother. I can’t imagine my life without him.” Lana trembled as she melted into his embrace.

Offering her comfort in the best way he knew how, Brett walked her to the bed and slowly began undressing her.

After Lana fell into a deep sleep, while Brett lay awake long into the night and thought about Erin’s dilemma. There had to be some way to change Brandon’s vision.

In the middle of the night, he left the bed, careful not to wake her, and went to the kitchen to phone Jessie who was used to Brett’s middle of the night calls. He didn’t complain about having his sleep disturbed, and they spoke at length.

By the time Brett crawled back into bed and pulled Lana close into his arms, he was able to sleep. In the morning, he would get Lana to distract Brandon so he could talk to Erin. He and Jessie had a plan and he thought that it just might work. He sure hoped it did, for all their sakes.



“You must be running out of names by now! There are only so many people on the planet!” Lana teased her brother about his latest nicknames over breakfast.

As he sipped his tea, Brandon snickered and raised his chin. “I’ll never run out of names, *Kitty Baby*.”

“Hey, not fair! Only Brett gets to call me kitten.”

“You should hear some of the names he calls people at the drop zone. Poor Tucker went all red in the face when I asked him why Brandon called him that.”

“I know! The poor man. He’s such a sweetie. I don’t know how you got up the courage to jump, Erin. It gives me the willies just thinking about it!”

Chuckles came from Brett when Brandon said, “Lana can’t keep safe on the ground, so it’s just as well she isn’t interested in flying. One crash-test-dummy in the family is plenty.

Erin threw back her head and laughed aloud.

“So what do you think of your parent’s latest scheme?” Brett asked Brandon.

After rolling his eyes, he looked over at Erin. “Mom and Dad always have some big plan going to save the world. Once they planned on opening a ceramics store so they could sell only items that had to do with the rainforest. Like the clays and paints weren’t toxic to the environment, or even the fumes from the kilns for that matter.”

“Hey, it was a nice idea. It just didn’t fit into the environmentally friendly plan that they had hoped to achieve,” Lana defended their parents, grinning.

“So what are they planning?” Erin asked.

His eyes full of amusement, Brandon leaned closer to her, as though revealing a secret. “They had just come back from a vacation in the Caribbean where they’d seen all the poor families and young children in wooden shacks going to school with no books, no supplies. They’re trying to raise money to send to them.”

“But that sounds very noble, Brandon. What’s wrong with that?”

“They plan on getting the poor families to make items for them to sell so that Canadian families will know how poor their lives are and send lots of money.” Brandon sat shaking his head.

“And the problem is...”

“The problem is that my parents have to buy all of the supplies to give to the families who would in turn make the products then have them all shipped up here, at my parent’s expense also, so that the children can go to school! It would be cheaper by far if they just send money down there and leave it at that. Most of the children can’t go to school anyway because they either live too far away or they have to work. Very few are privileged to learn.”

“It does sound expensive, but your parents seem to have caring hearts,” she said gently.

“They sure do. They’re suckers for a sad story. Lana and I have spent years trying to watch over them so they don’t bankrupt themselves with their sympathy.”

“They mean well, but sometimes they can be rather naïve.” Lana sighed.

Brandon got up to get more tea and asked Lana if she wanted one since her cup was empty. She nodded and he picked up the mug to take it to the coffeemaker when he froze, his eyes becoming glazed with a faraway look. Lana and Brett watched him for a few seconds then Lana stood and took the cups from him while Brett got up quickly to stand behind Brandon in case he needed the support.

Stunned, Erin watched. She had never seen Brandon go into a vision before. His unblinking eyes held a faraway look, but his body was tense, the veins on his neck standing out, his breathing shallow.

As soon as Brandon was released from his vision, his body literally melted and he began to fall toward the floor. Brett caught him and moved him into Lana’s empty chair.

Brandon shivered as sweat beaded his brow. Erin passed him a glass of water and he drank the whole thing in a few big gulps. When he seemed to snap out of it, his eyes searched for Lana's.

A slow lop-sided grin lit up his face. He placed a hand on her stomach. "It's identical twin boys, Lana. I'm going to be an uncle!"

Lana's eyes filled with unshed tears as she looked up at Brett.

As he stepped forward to hold his bride, Brett kissed her, his eyes showing that he didn't doubt Brandon's gift for a minute.

It was difficult to swallow the sudden lump in her throat as Erin said, "Wow, that's some pregnancy test. Congratulations. I'm very happy for you both."

The couple smiled at her, and Lana nodded her thanks.

"We better get you to bed for a while, little bro. You're going to need your strength for all the late night babysitting you're going to do for us."

After he gave a weak laugh, he accepted Erin's support as she led him back to the bedroom.

Once she had him lying down and covered with a blanket, she smiled and brushed the hair out of his eyes. "It's nice to know you get good visions too. Kind of makes up for the bad ones, I would guess."

"I'm going to be an uncle!" he said and fell into a deep sleep.

When she stood to face Brett, she nodded at his beckoning look. After placing a tender kiss on Brandon's brow, she left the room, closing the door softly behind her.



Once they were back in the living room, Lana sat on the chair across from Erin.

“Since I don’t need to distract him for you two, we can talk. Tell me how you plan on protecting my brother,” Lana said point blank.

Erin’s gaze flew over to meet Brett’s, and he shrugged. She dropped her head in her hands and groaned. “Oh, shit! I’ve never messed up a case this badly before. I am so screwed.”

Too many people knew she was an undercover cop which jeopardized her operation.

Brett put a hand on her shoulder. “I didn’t tell Lana a thing, Erin.”

Eyes narrowed in disbelief, she looked up at Lana then back to Brett and frowned. “Then how—”

“I can read him like a book, Erin. He might be able to read my mind, but I can read his expression and, his eyes. I guessed you were a cop and he couldn’t deny it. We don’t lie to each other, ever.”

“Are you going to tell him?” Erin referred to Brandon, wondering if her job was finished. A wave of pain went through her heart at the thought of not seeing him again, and that surprised her.

Lana cleared her throat. “No, Erin. That’s your responsibility. I just want to make sure that you don’t hurt him. That he’s going to be safe.”

Anger washed over Erin. “You know, you’re the third person who has told me not to hurt him. It’s not like I just got up one day and said to myself, ‘Hey, I think I’ll make Brandon fall in love with me and then smash his heart!’”

Agitated, Erin jumped up and left the room, grabbed her bag, and left the house. In her entire life she hadn’t been this unsettled by a man and it was driving her crazy.

Brett had followed her out and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Wait, Erin. Lana is protective of her brother, therefore so am I. We didn’t mean it as an insult.”

With a jerk, Erin pulled away from his hand, she practically snarled at him. “I love him, damn it! I don’t *want* to hurt him.” Erin’s mouth dropped open as she realized what she’d just said. “Oh, shit! I am in *big* trouble now.” Fear churned in her gut as she backed up.

“If it’s any consolation, he loves you, too. I can see it in his eyes when he looks at you.”

She knew that Brett had hoped to be supportive, but she wasn't ready for the truth and turned on her heel, racing off down the street.

Chapter Nine

The Dream Begins

“Shit! I *love* him. How could I have let my guard down like that? What the hell am I going to do now?” she muttered, her mind in turmoil.

For the past hour, Erin walked the streets of Toronto, sweat pouring off her as she began to run out of steam. Tears fought for freedom at what she felt was a failure to complete her mission. Erin detested failing at anything yet hated crying even worse!

Looking around her, Erin realized that she was near the precinct. “Might as well go face the music,” she grumbled, feeling defeated. With shoulders slumped as she turned down the next street, heading for the station.

Two blocks away, Erin found her anger building. She was furious for letting herself get in this position in the first place and her stomach burned with frustration.

The streets were crowded with people and vehicles. It was strange how she used to enjoy the constant noise and motion after having grown up in the quiet country, but she didn’t today. Today she just wanted to hit someone, or something.

Known at the precinct for her bad temper, Erin had run her fist through a few walls in her day. When apprehending criminals, she was even tougher than her male counterparts. She seldom put up with anyone swearing at her or hitting on her in an attempt to sweet-talk her out of arresting them.

The tough reputation took years to build up. The other male cops would laugh when a crook tried to con her, knowing that she was inflexible when it came to taking them in. Even on the mats in martial arts classes, she had perfected the techniques so well that she could take down any man, any size, and earned a grudging respect from her colleagues. At least, the smart ones did.

A low growl escaped as Erin thought about the ridicule she would get from them when they found out that she had screwed up.

A woman's scream caught her immediate attention. She looked around and reached for her gun then swore when she realized that she didn't have one on her due to her undercover status with Brandon. After all, how many guys had a girlfriend who came packing a pistol, especially in Canada?

Down the street Erin saw what was going on. A man was running straight toward her, a purse clutched in his hands. He looked back over his shoulder but no one was chasing him. Still, he kept going.

He moved closer, just twenty feet away, still on course. She braced herself then as he came abreast of her, slammed into his body, taking them both to the

ground. Before he knew what hit him, she was on top of him holding his arm behind his back.

“You, buddy, are under arrest,” she growled, reading him his rights.

The thief yelled at her, “You bitch! That’s police brut—”

“Listen, pal, I’m in a *really* bad mood today. Do yourself a favor and shut the hell up.” Disgusted at herself for losing her temper on the creep, Erin loosened up her grip a little. Unfortunate for him, he must have figured that meant he could fight her off so he began to struggle.

Since she had no handcuffs with her, Erin had to tighten her grip on his arm. “Aren’t you supposed to be on a case, Bond?”

A familiar voice caught her attention. With attitude, she said, “Hi, Malone. I figured I’d get a manicure and found this jerk making some woman’s day miserable.” Since everyone at the station knew she never pampered herself, she figured he’d get her sarcasm.

She took the cuffs from the cop and fastened the man’s hands behind his back, climbed off him and yanked him to his feet. “Would you like to tuck this loser into bed for me?”

“I’ll take care of him. Have a great day.” Malone winked at her which did little to stem her anger. Before giving the prisoner a chance to continue his tirade,

Malone escorted him to the waiting cruiser. He gave Erin a conspiratorial smile and drove off toward the precinct.

Two teenaged boys came up to Erin. “That was cool lady. Where’d you learn to do that?”

Erin almost groaned in dismay that the witnesses were young kids. “Do what?”

The boys laughed, elbowing each other.

“Look, as far as you’re concerned you didn’t see a thing, right?” she said firmly.

At their nods, she continued. “Go see my friend, Sensei Fernandez at the martial arts club a few blocks down. He’ll teach you how to protect yourselves. I go there sometimes to work out.”

“Thanks, lady!” The two youths took off at a run.

She couldn’t help but smile as she wondered if they’d realize that they would also learn respect and hoped they wouldn’t use her as an example of how to behave on the streets. The dojo master would teach them properly. Erin believed that when kids stayed in sports they’d keep off the streets and remain safe. Many of the young ones in the club were referrals from her.

If she could keep even one of them out of trouble and clean from drugs, she’d consider that a success. Erin did everything in her power to see that happen. One

night a week, she taught self-defense classes for women and teens at the club unless she was on an undercover assignment. She took pride in her student's accomplishments and encouraged them to compete in tournaments.

Finally arriving at the front steps of the precinct, she grimaced. She wasn't looking forward to facing her partner, or the Chief. After she took a deep breath, she slowly climbed the steps and entered the building.



The moment Erin came in the front door of the station, Jessie moved to intercept her. She felt like she was about to receive a death sentence.

When Erin came abreast of him, Jessie put his hand on her arm and nodded toward the conference room. She was wary, but shrugged and followed him.

Jessie shut the door tight. "Hey there, Bond. Nice work on the purse snatcher," he grinned.

Without a word, Erin moved over to a chair and threw herself down in it. She wasn't putting on any illusions for Jessie.

"Brett told me you would help, not that you would know about my cover," she muttered in disgust.

"Sorry, Brett and I have no secrets."

"Apparently he brings that out in a person. So did he tell Brandon about me yet?" she asked, almost afraid to hear his answer.

Jessie took the chair across from her and sat back. “No. We want to help you with your op. We have some ideas that might work, and based on Brandon’s vision, we think you need our help.”

A disgusted snort escaped. “I was told that we were supposed to keep his ‘gift’ a secret. There sure are a lot of people who know about it.”

“The buck stops here. Brett and I only know because of Lana. We don’t tell anyone else. Since you already know, we figure it’s safe to talk to you about it.” He paused. “It is safe to talk to you about it, isn’t it?”

Anger burned in her gut at his remark. She snapped, “If you don’t think so, then I’m obviously talking to the wrong guy.” Erin stood up, heading for the door but hadn’t gone two steps when Jessie put a hand on her arm. She looked at him, then at her arm, her eyes narrowed in warning.

“Sit down Erin, now!” Jessie was firm with her.

She flopped back down in the chair and glared at him until he spoke.

“Are you ready to listen?”

She nodded and remained silent.

“When you arrive in Mexico at the resort, you will receive a package from a man named Ramón, his code name is Turtle. This will be just between us and doesn’t include the official contact who will provide you with your other gear. No one will know about this but you, Brett, and me.”

Erin bit her lip and waited as she struggled to hold back the urge to ask questions. Her temper had gotten the better of her today and she wasn't sure where to go from here, so she let Jessie continue.

"As for you leaving Brett and Lana's place, you went for a walk and to go shopping. I'll see that you get dropped off there when we're finished."

Erin suddenly sat up, unable to meet his gaze as she tried to mask her pain. "I can't go back there, Jessie. Lana knows, you and Brett know, it's only a matter of time before *he* finds out," she said, meaning Brandon. "My cover is as good as blown. They'll have to get someone else out there to finish the op. I'm done with it." Pain washed over Erin like her heart was breaking.

In silence, Jessie studied her for a minute then sat back and shook his head. "You know, I never would have figured you for a coward."

When she cringed, he kept pushing. "The going gets tough and your little bitty heart gets stomped on, so you up and quit! I guess all the talk about you being such a tough cop is all a lie."

Erin shot to her feet, fists clenched as fury washed over her. She wanted to hit him so badly she could taste it, but you never hit a fellow cop, ever. Stiff with rage, she turned to leave, her hand on the doorknob before she realized what he had just done.

Suddenly the anger was gone. She felt like laughing at how he'd manipulated her. With her back turned to him, she dropped her chin to her chest in defeat and focused on her breathing. Jessie was good. Really good! He'd forced her to face her fears by challenging her. There was no way she'd back down from a dare and he knew it.

"Fine. I'll go back and face the music." Erin yanked the door open and left the room. Everyone who saw her in the hall steered clear of her, except for the one man she couldn't intimidate. Just as she'd turned to head for the front door, the Chief yelled out.

"Bond! Get your butt in here!"

"Shit," she mumbled under her breath. Her fellow cops looked away when she glared at them as she caught their smirks. She knew they were calling her 'Hurricane Bond' as usual though their voices were low.

When she entered the Chief's office, she saw that her partner sat in a comfortable chair waiting for her.

"What in hell are you doing here, Bond? Besides catching purse snatchers when you are on another assignment?" Crosby asked, grinning with amusement. "Nice to see you too, Crosby," Erin snarled but didn't sit down since the Chief hadn't told her to. She stood, legs braced apart, hands locked together behind her back and waited.

The Chief sat down and stared at her in silence, his fingertips together to form a steeple. Chief Jackson was a good boss. Though he was always fair and honest, he ruled with an iron fist and kept his cops in line any way he saw fit.

With a neutral expression pasted on her face, Erin gave the impression that she was comfortable being under scrutiny, but inside her stomach was rolling.

“I have a report of a woman cop brutalizing a purse snatcher. You know anything about this, Bond?”

She knew that the Chief didn’t expect her to tell the truth, but he had to ask.

“I never heard a thing about that, sir. Since I haven’t got my ID on me because I’m on assignment, I couldn’t have been the cop who took him down, sir. I’m just touching base with you because I was...in the neighborhood.” Her expression didn’t change, even when Crosby laughed.

“Is that so? And how is your investigation going, Bond?” the Chief asked.

“Just fine, sir, I’m completely integrated and after going to Lana Anderson and Brett Colton’s wedding, we are heading down to Mexico where I’ll continue my investigation. My cover should get me close to the main targets so I can complete the op, sir.”

Her chin raised a notch at her lie that everything was all right. She didn't want to know what would happen when Brandon found out she was a cop and that the whole thing had been set up as an operation to trap drug dealers.

"Very good. You'd better get back to your...integrating then, Bond. You're excused."

Without looking at her partner, she turned and left the office, heading for the exit as fast as her legs could carry her. She was really pissed off when Jessie stopped her and hauled her into the conference room again.

"What the hell do you want now?" she cried, close to losing control.

"I had my fiancée buy you two dresses and a couple of pairs of shoes for the rehearsal and wedding. It's an excuse to cover your leaving Brett's place today." Jessie's voice had gentled this time and she found her anger deflating.

"Thank you, Chan. Let me know how much I owe you and I'll make good on it." Humbled, she was unable to meet his eyes.

"Don't worry about it. Just make sure your op is successful and Brandon stays safe and alive." He held up the shopping bags and Erin reluctantly took them. "Tina included a wedding gift for the bride and groom. It's already wrapped."

Letting a deep breath go, she nodded. "Thanks."

She was about to open the door when he said, "There's a cab waiting for you. It's already paid for."

Staring at him like he'd sprouted a three heads, she asked, "Who are you, my fairy Godmother?"

His laughter followed her down the hall.



Sitting in a pew watching the group laughing and joking their way through the rehearsal ceremony, Erin felt a sense of melancholy. Brett and Lana had told Brandon after he woke up from his nap that Erin was out shopping for a dress for the wedding. He accepted the lie without a qualm.

Brett snickered at something Jessie said, surprising Erin. Two of the toughest cops at the precinct, men who seldom laughed or smiled while at work, appeared to be relaxed and happy. That seemed strange to her. Then she remembered that when she was with Brandon, she was just like them. Brandon made her happy.

Her gaze dropped to her hands so the others wouldn't see her suddenly teary eyes, Erin thought about their relationship and wondered where it would lead. She sniffed and raised her gaze to watch Brandon's parents. Paula and Mark Anderson had been married fifty years, having just celebrated their golden anniversary.

There was a remarkable resemblance in the twins. Brandon looked more like his mom with the golden-brown hair, but he had his father's green eyes and build.

Lana had her father's strawberry-blond hair and green eyes. She was about six inches taller than her mother, towering over her petite form.

The family seemed very close and joked a lot, offering hugs and kisses without a qualm. Erin felt a pang in her heart when she thought of her own parents, deceased for the past twenty-four years from a car accident that left her orphaned and raised in foster homes. She had always dreamed of having a husband and children but never believed it would happen to her. Being a cop always took precedence.

Brett's family was different. His parents, Lucy and Darren were divorced, yet they appeared to be good friends. His twenty-five year old sister Ember was single. Lana had told Erin that Brett's sister had always had the hots for his best friend Jesse when they were teens. She seemed to have outgrown it though, laughing with him and punching him on the arm as though he were her brother.

"Ow! Brett, call the cops. Your sister is brutalizing me!"

"Ha!" Ember replied. "Will you look at that. The big bad cop is afraid of little ol' me. Big baby!"

"Where are my cuffs? I'm taking you in, brat!" Jessie cried, tickling her until she had tears in her eyes from laughing.

Erin turned her attention to Tina. Now, she was an interesting character! She was very beautiful with classic features, her shoulder-length hair dyed black

with a pink streak over the left side from front to back which spoke of her unique personality.

Still amazed, Erin looked down at her own dress that Tina had picked out for her. It was a simple form-fitting design in deep teal, thin spaghetti straps and a scooped neckline that made her long neck look even more slender and graceful.

The woman definitely had excellent taste. Watching her and Lana together, Erin felt a little envy. In her whole life, she'd never had a close girlfriend. As a child, she would begin to get comfortable at one foster home then she'd be moved to another one. Eventually, she just stopped trying to make friends. Over time it had become difficult to keep track of them, so Erin became a loner.

She felt a pang as she thought of Cindy and their new friendship. It would probably end once her case was done.

Even on the force, most of her friends were men, and then only on an impersonal level. She seldom took a lover and kept her emotions out of her sex life; until Brandon. As she watched him, Erin felt butterflies in her stomach. She'd been trying all day to talk herself out of loving him, but was unsuccessful. The man had gotten under her skin.

As if he knew she was thinking about him, he looked up at her and smiled. She returned one wistfully. If she were going to marry anyone, she'd pick Brandon yet knowing how the skydivers traveled so often and met so many people, Erin

figured that Brandon would soon tire of their relationship and move on to someone else. Another arrow of pain shot through her heart.

No wonder falling in love was so dangerous for an undercover cop. She could barely think straight, and when she did, it was always about him. Erin felt a sudden urge to run for the exit, but before she could move, the minister called an end to the rehearsal and Brandon walked up the aisle toward her. She took a deep breath and schooled her features.

“Hi.” His voice was so deep and sexy it made the hairs on her arms lift as tremors like tiny fingers trickled up her spine.

“Hi, yourself,” she answered.

“Hope you’re hungry. We’re going to an all-you-can-eat Chinese food restaurant for the rehearsal dinner.” Brandon tilted his head. “You’ve been kind of subdued since we had breakfast this morning. Are you upset about seeing me having a vision?”

She shook her head. “Guess I’m just tired from my walk and shopping all afternoon.” Her eyes fell to her hands clasped in her lap. She didn’t like lying to him. Grateful that he didn’t push her, she accepted his hand when he held it out.

“Come on. Let’s catch up with the gang or they’ll eat all the food before we get there.”

Brandon's warm smile melted her heart. She blinked then turned her head to avoid his gaze in case he saw the tears banked behind her eyes. Erin walked with her hand in his.

It figures! We're walking the wrong way down the aisle. Away from the minister.

She doubted that she'd ever find herself married with children. Her career made having a family a liability. Cops died on the force all the time, and bringing up a family then leaving them orphans like her didn't seem fair. She swore to herself that her children, if she had any, were not going to go through what she did as a child.

If she ever had a family, she was going to stick to them like glue. She barely remembered her parents. Her children would remember her because she would be there for them, always.



Startled when Brandon opened the car door, she looked up to see him smiling at her. She hadn't even noticed they'd arrived at the restaurant. Giving him her hand, she stepped out of the car.

"Are you all right, Erin?"

Since she knew she'd been quiet all day, she struggled to give him a gentle smile.

“I’m just fine, Brandon.” She reached up and kissed him then walked toward the door without waiting for him.

The rest of the wedding party was already seated at the reserved table when they entered the restaurant. Brandon led her to a chair, his hand resting low on her back. Once he’d seated her, he sat down beside her and picked up the menu. His brow was furrowed in confusion as he shot covert glances at her.

Sitting on her left, Brandon’s father leaned in close and spoke to her. “I hope you didn’t feel left out tonight, Erin. Wedding rehearsals can be pretty boring to watch.”

Mark Anderson was a very handsome man in his late sixties. His kind comments made her wish she’d a dad like him.

“I had a wonderful time watching you all. Your family seems to be very close.”

“Do you have a big family, Erin?”

Her gaze dropped to her plate, her emotions closed off. “I’m sorry if I stuck my nose in where I shouldn’t, Erin, but I noticed how withdrawn you’ve been all evening and how you watched us all during the rehearsal. If it’s any help, I have a great shoulder for crying on. Just ask my wife.” Mark smiled, patting her hand.

“Thank you, sir, but I’m fine.” Erin excused herself and went to the ladies’ room in a hurry.



What on Earth is going on? She felt like all of those years of being the tough kid on the block were coming unraveled, just because she finally admitted to loving a man. A man who had an amazing, incredibly warm and loving family!

In the ladies' room, she locked herself in a stall and leaned her head on the door, taking deep breaths. Tears escaped as a little girl's anguish washed over her. Angrily she brushed them away. *I am strong damn it! I can keep it together. I can!*



Leaning over speak to his father, Brandon murmured, "What did you say to her, Dad? She looks like she's lost her best friend, but she won't tell me what's wrong."

"I have a feeling that Erin didn't grow up in a loving family environment like you did, son. She watched us all at the rehearsal like a hawk, and the more we laughed and joked, the more sadness showed in her expression. I'll send your mother in to check on her."

Nodding, Brandon sat back. He ordered wine for him and Erin, thinking about what his father had said. He and Lana had been very lucky to grow up in a loving family, with such awesome parents, but obviously he'd taken it for granted. Not everyone had an ideal family life. No wonder Erin had been so distant tonight.

She was heart sore. He saw his mom nod and stand up. Winking at him, she patted his shoulder before following Erin.



When Erin was finally able to control the tears and began to wash her face with cold water, she suddenly felt someone watching her. Turning fast, her fists up in a defensive move, she came face to face with Brandon's mother who stood behind her.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Anderson. You startled me." Erin began to breathe fast as adrenaline pumped through her veins. She grabbed some paper towels and began to pat dry her face and give herself time to calm down.

"Please, call me Paula, dear. I'm sorry I snuck up on you. The kids were always after me when they were young because I would come up on them so quiet. It wasn't intentional." Grinning, Paula gave her a mischievous wink. "But it sure helped me catch them when they were doing something they shouldn't have."

Erin forced a laugh. "They seem like the type who would have done that a lot; really mischievous."

Paula's laughter was like music. "They still are." Her expression changed to serious. "Tell me what's bothering you, dear. I really would like to help."

Before Erin could answer, Paula took her hands and held them in her own. Suddenly her eyes became distant. It was the same look that Brandon had that morning during his vision.

When she tried to pull her hands away, she found that they were locked tight in Paula's. Rather than yank them away, Erin waited to see what would happen.

A few minutes later, Paula had tears running down her cheeks, still in her daze. Erin panicked as she wondered what Paula was seeing.

The door opened and Lana came into the room. Erin looked over at her with alarm. As though she understood the silent plea, Lana walked over to her mother whose back was to her.

"How long has she been out?" Lana asked, putting her arm around her mother's shoulders.

"I'd say about five minutes now. Should I take my hands away?"

"No, that wouldn't be a good idea. The vision has to run its course. She'll come out soon. Hers never last very long."

Sucking in a swift breath, Paula finally blinked, the tears still pouring down her cheeks.

“Oh, you poor dear, I’m so sorry. But you’re going to be just fine because we are your family now. You’ll be with us for many years to come.” Paula hugged Erin who stood stiff in the woman’s arms, unsure of what to do.

Once she’d straightened, Paula caressed Erin’s cheek then turned to repair her face. Paula gave her daughter a serene smile once she noticed her in the mirror. “Oh, hello, sweetheart. How long have you been here?”

“Not long, Mom. Would you mind leaving us alone for a few minutes?” Lana asked gently.

“Certainly.” Paula reached up and kissed her daughter, hugging her before she winked at Erin and left the room.

“You people are killing me! You know that don’t you?” Erin said in wonder.

Amusement lit Lana’s eyes for a moment as she laughed.

“Erin, if Mom says you’re going to be a part of the family, then that’s what you’ll be.”

“But what about Brandon’s vision? I’m going to die, and so is he.”

Lana sighed. “Visions can be tricky things, Erin. Since Brandon’s, you have both made adjustments toward preventing the inevitable. Mom’s is saying that you will get past it and you won’t die. Let’s just leave it at that for now, okay?”

In awe, Erin blew out a heavy breath. “You really are killing me, Lana. I’ve never been so confused in my whole life.” She dropped her forehead into her hand.

As she slipped her arm into Erin's, Lana snickered. "Let's go get some dinner. Your nephews are growling."

Looking down at Lana's flat tummy, Erin started. She nodded, unable to speak. The women went back to the table where their men waited with welcoming grins.

Chapter Ten

Wedded Bliss

The day of the wedding dawned bright and clear. The trees showed off their vibrant fall colors of crimson and gold. It was very early, just after sunrise, but Erin was wide awake as she lay flat on her back beside Brandon as he slept.

As she stared out the window at the vista, Erin thought about what Paula had said the night before. Just how much Erin wanted to belong to a family hadn't been so clear to her until Paula's vision.

Used to being disappointed throughout the years, she'd built up strong protective barriers. Apprehensive about letting her anyone close, she never allowed herself to get emotionally involved with a man since the one time she had tried to follow her heart and it had been crushed.

Sadness filled her when she remembered her high school sweetheart, Sonny Thomas. They had fallen head over heels in love at the tender age of eighteen and had planned to marry. Sonny had met up with a rowdy group of people and took Erin out one night to a party. Although she had always avoided the drug scene, she was unable to talk Sonny out of it.

A few hours later, the police were zipping up a black body bag containing his still body. He had died from an overdose of cocaine. That day, Erin chose a new path for her future. She wanted to stop people from dying senseless deaths and prevent the dealers from selling illegal substances, especially to kids. She was going to be a cop and work on the narcotics squad!

It was an endless endeavor. Erin always wondered why people were so stupid, taking their lives into their hands for a few thrills. Over the years she became a tough cop and was every dealer's nightmare. Sonny's face always hovered in the background urging her to keep up the fight.

A lone tear escaped and trickled slowly down her cheek. She started when she felt Brandon's finger stop its descent.

"Penny for your thoughts?" he said, his voice husky with sleep.

She averted her eyes and made a move to get out of bed but Brandon pulled her back down and slid his body on top of her. His naked chest crushed her breasts and stirred a reaction in her core as he held her in tender captivity.

"I understand that my mom had her own vision in the ladies' room last night. Do you want to talk about it?"

When another tear slid down her cheek, he caught it with his lips and kissed it away. "Please talk to me, Erin. I know something is really bothering you."

When she kept her silence another tear escaped. “I’m not letting you out of bed until you talk. We need to have trust between us if we’re going to get married.”

Her eyes popped open wide in surprise. “What?”

“Mom said that you’re part of the family from this day forward. I thought we should make it official. Marry me? Be my wife?”

Disbelief and alarm send tremors through her body. She couldn’t entrust her heart to a family. It would be ripped away from her like it always had.

“You don’t know anything about me. I could be an axe murderer or...or a hooker. We’ve only known each other for a few weeks.” She thought about the lie she was living and how he might react when he found out.

“Lana knew Brett for about the same amount of time that we’ve known each other before he asked her to marry him and look how happy they are. She knows him like a book and he reads her mind. It’s a perfect match!” He shared his beautiful grin.

Flashes of her job, her mission, the danger they were facing, and her deceit, scrolled through her mind and she panicked. There was no way she was going to commit to a relationship based on lies! It wouldn’t work.

He traveled with his job. She worked in Toronto. There were a thousand different reasons why it wouldn't work, including her fear of being disappointed when he left her, and she believed he *would* leave her in the end. Everyone left her!

"No!" More tears filled her eyes and fell like a heated river down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, Brandon. I just can't! Please...let me go."



Unsure if she meant let her go out of his life or out of bed, Brandon moved off her and watched as she ran to the washroom and closed the door behind her. He heard the lock click into place. Her refusal wasn't a surprise to him since it was much too soon to ask, but it still hurt.

Brandon cursed himself for moving too fast in their relationship. Ever since he'd had the first dream about her, he'd known they were fated to be together, yet from the look in her eyes it terrified her. He decided to give her some space, dressed, and left the room quietly.



With her back to the door, Erin sat on the floor as tears streamed down her face and sobs wracked her body. The handsome ceramic floor tiles were cold on her buttocks, but she was so distraught she didn't care.

Finally, she'd been asked by the most wonderful man on the face of the planet to marry him, and she'd freaked out, turning him down. Erin groaned in dismay. When had she become such a coward?

Her legs were tucked up snug to her chest, her arms wrapped around them. She rested her forehead on her knees and cried for the lost little girl who had no friends, the bitter teen with a chip on her shoulder, and the young woman who had given her heart away and had it ripped from her chest.

Erin had never been so afraid in her life. She wanted to shoot herself for saying no, but her self-preservation instincts were too strong to say yes.

More than an hour had passed since she'd closed the door behind her when there was a gentle knock on the door. Her tears had subsided some time ago but Erin was afraid to come out of the washroom where she still sat with her back to the door. Her panic shamed her, but she just couldn't face Brandon.

"Please, go away. I just want to be alone," her voice cracked when she spoke. Scrambling to her feet she stood and stared at the door, hoping whoever it was would just go away.

"It's Lana, Erin. Please, let me come in so we can talk for a few minutes—Please." Lana fell silent.

It's her wedding day and she is here trying to make me feel better. I'm such a schmuck!

“Lana, I’m okay, honest. You have a wedding to get ready for, please, just leave me alone.” Erin rubbed her aching bum.

Suddenly the lock released and the door swung open. Erin screamed and grabbed for the robe on the back of the door.

With a sneaky smile, Lana said, “Did we tell you that manipulating locks is one of the perks of my gift?”

“You should be a cop,” Erin said automatically then bit her lip at the slip.

Lana held out her hand and waited for Erin to take it. Shaking, her eyes darted to the bedroom behind Lana.

“He’s gone out with Brett to get the tuxes. Come on, we need to talk.”

The sound of a long hiss of breath filled the room as Erin slipped the robe on, took Lana’s hand and walked with her over to the bed.

“You should be getting ready for your wedding, not bothering with me, Lana.” Running her hands through her locks, Erin noticed that they were shaking.

“Look, Erin, Brandon realizes that he moved way too fast and he wants you to just forget what he said...for now. That doesn’t mean he won’t ask again, it just means he doesn’t want to pressure you.”

Warm and kind, Lana smiled gently at her. Erin almost wished she would yell and scream at her for being such an idiot. Anger would have been easier to deal with than kindness.

“Lana, I...” Erin nearly lost it again and had to take a few deep breaths before she could continue. “It’s not that I don’t want to marry him. God! Who wouldn’t? He’s...the most amazing man I’ve ever met—it’s just that...well, I have this investigation to complete and he doesn’t know anything about me. I can’t marry him with these lies between us, and...”

“And you’re afraid.” Lana’s eyes held sympathy and understanding.

Shamed washed over Erin. Dropping her gaze, her face flushed with heat.

“Erin. We know that you grew up all alone in foster homes, that you were a scared little child who never stayed in one place long enough to feel safe, to feel like you belonged. We know your heart was broken when you lost your fiancé to drugs. We know...that we all care about you and we want you to be a part of this family, officially or not!” Lana finished. Her voice was firm yet gentle.

Staring at Lana with her mouth wide open in shock, Erin was incredulous. “How the hell do you know all that? No one knows all that about me, no one!”

A wise smile lit Lana’s face. “It was Mom’s vision. She lived your whole life in the few short minutes she held your hands. She felt your pain, your fear and she told us so that we would understand and help you. You have a family now, Erin.” Lana tilted her head. “I’ve always wanted a sister.”

Fear clawed at her stomach as Erin jumped up from the bed to pace the room, holding her cheeks in her palms. “I’ve never felt so naked...so...raw, in my whole life. You people...”

“Are killing you, I know.” Lana laughed, while she waited for Erin to wind down.

Erin stopped cold in the middle of the room, looked at Lana, and pulled out all the stops.

“This is all way too new for me. I’ve spent thirty-two years protecting my heart, and in the blink of an eye I fall in love with the perfect man and he asks me to marry him. Me! He wants to marry *me*!” She shook her head, incredulous.

“Yes, he wants you, you silly goose! Don’t sell yourself short.” After she giggled, Lana turned serious. “So, *Little Sister*, are you going to help me get ready for my wedding or what?”

Stunned, Erin stood silent for a minute, smiled, then laughed so hard, she had to hold her stomach. The whole situation was surreal. She just couldn’t fight it anymore. When she finally stopped, she grinned and nodded.

“You win, Lana. Let’s get busy. Give me five minutes to shower and I’ll scrub toilets for you if you’d like.”

Musical laughter filled the room as Lana stood and hugged Erin.

“Take an hour, and I’ll have some breakfast waiting. Tina and Ember will be here shortly. We can put the toilets on hold, for now. I’ll see you in a bit.”

Erin stared at the closed door after Lana left the room then shook her head. “Yup, they are definitely killing me!” She walked toward the washroom to have a nice hot shower, whistling on her way.



“Wow! You are so beautiful,” Erin said in awe.

Lana laughed. “I haven’t even put the dress on yet.” She’d had her hair and makeup done by a professional she’d hired for her wedding day.

Upswept strawberry-blond curls cascaded down her back. On either side of her face a single ringlet bounced and her bangs fell in a soft curtain over her forehead, perfectly straight. Lana’s makeup was subtle yet it accented her eyes and made the warm earthy green stand out and her lashes look fuller, longer. Her The luscious, dusty-pink and cheeks that had a slight dusting of rose blush were the final touches. She was perfect.

“Erin, it’s your turn,” Tina called out.

Surprised, Erin stared at Tina for a moment. “What do you mean my turn? I’m not in the wedding party.”

Lana looked at Tina and they both laughed. “Well, you’re getting your hair and makeup done anyway since we arranged it for you. I can’t have my brother looking better than you in his tux.

“But Lana...I—”

“...will sit in Rico’s chair and let him get you dolled up, time’s a wasting!”

With a firm, no-nonsense look, Lana took Erin’s hand, led her over to Rico and told Erin to sit down on the chair.

Tina winked at Erin. “See what a bunch of bullies you have in your new family?”

“I’m still trying to believe that they really want me.” Erin was serious.

Ember placed her hand on Erin’s shoulder. “Both the Anderson’s and the Colton’s are adopting you, so you might as well quit fighting it. I always wanted a big sister, now I have three!” A heartwarming smile encased all three women.

When it looked like Lana was going to cry, Rico went nuts.

“No, no, no, no! My darling, you cannot cry! My God, we would have to start all over again. You promise me you won’t let the tears go, or I stop right here and now!” he threatened, hands on hips.

“Okay, you brute! Get back over there and make my new sister shine. I’ll be good, I promise.” Lana’s laughter was infectious as the others joined in.

There were two hours left until the bride was to begin her journey into matrimony and that left Rico plenty of time for touchups after he finished with Erin. The ladies sat back and watched him work.

Eyes narrowed in thought, Tina studied Erin with an intensity which made her squirm in her chair.

“Lana. You know that topaz choker and earring set you have? I think it would go perfect with the new dress I picked out for Erin.”

“Good point, Tina. Ember, would you like to come with me and dig out the jewelry?”

“I’d love to!” Ember followed her to the bedroom, chatting all the way there.

Ten minutes later they returned with triumphant grins. Lana held a choker while Ember held the earrings out for Erin to see.

Erin’s jaw dropped. “You don’t expect me to *wear* that do you?” She was horrified.

“Don’t you like it?” Tina asked, apparently confused.

Turning her head, Erin received a reprimand from Rico, “You must stay still, darling. I cannot work unless you do.”

Erin obeyed then answered Tina’s question.

“Of course I do. I’ve never seen anything so beautiful before. I’ve never worn anything like it. What if I lose it? Or, what if someone steals it? What if...”

“Erin. Stop it!” Lana laughed. “We’ll have a church *full* of cops to protect you.” After Lana gave a conspiratorial wink, she Lana continued, “Will you please stop putting yourself down? It’s time you accept the fact that you’re a very beautiful woman and you deserve to have beautiful things.”

Erin snorted which brought a barrage of ‘tsking’ from Rico.

“The most beautiful thing I ever bought myself was a new cell phone.” She fought the urge to push Rico away and go back to her boring straight hair. It was one thing to help Cindy get all made up with a little makeup, a blow dryer, and a shirt, but this was way out of her league.

The other three women stared back at her in abject disbelief.

“Have you ever met anyone like her?” Tina asked Lana and Ember in amazement.

“No, but I saw a movie once about a tough woman cop turning in to a beauty queen. She fought the process all the way there, but she was beautiful when they were done,” said Ember.

Horried at the thought that Ember too might be in on her secret, Erin met Lana’s gaze. Lana smiled and shook her head, to Erin’s relief. Finally, there was one person in the world who didn’t know she was a cop! Way too many people did already.

There was a knock at the door and Ember rushed to open it, admitting Lana's parents.

"Hello! Oh, it's so nice to see my girls. Rico, my friend!" Paula cried out in joy and rushed to hug him.

"Darling, what are you doing with yourself? You never age a day!" Rico cooed, kissing her on the cheek.

"And you are as charming as ever, you rogue."

Turning to the women, Paula gave each of them hugs and kisses.

"You all look beautiful," she said.

Mark came over to stand in front of Erin and Paula followed.

"Good morning, dear." Leaning close, she kissed Erin on the cheek. "I'll save your hug for later. Rico, sweetheart, I see you've managed to make my girls even more beautiful. You are such a wonder."

After the night before when she'd seen Paula in her vision, Erin felt a little intimidated that the woman knew so much about her.

Rico flushed crimson under her praise. "None can compare with your radiant beauty, Paula, darling. You are a goddess!" He flirted outrageously.

Laughter filled the room when Mark protested. "Hey, you quit that, you monster. It's hard enough living with the woman. Don't go telling her that or she'll be impossible. Why, I'll have to hide all of the mirrors in the house too!"

Paula slipped her arms around her husband and kissed him on the lips.

“You smooth talker, you. Compliments like that will get you *dessert!*” She winked at him and he flushed.

Erin was quick to catch on to her meaning and their audience did too.

“Ewww! Way too much information,” cried Ember.

Even Lana’s face turned red. Tina laughed in delight.

For a moment, Erin stared at the couple with her mouth open until Rico gently lifted her chin with his finger to close it. She managed a quick peek at Rico, and was surprised when he winked at her.

“Ah, young love.” He sighed.

“I’m in the freaking twigh light zone!” Erin moaned.

Paula and Mark grinned and the girls joined Rico in laughter.

“Okay, princess, it is time.” Rico took her hand and she stood up, following him to the large mirror in the hallway.

“Oh, my God, how the hell did you do that?” Astonished, Erin could only stare at herself as laughter came from the living room. Her hair was now upswept in a Grecian style, with gentle swirling curls down the side of her left shoulder. A few strands were left down to accent her face.

Though Erin could wield a mean curling iron when she was motivated, she’d never accomplished what Rico had in such a short time.

“When you put on the dress, you’ll figure out why we chose this style for you, princess.” Rico took her hand again and almost had to drag her away from the mirror to get her back into the living room.

“Now for the makeup.” He led Erin back to the chair again and pulled up another one so he could sit facing her.

In twenty minutes she was completely done. “Can I go look now?”

“Nope!” said Tina. We have to get the bride dressed and then us. When we’re all ready, we’ll look in the mirror together.

Erin turned to Rico. “I, ah...I just—No one’s ever made me look so—Ah, shit! Thank you, Rico.” She threw her arms around him and gave him a bear hug, surprised when tears came to his eyes.

“It was my pleasure, darling. Now shoo, I have to clean up this mess and we are running out of time.” The emotional man gave her a tremulous smile.

She touched one of the curls on her shoulder with reverence as she walked down the hall, following Lana and the girls.



Stunned, Erin thought that the bride was magnificent. There wasn’t a thing about her that wasn’t perfect. Lana stood facing the mirror, her expression one of amazement that matched those of her friends behind her.

“I want to wear this dress once a week for the rest of my life. It’s so beautiful,” she whispered in awe.

Tina shook her head. “It’s not the dress, Lana. It’s all about you and your love for Brett. You’re positively glowing with it.”

Erin and Ember nodded, agreeing with her.

“Let’s go show your parents.” Tina bent down and lifted the twelve-foot train. The white satin gown perfect in its simplicity, the neckline cowl shaped, draped above Lana’s cleavage to reveal only enough of her virtues to tease. Long sleeves began at the edge of her shoulders to fall to her wrists.

Lana turned to see the back of the dress and ran her fingers over the material where the torso of the gown was form fitted then flared out from her hips. On her head rested a simple tiara, accented with tiny pink roses artfully arranged through her hair. She had chosen not to wear a veil. Her ringlets cascaded freely down her back to stop just above the cowl. She was stunning.

Once Mark, Paula, and Rico had Lana in hand, the other three women went back to Erin’s room to dress.

Tina and Ember quickly put on their rose pink satin gowns in a style that matched Lana’s. Their jewelry was of pink sapphires shaped like teardrops. They looked absolutely regal standing together, ready to go.

Turning to Erin, Tina grinned. “Now for the *piece de resistance!* We dress Cinderella here.”

Ember sighed in delight as she pulled out the gown Tina had picked out for Erin.

Amazed that she’d forgotten to look inside the packages Jessie had given her at the precinct, Erin stared. Her jaw dropped.

“Wow. It’s amazing, Tina,” she whispered in awe.

The satin gown was metallic bronze, with a cowl neck in front like the other women’s dresses. It would reach to the floor, even though Erin was so tall. Form fitted, it would be stunning on her shapely body.

The two women helped her slip it on and laughed when she protested. “There’s no way I’m wearing this without a bra!”

“You’ll see why you can’t wear one in a minute, girlfriend. Just stand still.”

Tina had a naughty-girl expression on her face that Erin didn’t care for.

Feeling a draft on her back, Erin put her hand behind her and found that it also was a cowl shape, but it dropped all the way down to her lower back. Her mouth fell open again. “I can’t wear this, Tina. It’s probably against the law!”

The two women laughed.

“That’s not the half of it. You aren’t wearing underwear either.”

“Are you out of your mind? I’d have to arrest *myself*!” She cringed when she realized what she’d said. Ember wasn’t supposed to know about her being a cop.

Covering her slip, Tina said, “You’d have to be a cop to do that, now wouldn’t you?” Winking she wiggled her fingers, indicating that Erin was to remove her underwear.

“How about some panty hose?” Erie asked with bleak hope.

A raised eyebrow and a smirk were her answer.

Though Erin let out a low growl of irritation, she obeyed with a great deal of reluctance. Ember helped Erin put on the delicate metallic-bronze sandals. Since she was so tall, she didn’t need any extra height so Tina had bought the shoes with a one-inch heel. Erin was grateful. Finally, they put on her jewelry. The golden topaz stones reflected the light like flashes of fire.

“Perfect,” Tina said, nudging Ember who was giggling at Erin’s discomfort.

When the girls were ready, they joined the others in the living room. There was complete silence for all of five minutes while Mark, Paula, Rico, and Lana stared, admiring the three women. When the doorbell rang, Rico raced to open it and admitted the photographer. They had forty-five minutes until they had to leave for the church.

Erin stood back while Lana and the girls were set up for the shoot. Paula and Mark joined her.

“My dear, you are absolutely stunning!” said Mark, kissing Erin’s cheek.

Paula agreed with a nod.

Her cheeks hot with embarrassment, Erin whispered, “They forgot a few things when they made this dress, like the entire back!” Turning around Erin pointed at the lack of material with her thumb.

Paula bit her lip and Mark let out a big guffaw just as the photographer called the parents to come over and have their pictures taken.

As soon as she sat back on the leather sofa, Erin screamed.

Everyone stopped in place, staring at her.

With a sheepish grin, she shrugged. “Sorry, the damn couch is cold.”

It took a while for the photographer to find order after that, there was so much laughter. He kept shooting venomous glances at Erin until she stuck her tongue out at him. Catching her, Rico slapped his hand over his mouth to quiet his own amusement though it still showed in his eyes.



Covered in Lana’s tan-colored fall coat, Erin was escorted to the family pew. She saw Brandon, Brett, and Jessie getting ready to line up. The bride would walk in any moment now.

Breathless as she watched Brandon, his handsome form encased in a black tuxedo. She couldn't take her eyes off him. As though he felt her gaze, he lifted his head and stared back at her, a gentle smile on his face.



Concerned that Erin would want out of the relationship after he'd pushed it too far that morning, Brandon had been distracted all day. Brett and Jessie had teased him non-stop about falling in love, until he'd pointed out that he was the only one of the three men without a ring on his finger or engaged.

That only brought on more laughter. Brett had grinned, saying, "It won't be long. She'll come around."

When he met Erin's gaze, he could see that she was feeling much better about it. An amber-gold flash from her ear caught his attention and he realized that she was wearing jewelry. He hadn't thought she had any with her and wondered if Lana had loaned her some. Her eyes sparkled just as bright as the jewels, and her hair was done up in a magnificent style that accented her graceful throat.

The minister cleared his throat and began to speak. Brandon winked at her before turning to line up. The guests and family members were all present. It was time for the bride to appear. The entrance music echoed off the walls for the bridal march and the back doors opened.



First through the door was Ember, her electric blue eyes glowing with joy. Long, shiny, blue-black hair was upswept on one side of her head and cascaded in curls down her shoulder. Erin sighed as she watched the way the pink satin dress swirled at Ember's feet as she walked, moving gracefully. She held a bouquet of tiny pink roses in her hands. Her smile wasn't feigned as she grinned ear to ear.

When Ember arrived at the front and stood in her place, Tina came through the door. A quick look at Jessie's face nearly had Erin laughing aloud. There was no way he could hide his love for Tina. In one way it was funny since Erin saw little of the tough cop in him as he watched Tina like a love-sick school boy.

In an identical dress to Ember's, Tina moved with measured confidence down the aisle. Today her ever-changing hair was black with a pink stripe over the left side that matched her gown. Erin gazed over the many smiling faces in the congregation as Tina passed by and returned the favor. Tina apparently loved being the center of attention and was in her glory.

Taking her place beside Ember, Tina played it cool, ignoring Jessie who still hadn't taken his eyes off of her. She offered him a brief glance then turned and focused on the wedding. She'd told Erin earlier that you had to make men sweat it out once in a while and keep them on their toes to captivate their attention.

For the first time since she'd met Brett, she was shocked when Lana came into view and Brett froze in place. Gasps of awe echoed around the chapel. His eyes went wide as his throat worked when he swallowed hard, never taking his eyes off his bride. In turn, Lana had eyes only for him. It was as though they were the only two people in the room.



When he first saw Brett's reaction, Brandon grinned but then he looked at his sister and his jaw dropped. She was stunningly beautiful. He had never seen her look so serene, so breathtaking. No wonder Brett was lost.

For a few seconds he turned his head to look at Erin and wondered if he would react the same way on their wedding day. He already felt like that about her now. She stood with the congregation, her eyes focused on Lana.

Man, I want to take her in my arms and run away with her.

Brandon wondered when he first fell in love with her then smiled. It was the moment they'd met and she looked deep into his eyes. That day, he was a goner. The visions of her hadn't done her justice!



In wistful silence, Erin watched as Lana began the long walk down the aisle toward Brett. It hadn't seemed so far the night before at the rehearsal dinner yet it looked like it was in slow motion.

When the bride stopped just shy of where Brett stood, the music fell silent and the minister began to talk. He asked who gave the bride away and Mark spoke up, placed her hand in Brett's, then sat down in the family pew and slid his arms around his tearful wife.

Brett helped Lana up the step to stand beside him and not once did he take his eyes off her.

A deep longing brought an ache to her heart Erin had never known before, Once again, she wondered why she'd been so freaked out over Brandon's proposal. She wanted the '*happily ever after*' more than anything, and she wanted that with Brandon. As she looked beside her at Paula who was held close in Mark's arms, Erin realized that she wanted what they had; a never ending love.

Though Paula's gaze never left Brett and Lana, she placed her hand on top of Erin's and squeezed gently as though she knew what Erin was feeling at that moment.

When the minister asked if anyone objected to the marriage, Erin's eyes narrowed. *If one person says a word, I'm going to*—The minister continued and Erin released the breath she'd held and almost laughed aloud at her fierce

protectiveness toward Lana. No one had ever shown her the kind of love and compassion that the Andersons and Coltons had. It was a whole new experience for her.

Soon Lana and Brett turned to face the congregation and the minister pronounced them Mr. and Mrs. Colton. Everyone cheered, clapping, and some wiping tears of joy from their eyes.

Normally, Erin would have found this kind of emotional upheaval extremely annoying, yet today she realized what she'd been missing in her life. The cop in her fought with her softer side. A side that she hadn't known she possessed until today. *I am so screwed.* She stared at Brandon as butterflies warred in her belly.

All the years of building the tough protective shell had been erased in one day of being surrounded by love where people accepted her and cared about her with no ulterior motives. Erin sighed. She wanted these people in her life but until the mission was finalized, if she and Brandon lived through it, that kind of happiness would evade her.

The newlyweds had signed the register and were headed down the aisle toward the front doors. Brandon winked at her, letting her know he hadn't forgotten her as he walked with Ember, following Tina, Jessie, Brett and Lana.

Mark held up an arm for Erin and Paula. Once they'd each slipped an arm around his, they walked with him to the exit. Erin was now family.

Chapter Eleven

Place Your Bets!

Together, Erin and Brandon stood in the cloakroom at the reception hall and he'd just finished giving her a brief kiss. Apprehensive about showing him the dress Tina had bought for her, her fingers fumbled with the buttons.

He grinned and brushed her hands away and undid them. She turned around so he could slip her coat off and watched his face in the mirror.

She loved his expression when he looked down at her back and his eyes nearly popped out of his head. Though for a moment Erin bit her lip, worried that he would hate the gown, it was obvious he didn't. Brandon had turned into a statue, not moving a muscle as he stared. She was about to check his pulse when he swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing.

"Oh, my—Erin, you—Oh, my..." For once at a loss for words, his eyes were wide in stunned surprise.

A surge of womanpower tingled up her spine as she turned to face him. "Are you...going to hang that up, Brandon?" Erin kept her voice husky and low with sensuality.

His eyes finally met hers and she gently pushed his chin up with a finger to close his mouth.

“Need a bib?” she quipped, trying to cover her uncertainty.

“You look—I’ve never seen a dress—the dress—” He couldn’t put a sentence together.

Laughing low in her throat, she took the coat from him and hung it up since he appeared to have lost his ability to think. Since there was a lineup behind them, she took his hand and led him from the cloakroom. At first Erin noticed many admiring stares as well as angry ones from the women who watched as their men’s hungry eyes following her, yet as she walked away from them, she was aware of only one man’s eyes burning a hole in her spine. A shiver rushed through her body as desire stirred yet she kept walking and pretended she didn’t notice.



Breathless as she walked beside Brandon, her hand in his, Erin knew he hadn’t stopped staring at her since the moment she’d taken the coat off. She felt the desire radiating from him. When her lower belly clenched in response, Erin sucked in a quick breath. She fought to avoid his gaze as Tina had suggested. When her eyes met Tina’s, she grinned. She glanced over at Brandon then Jessie and Ember and bit back a laugh.

From the look on Jessie's face, Erin thought that the two men needed a good dose of *'snap out of it!'*

Tina winked, as though quite proud with the results of her project.

"Hi there, you two, have you seen Lana and Brett yet?" Tina asked, even though they all knew that the couple was still with the photographer.

Slowly shaking her head, Erin said, "No, Tina, I haven't seen them. They should be along soon though."

She studied the two stunned men in amazement, tilting her head. They appeared to be in a trance. Wow! She'd never had that kind of power before. Erin caught the satisfied smirk on Tina's face. What an amazing woman! She could probably get blood from a stone!

Applause sounded as the newlyweds entered the room. Erin turned around and had to nudge Brandon to get him to pay attention. She rolled her eyes at Tina, who laughed in delight.

After running the gauntlet of guests, Brett led Lana over to them. To his credit, he was quick to mask his shocked expression when he saw Erin, his eyes meeting Tina's with accusation. Tina grinned and winked at him. It took a lot to get a reaction out of Brett Colton.

Lana gave the girls each a hug. When she held Erin, she whispered. "He's so out of it! Way to go, sis." He still hadn't looked away from Erin.

Laughter shone in Lana's eyes as she kissed her brother. She had to cup his chin with her fingers and make him look at her. As he shuddered Lana laughed. "Hey there, *Stunned One*, did you forget how to speak?"

Brandon snapped out of his daze. "Ah, congratulations, Lana, you look beautiful."

Lana smirked. "Is that congratulations that I'm married, or congratulations that I look beautiful?"

"Oh...ah—No, I—That is, you look beautiful. Congratulations on your marriage to Brett." Brandon's eyes kept darting back to Erin as if he were afraid she might disappear on him.

Erin bit back a chuckle as Lana received a grin from Tina who was obviously enjoying Brandon's unusual behavior.

When Lana moved to hug Jessie, she snickered. Tina had to punch his arm before he noticed the bride, even though she stood right in front of him. He quickly kissed her on the cheek and offered his congratulations. Tina didn't seem the least bit worried about him looking at Erin. Her expression showed that she trusted him completely.

"Well, we should get the reception line going and then we can eat. I'm starving," Lana said. She took Brett by the hand and walked away, throwing a cheeky grin over her shoulder at Erin.



Though Brandon did his best to keep his eyes off Erin since he was making a fool of himself, he was irritated that so many other men stared at her. He was only able to calm down when he noticed that she was unaware of them.

Not only was his groin acknowledging her sexy body, but his heart pounded so loud he could barely register anything else around him but her...and those who wanted her.

When he'd first removed her coat, he'd thought she was completely naked until he looked in the mirror in front of them where Erin's gaze captured his. His heart raced with the strong emotions that connected them in that moment.

Ever since the day they'd met, he'd acted like a bumbling fool around her. Somehow he'd thought those days were behind him back in high school, he was amazed that today he'd reverted back into a teenager, tripping over his own tongue and helpless to do anything about it.

Lana had teased him unmercifully in the few minutes that they'd spoken together. She was right; he had it bad, really bad. He was head over heels in love with Erin. Feeling a pang in his heart at her refusal to marry him, he looked down at his dessert plate. She was the piece of his heart that had been missing all these years. With grim determination, he promised himself that Erin would marry him, and soon.

He looked up in that moment and met his father's eyes at the nearby table. His dad winked at him, a knowing smile on his face. Brandon grinned. His dad knew exactly what he was thinking and he didn't have to be a mind reader to do so. Brandon was sure that he was an opened book, his unguarded expressions giving him away.

As he watched Mark pull Paula close and kiss her cheek, then whisper into her ear, he realized how all his life he'd been oblivious to how close they really were. He glanced at Erin. When she met his eyes, her gaze a caress of love, he decided that he wanted the same kind of relationship with her and hoped that he wouldn't have to wait long for her to commit to him.

Once dinner was complete, the guests were asked by Jessie, the master of ceremonies, to move to the ballroom for the rest of the evening. Brandon stood and pulled out Erin's chair when she moved to stand. As he leaned in close and kissed her with tender care, he caught his breath. She tasted like cherries from the desert they'd eaten.

Erin had been quiet throughout the meal, only speaking to him when he asked her a question. For some reason she behaved as though she were shy. That was unexpected since she was such a confident woman.

He led her to a large round table in the ballroom where Brett, Lana, Jessie, Tina, and Ember were sitting then pulled out a chair for her.

“Would you like me to get you a drink?”

“Sure, Tequila with lime, straight up.” By the way she started, he thought that she’d let her guard down for just a moment. He was pleased to see a little of who she really was, even if she hadn’t meant to show him.

“I’ll be right back. Just call the cops if anyone bugs you.”

With shock in her eyes, she looked up at him. When he nodded toward Brett and Jessie, she said, “Oh, cops. I get it. Thanks.”

Brandon wondered why she was acting strange all of a sudden. He knew that she had secrets that she didn’t want to share with him...yet, but if he had his way, she’d share them soon. He went over to the bar to get their drinks but was stopped now and then to speak to friends and family along the way.



When Erin had reacted to Brandon telling her to call the cops, she cursed herself. If Brandon hadn’t figured it out by now, it wouldn’t take long for him to put the pieces together. Erin looked over at Jessie’s then Brett and saw the truth. They knew she’d nearly blown it. She closed her eyes and moaned, angry that she’d screwed up again.

What in H...E...double-hockey-sticks is wrong with me?

As she leaned back in the chair, she cried out in surprise. The men looked at her in question.

“The bloody chair is cold,” she hissed.

Everyone at the table burst out laughing at her predicament.

When Brandon finally made it back to her side, he apologized. “I’m sorry it took so long. I didn’t realize I was so popular.” He put their drinks down and sat beside her.

Erin shot a glare of defiance at Brett and Jessie then picked up her shot of Tequila tossed it back in one gulp then sucked on the lime. Jessie only raised an eyebrow where Brett remained expressionless.

As Brett moved off to mingle with the crowd of guests, Erin noted that Lana was surrounded as she conversed with family and friends. Even Tina and Ember were caught up in conversations.

She sat in stony silence, unsure of what to do next. Every time she opened her mouth, she nearly gave herself away. Brandon was an intelligent man and it wouldn’t take him long to figure out she was a cop. But would it affect her mission if he did? She just didn’t know.

The music stopped and the DJ’s voice cut into the noise. “Okay everyone can I please have your attention? Circle around the dance floor so we can welcome our newlyweds, Brat and Lucy, to our party.”

At the laughter and shouts from guests correcting the DJ about Brett and Lana’s names, he called out. “Okay, Okay. Geez, what a vicious crowd! *Everybody’s a*

critic! Brett, would you like to lead your beautiful wife to the center of the dance floor for the bride and groom's first dance?"

"It would be my greatest pleasure," Brett said loud and clear as he took Lana's hand. His eyes never left hers as they moved in close together.

Since Brett was a big fan of country music, the DJ put on a country song. The crowd began yelling at him when they realized that it was a rowdy song about loose honky-tonk women. With a chuckle, his voice rang out over the noise, "Oops! Sorry about that; wrong wedding!" He snickered into the microphone and put on a song about love lasting forever, the crowd laughing in delight at his antics.

The humor of the situation was hard to resist as Erin stood in the circle of people and smiled at the DJ who winked back. She felt Brandon's body shift as he stood beside her and looked up at him. Surprised to see that he was irritated at the DJ's attention, she fought back a grin and squeezed his hand and brought his gaze back to her. When he looked into her eyes, meeting her grin with his own, she felt the crazy butterflies take flight again.

The DJ called out for the wedding party to join the bride and groom, and Brandon reluctantly let her hand go to take Ember's.

Ember smiled at Erin, and whispered, "I'll give him back soon."

With a nod and a wink, Erin let them go and stood watching the couples dance. She felt someone standing beside her and turned to see her partner Crosby. He had a look of amusement on his face as his eyes remained on the wedding party dancers.

“Nice duds,” he teased about her dress. “Finding it difficult to stay...*undercover*?” Crosby drew out the innuendo, snickering.

“Don’t make me take you down, Crosby! What are you doing here, looking to get a broken nose?” she said under her breath, keeping her eyes on Brandon.

“I was invited. It looks like lover boy doesn’t want you talking to strange men. It appears to me that you’re getting more out of your investigation than you expected.

She noted Brandon’s possessive stare and felt heat suffuse her body with pleasure.

“Right, like they come any stranger than you, Crosby.” Erin smiled at Brandon, but he kept frowning.

The man suddenly turned serious. “I just heard that there was more trouble at the zone. Expect to head back there tomorrow. Nothing serious, but my contact says Brandon’s going to be pissed.”

Though she kept her smile intact, her eyes on Brandon, her stomach flipped. “Anybody get hurt?”

“Nope, just petty vandalism this time. I’ll let you discover it for yourself when you get back there. The song’s ending. I’d better disappear before your boyfriend clobbers me.”

“It’s not my boyfriend you have to worry about.” At his chuckle, she murmured, “I’ll be in touch.” Crosby faded into the crowd and Brandon claimed her hand to take her to the dance floor.

She pulled back in a panic. “Brandon, wait! I don’t know how to dance,” she hissed.

A look of amazement crossed his features as he put his arm around her waist. “Just follow my lead, you’ll be fine.” They began to move in unison to the slow music.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” she asked with uncertainty.

“I don’t think I’ve ever met a woman who didn’t dance.”

“I...didn’t get much of an opportunity. I moved around a lot when I was a kid and I never went to school dances.” Erin’s eyes dropped to his chest.



Sensitive to Erin’s feelings, Brandon pulled her closer, his warm hand resting on her naked lower back. His mother had told him about Erin’s past, but he was still surprised when she showed him small pieces of her true self. She had some sturdy, protective walls he had to scale to gain her trust.

Eyes filled with yearning, she met his gaze and swayed with him to the music with a rhythm that was natural to her. He stared at her lips, accented with a frosted bronze lipstick and felt himself harden. His hands smoothed over her warm, naked skin while he held her close.

“Who was the man?” he asked his voice husky.

“The man?” she whispered, swallowing hard.

“The one you were talking to...while I was dancing with Ember.” His voice roughed as the passion kindled between them.

“Oh...I don’t know. He wanted to dance but I told him I’d reserved all my dances for you.”

Though he caught hesitation in her eyes, he was satisfied with her answer and went back to watching her lips. “You are incredibly beautiful tonight, Erin.”

She shivered beneath his fingers as they slid up her smooth back. He wanted nothing more at that moment to kiss her until she lost all thought of anyone but him. It was difficult to fight the urge to kidnap her and take her away from all the others who watched her every move.

“Thank you. You look incredibly handsome tonight, Brandon.” She smiled, running the tip of her finger along his jaw.

Just as his lips lowered to a hairsbreadth away from hers, the song ended and the DJ put a fast paced song on. Brandon leaned his forehead against hers and sighed with regret.

“Where’s a cop when you need one? Remind me to have my new brother-in-law arrest the DJ for disturbing the peace!—I’ll dance to this noise if you want me to, or we can go back to the table.”

Unspoken, her answer came in the form of a raised eyebrow as well as a plea in her eyes.

Brandon laughed as he walked with her back to the table, his hand pressed with possession on her lower back. The only time he gave her up for dances with any other man was for Brett and Jessie. Other than them, Brandon hovered over her, not leaving her side.



Later in the evening, Brandon was dancing with Lana while Brett held Erin in his arms. His hand on her waist was impersonal and she felt comfortable with him.

“Things are going better between you two, I see.”

Erin avoided his eyes. “No thanks to me,” she said in disgust.

Brett smiled. “You’ll be able to tell him soon then you can get your lives on track. You should have seen how angry Lana was with me when I told her I was an undercover cop. The dishes on the table rattled so hard I thought they’d explode.”

At his reference to Lana’s amazing gift, Erin chuckled then looked over at her dancing with her brother. “She’s a wonderful woman, Brett. I’ve never met anyone quite like her. Or anyone even close to Tina! Now *she* is something else!”

Erin laughed as her eyes skipped over to see Tina and Jessie lost in each other while they dance. Tina threw back her head in laughter at something he said to her. When another man stepped in and tried to interrupt the dance, Jessie’s ferocious look had him backing away in alarm. Tina grinned until he looked back at her then she shifted her expression so that it appeared she hadn’t noticed the exchange.

“You’re not kidding. When I first met her it took her less than a minute to ask me if I’d like to go to bed with her.”

Stunned, Erin stared up at him in disbelief. “You’re kidding?”

He shook his head, “Nope. If Lana hadn’t set her sights on me first, I’d have been just a notch in *‘Tina The Tiger’s’* belt by now.”

A snort of laughter escaped before Erin could stop it. “You’re lying! Tell me you’re lying.”

Brett shook his head and grinned. “Not even a little. If it hadn’t been for Jessie coming to my rescue, I’d be sitting in the nearest bar nursing a broken heart with a long lineup of her castoffs.”

“I’ll have to ask Tina about that, but from the short time I’ve known her, I have admit, I believe every word you’re saying. She can be pretty outrageous.”

Erin looked over at Tina and Jessie again as they danced together and snickered. They seemed to be deep in love with each other. Tina’s wildcat days were obviously over.



When Brandon heard Erin’s laughter, he looked over at her as she danced with Brett. She was more relaxed than at the beginning of the night. *Man, what a knockout in that dress!* It was all Brandon could do to leave her side for a minute in case she ended up in another man’s arms. He’d never had a jealous streak before, but he had one today!



As she fought to keep from laughing at Brandon’s reaction, Lana watched as her brother as he stared at Erin. “So, wanna bet on how long it takes?”

His gaze swung back to hers. “How long what takes?”

“To get her to agree to marry you.”

“Haven’t you learned your lesson yet, *Furball*? I always win our bets.”

His confidence made Lana frown in annoyance. She tapped her finger on her lower lip and narrowed her eyes in thought. “I’d say it will take at least three weeks from today.”

“Huh! I say it’ll be within the week!” Brandon boasted with confidence.

“I’ll take that bet. How about a hundred bucks?”

“Done!” Brandon spit on his hand and held it out to her.

Lana didn’t even blink before spitting on her own palm and slapping his hand with a firm handshake.

Together they laughed then hugged.

Once he released her, Brandon became serious. “Be happy, Lana. I like Brett. It’s going to be a lot of fun having a brother, especially one who’s so good at verbal sparring.” He smiled at his sister. “You might want to give him lessons on making up nicknames though. That way I’ll always win!” His cheeky grin was contagious.

“You think so? I saw for myself that he can match you. I’m willing to bet he can beat you hands down within a month.”

His chest shook with a deep chuckle. “One bet at a time, girl. You’ll confuse me.”

Lana looked over at Brett and her heart melted. “It’s going to be a dream come true having him for a husband.”

When she looked back up at her brother, she gave him a sly smile.

“By the way, I left plenty of bubble bath, kinky sex oils, candles, and even a bottle of champagne chilling in a bucket for you two beside the hot tub in my room. If you decide to make it an early night, I’ll understand.”

Surprise registered on Brandon’s face. “Are you *trying* to lose your bet?”

Shaking her head, she gave him a saucy grin. “I won’t lose my bet. By the way, I’ve got a secret to tell you.” Lana pulled his head down and whispered in his ear.



Suddenly Brandon’s eyes widened in shock and sought out Erin. He swallowed hard and looked back at Lana. “You’re kidding me?”

She shook her head. “Check it out. Oh, and I guess it’s a safe bet I better to say goodnight to you right now. Tell Erin that we’ll talk soon. I love you, little brother.”

Distracted, Brandon kissed her cheek, “I love you, too. Have a wonderful honeymoon.” He didn’t even wait for the song to finish but made a beeline for Erin. Lana laughed in delight.

Brett came over to claim her. “What was that all about? Brandon looked like he was about to faint.”

Lana whispered in his ear what she'd told her brother. Brett looked over at the couple and laughed. "I have a feeling that their evening with us is over. Look at his face. Oh, there he goes, checking to see if you were telling him the truth."

Deep in conversation with another man, Erin only smiled once at Brandon then turned her attention back to him. Brandon was frowning, barely able to stand still he was so pent up with energy.

The newlyweds laughed until tears poured from their eyes when Brandon turned to them with a look of shock, realizing that what Lana hadn't lied. He nodded goodnight and grabbed Erin's hand, cutting her off in mid-sentence and practically dragged her along behind him.

"I think Mom and Dad better get another wedding organized. Tina will be in her glory." Lana fell into Brett's arms as she shook with giggles.

Chapter Twelve

Off To Meh-Hee-Coe

Since Brett and Lana had gone straight up to their new cottage in the Muskoka lakes to spend their honeymoon, Brandon and Erin had the house to themselves.

Erin was concerned. Once they'd left the reception, Brandon hadn't spoken all the way to the house in the cab after he'd dragged her away and paid the driver extra to get them back to Brett and Lana's in a hurry.

Could he have figured out my secret? He's probably so angry he's going to dump me now. I don't even care about the op anymore, I only want him.

It was late in the evening anyway, but Brandon hadn't even given her a chance to say goodbye to the bride and groom, or Tina and Ember for that matter.

Uncertainty rode in waves through her stomach as she sat there watching the road, afraid to look at him. He didn't even hold her hand or put his arm around her like he usually did.

Still, she couldn't figure out what she'd done to anger Brandon. He'd been a perfect gentleman all night long. She snuck a few covert glances at him in the cab and shivered. He stared straight ahead with a look of simmering fury on his face.

Once at the house, the front door had barely closed behind them when Erin gasped as her back was pressed up against the back of the door, cold wood chilling her naked skin.

In a flash, Brandon's lips seized hers, hot and desperate while his body pressed in close against her. His hands cupped her bottom and pulled her hips in tight, his swollen member burning hot against her pelvis. Erin stopped thinking about the wedding or anything else but him as her arms moved to encircle his neck.

Barely able to breathe, she pulled away and placed her hand on his lips to stop him from kissing her again. Her chest rose and fell at a rapid pace that met the rhythm of her heartbeat as she stared up at him.

"Brandon, what's gotten into you?" she asked in a breathy whisper.

"You sat there the whole night in that...dress, nearly killing me...men drooling all over you...and on top of that you weren't wearing any *underwear*?" he growled. Passion and ire burned bright in his accusing eyes.

For a moment Erin dropped her gaze in shame then she remembered Tina's words about keeping their men on their toes. With her eyes focused on his chest,

she ran her finger down the front of his shirt, and said in a husky voice, “The other men didn’t seem to mind!”

“What?” Brandon exploded, his body going ramrod straight. He picked her up in one swift move and strode to the bedroom, dropping her on the bed.

With an abrupt tug at his bowtie, he tore it away from his neck then almost ripped the buttons off his shirt as he began to undress, his expression one of fury.

Erin felt moisture on her thighs as she watched him, more excited than she’d ever been with a man. It took him very little time to strip down and pull out a condom, then slip it on. Without any foreplay, he ran shaky hands up her legs as he pushed the silky bronze material up, toward her waist. She shivered with anticipation.

Earthy green eyes burned into hers. In a hurried pace, his palms smoothed over her thighs toward her mound. When he caressed her hips, her breathing quickened.

A deep shudder racked her body as sexual need took over. Erin held her breath when he stopped at the spot where her underwear was supposed to be. Without a word, he climbed between her legs, leaned over and claimed her lips as he thrust deep into her moist glove. While Erin cried out in response, Brandon grunted with pleasure.

He made love to her with a desperation she hadn't felt in him before, an almost violent need that she met equally. Her hands threaded through his hair and pulled it free of its restraint.

Moments later when he came inside her, hot seed coating her channel, she screamed and joined him. Her long legs held him captive as he pulsed within her. Desperate for his lips, she pulled his head down and kissed him while the sensations rocked them.

It took a few minutes for them to catch their breaths, longer for Erin to calm her racing heart. Brandon kissed her again, yet this time with sweet, tender care. She was overwhelmed with the strength of their passion.

"I love you, Erin. I love you, so much it hurts," Brandon growled.

As she gazed into his eyes, she saw the truth there and finally let down the walls surrounding her heart. "I love you too, Brandon. God help me, but I do."

Tears slipped from the corners of her eyes and he kissed them away. He still rested deep within her. She was surprised to find he was still hard.

A sense of loss filled her when he pulled out and slipped off the bed, removing his condom. He picked up a couple more from the dresser and reached for her hand. "Come with me, Dark Angel." His voice was low and husky with passion.

Without hesitation, she placed all of her trust in him and accepted his offering. When she stood beside him she tingled head to toe as he slipped her dress off her shoulders at a snail's pace, his fingers brushing against her skin as she trembled beneath them. The rich material pooled around her feet and she looked down at the bronze sandals she still wore.

As she imagined the erotic image of her legs wrapped around him with her shoes on, she groaned. He knelt down and gently removed them while she placed her hands on his shoulders for support.

When he stood, he led her across the hall to Lana and Brett's room. At the doorway she pulled back, unsure. "Brandon, I—"

"Lana told me we could use the tub. She set this all up for us. They won't be home tonight so we'll be completely alone—Come on," he urged softly. Brandon's eyes burned with desire.

The reactions in her heart and mind merged, sending waves of desire through her once again. She followed him at the slight tug of his hand.



While the tub began to fill, Brandon lit all of the candles and added Jasmine bubble bath to the water. Opening the champagne, he poured them each a flute full then placed the glasses on the shelf beside them then helped her climb into the bath.

They sat side-by-side and kissed with lingering, sweet movements. Their tongues tangled as they explored each other's mouths. He held her close to him, his arm around her shoulders as bubbles surrounded them.

When the tub was full enough, Brandon finally turned off the taps and started the jets before moving back to Erin's side. He marveled at her beauty. She was still wore the topaz choker and necklace, as though she'd forgotten she had it on. Her hair remained upswept, tendrils falling gracefully down past her throat.

To him she looked like a Greek goddess with her makeup, hair, and jewelry, the light of the candles reflected in her eyes. The bubbles that surrounded her lent her an ethereal look. Brandon sat back and stared at her in wonder.



Erin felt shy all of a sudden and dropped her gaze as Brandon ran a finger down her cheek and slid it along her jaw line. He reached over and picked out a strawberry from the bowl of fruit, dipped it into the chocolate and held it out to her.

With her teeth, she caught the offering, her eyes holding his gaze. Once the fruit was gone, she attended to his fingers and sucked one into her mouth, grazing it lightly with her teeth as her tongue glided over it.

Brandon's lips parted, his eyes glued to her mouth as she took the finger in deeper, caressing it with her tongue and moaning as though it was the tastiest treat.

After she released the digit, she reached over to the bowl and found a piece of kiwi fruit, dipping it in the chocolate deep enough so that her fingertips were coated. She took another sip of her wine then handed him the flute glass.

She didn't place the fruit in his mouth but on his bare chest and grinned when he shuddered.

A gentle shove made him lean back against the tub wall. Erin slowly licked at his chest, her eyes burning into his as she grasped the fruit in her teeth and picked it up. She offered him the sweet tidbit with her teeth and he accepted, tugging on her lips as he sucked the nectar from her mouth. When his lips returned to hers, their tongues entwined in a sensual dance as they savored the delectable sweets and their passion built. Brandon pulled away and moved a few of the candles to the side then placed his hands at her waist and lifted Erin up out of the water to sit her on the edge of the wide ledge. Her back rested against the cool tiled wall as she was reclined against it.

With a gentle lift of an eyebrow, she watched him, curious to see what he would do next. *This feels so right. I can't believe how my heart and body sing for him.*

Brandon took the spoon and dipped it into the chocolate. He offered her a wicked grin as he dribbled it over her mound, his eyes never leaving hers.

Erin's heart raced, her excitement rising. She moaned with pleasure when he bent his head until his lips and tongue laved and sucked at the chocolate. Her fingers threaded through his hair as her eyes closed, her neck arching.

Captive in his embrace as he held her buttocks in his large palms and made oral love to her, she screamed as bliss took over. Out of control, her hips jerked while she rode the waves of climax, her eyes closed in surrender.



For an endless time Erin held his head close, his hair tight in her grip as she rode the sensations, unaware of his discomfort. He grinned and watched her face, pleased at the satisfaction he saw in her expression even though her eyes remained closed.

It's worth the hair loss to see her like this.

Careful not to startle her, he lifted and lowered her body back into the tub with him. She slid like melted chocolate into his arms. As Brandon used a washcloth to clean her up, she snuggled in close to his chest, keeping her eyes closed as she accepted his ministrations.

"Are you all tuckered out?" he asked, hoping that she wasn't.

One eye opened and a wicked grin curled her lips. “It takes a lot to wear me out, cowboy. I was just savoring the moment. Besides, that nickname is taken.”

First he chuckled then shouted, “Hot-dog!” His lips claimed hers once again.

As Erin kneaded his shoulders, her nails scraped lightly over his skin until he moaned in ecstasy.

While his lips held hers captive, Brandon’s hands were everywhere. Cupping her breasts one moment, caressing her thighs the next, it wasn’t long before he had Erin gasping for breath as she shuddered with need.

Unable to wait another minute, he put on the condom and lifted her up to straddle his hips, slipping his finger inside her, Brandon groaned as he felt her moist heat. As Erin’s head fell back, her neck arched and the amber colored topaz glittered above her collarbone.

He slipped a second finger into her and watched in awe as she responded to his touch. He had never seen a more beautiful woman in his life. While his fingers thrust in and out of her, his other hand gave her breast attention, rubbing her hardened nipple. She groaned as he moved his fingers faster.



Erin was done waiting as she pushed his hand away from her core, aching with need. In one quick move, she brought her hips down, bringing him home. Head to toe she shuddered as the sensations teased her, she began to rock her hips

slowly at first, watching his face as he dropped his head back on the edge of the tub.

She increased her pace and the water bubbled and sloshed around them. Soon she felt their passion begin its upward journey and moved faster yet, her fingers threaded together with his and held. Brandon cried out as he came close at the same time as Erin's core began to contract around him. She let out a shout and took him over the edge of the precipice with her.

A few minutes later, breathless, Erin lay resting her head on his chest, while he remained deep inside her. "I don't think I can move a muscle," she whispered then lifted her head and grinned. "Unless you want me to?"

Brandon groaned. "What kind of vitamins are you taking, woman?" "Well, I know that it *has* been a very long day. If you're too tired to...entertain me, I think I can find some batteries somewhere around here," Erin bantered, too exhausted to make love again, but she adored how he reacted when she teased him.

"Huh! No woman of mine is going to have a need for batteries. You just give me a few minutes and I'll be right with you," he growled, tickling her.

She squealed with laughter and tried to get away only to find herself beneath him, the pulsing jets massaging her body. Water splashed over the side of the tub as he kissed her until she groaned.

Just as she began to melt into him, Brandon let her go, grinning as he removed his condom and washed himself.

Erin wondered when she had ever been so happy. A pang of guilt washed over her when she thought of her deceit, marring her perfect day. She recovered quickly, but not before he had noticed her unguarded expression.

“One of these days I hope you’ll tell me what’s going on in that mind of yours. Trust is important in a relationship, Erin. I wish you would trust me.”

The look in Brandon’s eyes proved that he trusted her, and that scared her. When he found out about her deception, it could ruin everything between them. She shuddered at the thought.

“Soon, Brandon. I can’t talk about it right now. Please—” Tears pricked behind her eyes, but she stopped talking when his fingers touched her lips.

“You don’t have to say a thing, Erin. I can wait until you’re ready. Just remember that no matter what, I love you.”

A sob escaped but she kept her eyes locked with his. “Thank you. I promise you that soon we’ll have complete honesty between us. Soon...”

Warmth filled his eyes as he reached up and began to remove the pins holding her hair. “I hate to do this because it looks so beautiful like that, but I’d like to take your hair down.” When it finally cascaded down past her shoulders, he undid the clasp of the necklace and removed it.

“Oh! I forgot I was wearing it. I hope I didn’t break it.” Panic in her eyes, Erin reached up and removed the earrings.

“Erin.” When she didn’t look at him, he cupped her cheeks and met her gaze. “Erin, Lana could care less if the jewelry got broken, lost, or stolen. She was happy knowing that you felt good wearing it.”

Erin shook her head. “I’ve never had nice things like that. It just didn’t seem important to me before.”

“*You* are important to me, not the jewelry.” He leaned over and gave her a breathtaking kiss. “Let’s wash all that gel and hairspray out of your hair and get you into bed.” His look promised that there was much more fun ahead.



The next morning, Brandon and Erin enjoyed a long, leisurely breakfast, reluctant to head back to the zone. When she’d packed up her things, she’d decided to leave the beautiful bronze dress and shoes in the cupboard at the house, wondering if she would ever come back to see it again.

Her fingers trailed over the silky material as she remembered the moment when Brandon realized that she hadn’t worn underwear beneath it. The rest of the evening was enchanting. She was deeply in love with him now and there was no going back. She could live without him no more than she could without oxygen.

With a slow grin, she closed the cupboard door, leaving it behind, yet taking her memories with her.



“Almost there,” Brandon said, squeezing her hand.

As Erin leaned her head back on the seat, her neck arching, she looked over at him while he drove. “Brandon, these past few days...they were magical. You were magical.”

His tilted grin flashed at her, “I was? And here I thought I’d finally met Cinderella at the ball. *You* were spectacular.”

“Oh, I *was* spectacular was I?” she teased.

He laughed, “Okay, okay! You *are* spectacular, *and* beautiful, *and* funny, *and* smart *and*—”

“All right, already, you can stop now.” She gave him a playful swat on his arm then turned back to look at the road.

They passed through the gate that led to the zone, home again. Things looked normal so far, Erin thought, her cop mode kicking in as she searched for the source of the vandalism or anything to do with the case. She could see skydivers gliding slowly down from the sky, the rectangular canopies scattered across the

blue backdrop in a rainbow of colors. Brandon knew exactly who was jumping by the colors of their chutes but Erin was only able to pick out a few of them.

Brandon's chute was turquoise and had *I B Jumpin'* in large letters on the underside. Erin grinned. He didn't need big letters to make him stand out in a crowd. Suddenly she was happy to be back and looked forward to seeing Cindy again.

Everything was perfect until they pulled up to the trailer. Emblazoned on the side of it in bright red letters were the words, '*Die Stomper!*'

"Shit!" Erin muttered.

A vein throbbed in Brandon's neck as he climbed out of the Jeep, slamming the door behind him. Erin hadn't seen him this angry before, not even when he realized she was naked beneath the dress. She took her time getting out of the Jeep. She wasn't afraid of his fury but wanted to study him from a cop's perspective. It was part of her nature.

When Erin looked, she saw Cindy running up to them full tilt. "Hey, kiddo, I see that someone was decorating while we were away."

Cindy cringed as she looked over at Brandon's furious expression. "Welcome back. I guess I don't need to tell you what happened."

Angry green eyes slid to meet Cindy's gaze. "Did anyone get hurt? Was anything else damaged?"

She shook her head. “No. Frisker made a thorough check of everything and even installed new heavy-duty locks on the doors to the hangar.”

After he nodded, Brandon turned to look at the lettering. “I have to touch it. Can you keep curious eyes away for a while?”

“Sure thing, boss. Welcome back.” Cindy looked up at Erin. “See you later, *little buddy*.” She raced back to the field to distract the staff and clients.

Erin did her best to lighten his mood. “Now see what you’ve done. She’s given me a nickname. I’m a half of a foot taller than her, but she calls me *little buddy*!”

Frustration in his gestures, he ran his hand through his hair and sighed. “I’m sorry, Dark Angel. I’d like to have made your homecoming a little more special.”

“That’s okay, Brandon. You’ve made my whole life more special.” Erin spoke softly as she caressed his cheek.

Brandon stared down into her eyes, his tension relaxed only slightly. He took her hands in his. “What goes around comes around. I hope my life will *never* be the same now that you’re in it. Just let me know when you’re ready for that proposal—no pressure.” He grinned then kissed her. “Well, maybe a little pressure now and then.” Resigned, he looked back at the wall. “I don’t know if this will be a bad vision or not, but I thought I’d warn you. If it’s bad, just let me get to the ground and leave me to it. Don’t try to snap me out of it. Okay?”

Since she'd only seen him have a 'good' vision, she was concerned and nodded, bracing herself.

Brandon placed his hand on one of the red letters and stood silent for a minute. She could tell when he went out of it because his whole body tensed and his eyes glazed over. Moving close behind him, she prepared to catch him when he fell; if he fell.



The minute his hand touched the angry red paint, Brandon felt a wave of malevolence wash over him. The vibrations of pure hatred made him nauseous. Images flashed through his mind. A bloodied knife, a gun shooting, a large bag of what appeared to be flour, a knife digging into the flour, a finger dusted in white powder touching a tongue, a plane, and one face, a man's face. The man was laughing, there was someone lying at his feet. Images flashed over, and over in his mind until eventually he felt himself falling, the light fading as he was released from the vision's grip.



When Brandon's body went limp in her arms, Erin struggled to bring him safely to the ground. Although she was quite strong from her workouts with weights and martial arts, he was heavy in his unconscious state.

She'd always kept fit so she could apprehend criminals without having to rely on her fellow officers. Her one law for herself was to never let anyone see her as weak. That meant the criminals *and* the cops. Unfortunately, that law had been broken with this man and his family, Erin had never felt so unraveled in her life.

As she cradled his head on her lap, she brushed his hair aside, using her sleeve to wipe the sweat from his brow. He was completely out of it. She tried her best not to panic, but his skin was pasty white, his breathing labored.

Footsteps approached in a hurried pace and Erin tensed, ready to protect Brandon, but it was Frisker who came running to help her.

"Let's get him inside, Erin," he said, out of breath.

"Thanks." She waited until Frisker lifted Brandon up a bit before she scrambled to her feet and lifted his other arm over her shoulder. Between them, they managed to get Brandon into his bed. Erin turned to Frisker.

"Thank you. Can you tell me what happened? Were there any witnesses or evidence left around?" she asked in a cop-like manner.

Though for a moment he appeared surprised at her rapid questions, he answered her.

"A couple of the younger crew members thought they saw someone, but it was dark out so they aren't sure. It wasn't until the next morning that the vandalism was discovered."

“Did you call the cops?” she asked.

“Absolutely. They didn’t find anything either. The hangar was locked tight so the plane and gear were safe.”

“Good work.”

Erin grimaced as she glanced down at Brandon who looked like a corpse with his colorless skin.

“I’ll have Cindy bring down some hot soup in a while. Just make sure he drinks plenty of water when he wakes up.” Turning, he opened the fridge. “I’ll get her to restock the fridge with water too. Do you want anything?”

“No thanks, Frisker, I’m fine. I’ll stay with him until he wakes up.” Erin gave him a wistful smile.

He nodded and left the trailer.

On the counter she spied Brandon’s bookwork and took a quick glance at the papers. As she watched Brandon’s still body, Erin wondered what the chances were of getting caught calling Crosby. If Brandon woke up while she was on the phone, it could be a big problem. She decided to chance it and pulled out her cell.

“Hey. I wanted to update you on the situation down here.” Giving Crosby the details, she murmured into the phone. “Here are a few leads you can check out on the younger crewmembers.”

After giving him a quick list of names from Brandon's roster, she hung up the phone, turned it off and slipped it into its hiding place in her bag.

Brandon moaned and shifted. He seemed to be coming around. Erin leaned in close and wiped his forehead with a cool cloth, startled when he grabbed her wrist in a strong grip. His eyes were still out there, glazed and vacant. When he spoke, it was with a voice she didn't recognize.

"She must run or die!" His voice was harsh and disjointed. Erin gasped as she realized that Brandon's eyes were blue now, not green! She had to look twice to make sure.

"Oh, my God, he's possessed!" she whispered, feeling like she was in a horror movie on the big screen.

Suddenly, Brandon relaxed, his eyes closing. He was unconscious again. She shivered. All the talk about possession and spirits from the other side coming to speak to people was a whole lot more believable now.

Until she'd met Brandon, she hadn't believed in psychic ability. Now she was totally freaked out! Erin lifted his eyelid and found his eyes were green again and the pupils back to normal.

She recalled that Paula had given Erin her phone number in case she needed her. Erin jumped up off the bed and began to dig frantically through her bag for her

cell phone. As she dialed the number with shaky fingers, Erin prayed Paula would answer.

“Hello, Erin!” Paula answered in a gentle voice.

“How did you know—Oh, never mind! Paula, I need your help. Brandon—Shit! I think he’s possessed!” Erin’s surprise that Paula knew who was calling her, even with the cell phone showing the ID as ‘private caller’, was pushed aside by her fear for Brandon.

Paula’s musical laughter floated through the phone. “It’s all right, Erin. Sometimes he channels people, but it’s nothing to get worried about.”

“Worried about? He spoke in a voice I’ve never heard, and his eyes...his eyes turned blue! How weird is that?” Erin’s voice rose as she talked, desperately close to running for the hills. She’d completely forgotten her cop training and was losing it big time!

“Calm down, Erin. I’m telling you that this has happened before and he’ll be just fine. It’s *okay*, dear.”

Her insistence that it would be okay wasn’t very reassuring.

“What do I do now? He is still out of it.” Erin was amazed to see her hand shake as she held it up.

“Just keep him warm, and when he wakes up, give him lots of water. It isn’t unusual for him to sleep for a few hours after an episode. How long was he in the vision?”

“I’d say about twenty minutes, Paula.” Looking over at Brandon’s still face, Erin shivered.

“He should be out for about two hours then. Relax, dear. He’ll be fine. I wouldn’t lie to you!”

Since Paula was so calm and unconcerned about her son, Erin decided to bow to her experience.

“Thank you, Paula. I’ll talk to you soon,” Erin said in a softer voice, her fear finally under control.

“I wanted to tell you last night before you left—I’m really proud of you, Erin. Good bye, for now.” And that was all she said before she hung up.

The next thing Erin knew she was staring at the phone and crying like a little girl. Her whole life she had waited to hear those words, and now here she was, bawling her eyes out. It amazed her how much Brandon and his family affected her. After she slipped the phone back into its hiding place, Erin turned to Brandon, swiping at her tears. He looked so peaceful, his face completely relaxed, and his color was finally coming back.

Once she lay down next to him, she pulled a blanket up over their shoulders then caressed his cheek. What an amazing man. He had so many facets that her head was spinning from trying to figure them all out. And his family—She absolutely loved his family.

That was the last thing she thought before she finally slipped into a deep sleep letting her mind finally clear of the chaos and turmoil of the day.

Chapter Thirteen

Mi Amigo

The fragrance scents and warm, humid air, teased Erin's senses and she closed her eyes in delight. They were finally finished with customs at the airport and organizing the gear on the bus the resort had sent for them.

Puerto Àngel, Mexico rested on the Pacific Ocean. The trip from the airport to the resort would take forty-five minutes but Erin hadn't been to Mexico before and was happy to watch the countryside pass by as they traveled in the bus, the windows wide open so the breeze would fan them.

Erin waved to a small group of Mexican children who ran beside the bus waving and shouting, "Hola!"

With his strong, comforting arm around her shoulders, Brandon sat next to her. She felt relaxed, as though a weight of the world had been lifted off her shoulders as the noises and crowds of the big city were left behind.

Palm trees lined the roads, heavy with green coconuts. Other trees blossomed with flowers in pinks, whites, and purples, filling the air with their

sweet scent. She watched, tensing as vehicles swerved, weaving in and out as they passed other cars on the narrow and curvy road, barely missing each other.

“They want candy,” Brandon said, leaning close to her and nodding to the children.

Erin frowned. “But I didn’t think to bring any.”

“That’s just as well, Erin. They don’t have dental plans down here and poor families seldom get to see a dentist. Tourists sometimes throw candy out the windows of moving vehicles, but we don’t. I once saw a small child get run over while trying to get to the candy. I told my team that if I caught them doing it that I would fire them on the spot.”

“Oh, Brandon, you were right to make that rule—” For a moment she stared down at the young ones, she noticed how worn their clothing was. “I feel so sad for those kids. Its one thing to grow up without family, but at least I was fed and clothed. I had candy often. Compared to these kids I was positively spoiled—I feel ashamed.” Erin turned back to watch the kids.

“Don’t, Erin. These kids don’t know anything but the life they lead here. They have no idea that they’re poor in the sense of what we have in Canada. We are a privileged society and we take it for granted. I envy their lifestyle. They lead a simple life, without technology interfering.”

Brandon's hand brushed down her tresses in a repetitive, soothing motion and she leaned back against him.

"You're right, Brandon, I know, but it's hard to accept. I feel like selling everything I own and giving it to them—I know that must sound ridiculous." Erin's eyes followed the children.

Suddenly, Erin laughed. "No I know why your parents were scheming to get money to send to children in places like this. It's heartrending to see it, and it makes us feel humbled that we really do have so much in our lives."

"It sounds like you have a big heart like my parents, Erin. I love that about you—We'll arrive at the resort soon."

"It's obvious that you've been here before. I look forward to being educated about Mexico by such a handsome instructor." She leaned over and kissed lips that tilted in a half smile.

"I think we can discover more to educate you about than just Mexico's culture," he growled, the heated look in his eyes telling her exactly how he wanted to teach her.

"I look forward to it." Erin ran her fingers through his hair and kissed him until he groaned and broke away.

"You aren't playing fair, Dark Angel. Now I won't be able to walk when we get there."

Her laughter brought grins to many of the crew aboard the bus.

The bus turned onto to the road leading to the resort, passing the security guards without stopping. They had arrived at their new home for the next two months.



As she waited for Brandon to open the door to the small pink hut that they had been assigned, Erin suddenly screamed, laughing, when he scooped her up in his arms and carried her inside.

“Just practicing—marry me?” He winked and kissed her.

“Put me down, you goof!”

With a sigh, he put her down yet kept his arm around her waist. She looked at the room with a cop’s eye taking in the details. The bed was a king sized and covered with a beautiful bedspread and matching curtains that were patterned with flowers and abstract designs in teal and coral colors. The floor was covered with terra cotta tiles with a hand painted pattern in the center of the bare floor in the same colors as the bed material.

Tall windows ran the full length of the back wall with a sliding patio door in the center that led to a small deck enclosed with pink tiled walls. A white, wrought iron table with two matching chairs awaited guests to have their morning breakfast.

Erin breathed in the scents of wild flowering trees and palms in the yard beyond. Purple orchids grew high up on the branches of some of the trees while a symphony of tree frogs and birds echoed from the heavy forest.

After a deep sigh of contentment, she went over to check out the bathroom. It was small, but the shower stall was large enough for two people to fit comfortably.

“Hmmm, a nice long shower would be welcomed about now, don’t you think?” Brandon said close to her ear. He had come up behind her and pulled her back into his embrace, his hands wandering up under her shirt.

Playful, Erin giggled then shook her head. “No way, buddy! You’re going to feed me first and show me the resort. I’d also like to check out the area where you will be jumping, and then—”

“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! You want to do all that before—” We wagged his eyebrows and pointed to the shower and then the bed, a woeful expression on his face.

“Well, I suppose that since you’ve been such a good tour guide, we could—” Erin wiggled her own brows but before she could finish the sentence, he kissed her.

She tried to speak again, pulling her lips briefly away from his. “We should unpa—”

Deep in his chest his chuckle vibrated as he kissed her again and lifted her off the floor in a tight embrace. She giggled beneath his lips and threw her arms around his neck, her fingers running through his hair. Just then there was a knock at the door.

“Noooo!” he cried, looking at her with a pitiful expression. “Hold that thought!”

On his way to answer the door, she heard him grumbling beneath his breath.

“Hola,” said a voice from the other side.

“Hola, mi amigo, what can I do for you?” Brandon asked with polite calm, hiding his groin behind the door.

“Senior Stomper, I am Juan Santana. I have been assigned to your crew as your safety specialist.” Juan held his straw sombrero in his hands, a big smile on his face.

“Oh, right. Hi. They call you Tank, don’t they?” Brandon smiled at him.

“Si, Senior, I am called Tank.” Juan’s accent was heavy but he was easy to understand.

“Why do they call you Tank?” Erin asked. She was a head taller than Juan but it didn’t seem to bother him. He gave her an appreciative smile.

“Hola, Seniorita. I am called Tank because when it comes to safety, no one can move me. I am a strong enforcer, si?” he chuckled, adding, “Except with my wife, of course, she is mucho grandee enforcer!”

Erin laughed, liking Juan immediately. “I look forward to meeting her. Maybe she can give me some lessons.” Sliding her gaze over to Brandon, she gave him a wicked look.

Comically, Brandon rolled his eyes at the ceiling and groaned. “Tank, if you care about me at all, you will never let your wife give her lessons. It just might kill me!”

Juan and Erin laughed at him then Juan got down to business.

“I have come to take you to meet your employer and check the equipment. He wants your team to get started as soon as possible.”

Brandon’s comical expression had Erin coughing to hide her laughter. He appeared to be devastated at the distraction and his eyes flicked to the bed and back.

“Uh, I was going to rest for a while first, Juan,” Brandon said with a hopeful expression.

A snicker escaped from Erin’s fist as a knowing look came over Juan’s face.

“Ah, yes. We take siesta in the afternoon every day, senior. It is still very early.” When Brandon looked like he was going to start begging, Juan continued.

“But, since you had such a long flight and you have to get settled in, I suppose we could do this after siesta, around four o’clock?”

“I *love* you Juan. You *rock*!” Brandon cried, throwing his arms around his new friend.

The man chuckled as he tried to get out of Brandon’s clutches then winked at Erin. “He’s all yours, Seniorita. I will see you later.” He turned and left, still laughing as he walked down the path to the main villa.

“Yippee!” Brandon growled low in his throat as he shut the door and shot a grin at Erin, a triumphant expression on his face. He took the ‘Do Not Disturb’ hanger off the knob and opened the door then placed it on the knob outside so they wouldn’t be bothered.

Not waiting for him to come and get her, Erin began to strip her clothes off in a slow, sexy dance, her hips swaying as she moved across the room to the other side of the bed. Brandon had stopped in his tracks to watch every move.

When she was down to her bra and panties, she gave him a come hither look over her shoulder before sliding one strap off her shoulder, then the other. Another measured turn allowed her to face him. With both hands she smoothed them over her breasts and continued down to her abdomen, stopping only when she met the black lace of her panties, daring him to come get her.

Not one to take his time, Brandon moved over to her, stripping his clothes off with careless abandon. Before he reached her, he was naked, his soldier standing at full attention.

With a quiver of excitement, Erin stood tall and waited for him to finish undressing her, her heart pacing faster as excitement raced like fire through her veins.

One handed, Brandon undid the bra strap behind her. Her brow lifted in query.

“University course; ‘Stripping 101’,” he quipped with a sheepish grin.

He’s obviously had plenty of experience taking bras off women.

That thought passed as Erin waited for him to complete his task. He eased the bra down her long arms and let it drop to the floor. His head dipped then his lips claimed her nipple while gentle hands slipped her panties down past her hips to fall quietly at her feet.

As sensations rushed through her belly, Erin sucked in a quick breath then threaded her fingers through his hair and removed the ponytail holder to free the long strands.

His heated lips switched to her other nipple and gave it equal attention.

“Oh...” Erin cried out in protest as he left her sensitive breasts and moved up to claim her mouth as he lowered her to the bed. His hands slid downwards, cupping her buttocks to pull her closer to him.

Hard and rigid, his staff pressed against her like a hot brand which caused her womb to clench. She reached down to hold him in her fist, smiling beneath his kiss when he groaned.

Brandon pulled away from her and gasped. “Hold on a sec, I need a minute.” He sat down with his back to her and took in a few deep, shuddering breaths.

Panic set in when Erin realized that something was wrong with him. She sat up and put her hand on his shoulder. “Oh, my God. Brandon, are you all ri—” Erin screamed when he growled and swung around suddenly, pinning her back down on the mattress.

“Oh, yeah! I’m doing just fine, my pretty!” He let out a wicked laugh.

The amusement in his eyes proved that he had been teasing her so she smacked him on the arm, “You creep! You scared the hell out of me!” His unrepentant grin had Erin giggling, unable to stay mad at him.

“I need to get a condom. Luckily, I bought in bulk!” When he stood up and reached for the package he’d stashed in the suitcase, he leered at her.

“Pull another stunt like that buster, and you’ll find dust on the box by the time you leave here!”

The threat of no sex didn't faze him. As he whistling a merry tune, he came back with a handful of condoms, throwing all except one on the bedside stand. Expertly, he slipped one on and went back to seducing his willing girl.



After a long siesta with no sleep at all, Brandon and Erin walked hand-in-hand to the main dining room. It was an all-inclusive resort and the skydiving crew was welcome to any food or beverages they wanted. Brandon had made it perfectly clear that he would dismiss anyone immediately for drunk and disorderly behavior. The crew had a reputation to uphold, and Brandon was strict about protocol.

The amount of food available and the wide variety of dishes amazed Erin. She grimaced when she thought about those poor children, imagining how many families the spread of food could feed.

They sat at the window, which was basically a wooden fence looking out onto the courtyard. There was no need for glass to protect guests from the elements since the thatched roof would keep rain and the hot sun off them.

As she stared at the guests in the courtyard, Erin sighed. Most of them had various degrees of sunburns, depending on how long they had been at the resort. You could tell the guests who had just arrived by their pure white skin or bright red burns.

“Share,” Brandon said, taking her hand in his.

“Pardon?—Oh, sorry, it’s just so beautiful here. I was soaking up the moment.”

“I’m really glad that you’re here to enjoy it with me. Tomorrow, we’ll be busy getting things setup and tested. I was wondering if you’d like to tandem jump with me.”

“I’d jump anywhere with you. I know you’ll keep me safe.”

“How about jumping with me into marriage?”

Tilting her head, she asked, “Are you going to keep asking me every day for the rest of our lives.”

An unrepentant grin on his face, Brandon nodded. “Absolutely! However, I was hoping you’d give in before we get old enough to become grandparents. Like maybe tomorrow when I ask you again?”

Erin shook her head and laughed in delight. “For today, it’s still no. For the future, we’ll get to it when we get to it.”

She knew the devastated sigh he released was a fake, as was the frown because of the amusement in his gaze.

“Oh, okay. I was hoping to wear you down on our first day here...” Suddenly his eyes lit with mischief. “...but I guess I can wait until tomorrow.”

“Will you just stop it?”

“For now I will, but only because I have to go meet my new boss and check out our gear. Will you be okay on your own?” He seemed hesitant to leave her.

Erin smiled to reassure him. “I’ll be just fine. I might go down to the beach for a walk.”

They stood and Brandon took her hand in his and moved to the exit. His arms slipped around her waist as Brandon kissed her with tender care then leaned his forehead against hers, nose-to-nose.

“I’ll see you in a few hours. Stay away from all those nudie muscle beach dudes, okay?”

“You have no worries there. If I get any proposals, I’ll turn them down. You get first dibs.”

He chuckled then danced along the path, a grin spread across his face as his hands clasped together over his heart. She couldn’t help but laugh as she watched his antics and smiled, dreaming about the day she could say yes to him.

The beach called to her, waves rolling in and out in a smooth, beckoning rhythm. The sky was vibrant blue with not a cloud to be seen. Heat beat down on her shoulders. She felt like throwing up her arms as elation filled her heart. Sometimes her job had its perks.

Her sandals filled with sand as soon as she stepped onto the beach so she took her shoes off, walking for some time along the shore. The waves washed over

her bare feet, cooling them. Erin took a deep cleansing breath and listened to the sounds around her feeling an unfamiliar sense of peace.

If I could marry Brandon, my life would be perfect. The only problem would be that I work in Toronto and he moves around to different jump sites year round.

A shout had Erin tensing, ready to fight as her instincts kicked in. She scanned the beach and noticed a small group of people gathered in a circle. Quickly putting her sandals on, she ran toward them. There were four muscle bound white men in their early twenties surrounding two smaller teens, one white, one Asian. The larger men were bullying the younger boys, shoving and kicking sand at them.

“Hey!” Erin yelled, shoving one of the larger men aside.

They stopped their game and stared at Erin with interest. The teens stood quiet, apparently unharmed.

“What’s going on here?” Erin asked in a gentle controlled voice, using her innocent look on the men.

“Hi there, babe, we were just playing. You wanna join us?”

This man was over six feet tall and in top shape, though Erin figured he used steroids since his muscles were far too large to be normal. It seemed he was the ringleader. The other three men were not as buff as him, but they had the same

deep golden brown tans that came from many hours spent in tanning beds or baking in the sun.

“Depends. What kind of game are you playing?”

The urge to deck him was strong because Erin hated bullies. She tried not to lose her temper when he gave her the once over, staring at her legs and breasts with insolence.

“Lady, it’s okay. We can just leave.” The young Asian boy said, the tone in his voice nervous but strong.

“Shut up, you stinkin’ Chink!” the loudmouth yelled, shoving him.

In a quick move, Erin grabbed the young boy’s arm and prevented him from falling. Though she was able to keep her expression neutral, hiding her fury, she was getting near to boiling point with the creep.

“That wasn’t nice. What’s your problem with the kid?”

The bully looked at her and puffed up his chest. “He’s a Chink, that’s the problem—Why don’t you and me go get a few drinks and maybe...see what pops up?”

The bully and his friends laughed aloud at his crude remark.

“I’d really like to...but there’s this one problem.”

They fell silent and waited for her to continue.

“You see, I’m very prejudiced and I don’t think I could go with you.”

She waited and studied the four men, gauging them.

The leader goes first, then the second biggest guy. That will leave the other two, who will probably cave in and run. Not the best odds, but I think I can manage.

“We’re okay with prejudice. What’s your prejudice about? Chinks?” Big mouth was moving in closer now, only a few feet away.

“Well, you see, I figure it’s the millennium now and since I’m prejudice against *bigots*, and you’re obviously stuck way back a few thousand centuries with the *Neanderthals*, that it would make me sick to my stomach to hang around you for more than a few minutes.”

Still holding her innocent expression, she nearly burst out laughing when it took them a minute or so to figure out she’d insulted them.

The bully was the first one to get it and reared back as if he’d been smacked. “Why you bitch!” He puffed up his chest even more and advanced on her.

Taking him down in two swift moves, she turned to drop the second one, smashing his nose with the back of her fist. The third clown had moved in to grab her before she had finished with number two, but suddenly he was gone. The teens had taken the last two on and stood there with pleased grins on their faces.

The first bully stood again, unsteady on his feet and took a swing at Erin. She ducked and slammed her elbow in to his chest, spinning around to smash her palm up into his nose. The sound of cartilage snapping told Erin he was down for

the count when he dropped to the sand. Without their leader, the other three were tame as kittens.

“Now, if I see you guys harassing people on the beach again, I’ll have security remove you from the resort. You get me?”

When the three men nodded, she continued. “Now get this jackass out of here, and you might want to think about choosing better friends.” The men just stood there until she yelled. “Get!”

They picked up their bleeding friend and took off down the beach with him. The bully came around enough to look over his shoulder at her. She watched him mouth, “You’re dead lady.”

Erin snorted. “Like I’ve never heard that one before!”

She faced the teens. “Nice job, guys. Thanks for the backup. You’re both into martial arts?”

They grinned. The Asian boy spoke first. “Yes, ma’am. Our sensei always says not to fight if you can avoid it, but we couldn’t let those jerks gang up on you.”

“Your sensei sounds like a smart man.”

The white boy grinned. “Our sensei is a woman.”

“I like her already. My name is Erin.” She held out her hand.

Shaking it, the Asian boy said, “I’m Davie Yamamoto.”

“*Davie* doesn’t sound Japanese.”

With a beautiful white smile, he answered, “My real name is Osamu. In Japanese it means ‘law abiding’.”

Erin offered a formal Japanese bow like they used in the martial arts club. “And so you *are* law abiding.” Turning to the other boy, she held out her hand. “And you are...”

He stepped forward and took her hand in a firm grip. “Jeremy Wise. I think you’re awesome. I’ve seen the women in our club fight, but they don’t move half as fast as you—well, except for our Sensei.”

Pleased at the attitudes they had, Erin tried to figure out a way to keep the fight secret from Brandon. “Listen guys. I need to ask you a favor. If anyone asks, could we just say that you both saved me?”

“Why?”

“Well, my boyfriend worries about me and if he knew you guys stood up for me then he’d feel better knowing I had a few good body guards around if I needed them.” She winked at them.

“Are you serious, Erin?” Davy asked.

“Yup. And for your trouble, I can check with Brandon about letting you skydive. One free jump each with lessons included.” When their eyes lit up, she added, “That’s assuming you’re eighteen and can legally sign a waiver.”

Excitement in his gaze, Jeremy nodded. “That would be cool. Do you really mean it, Erin?”

“I sure do. If you want to jump, let me know and I’ll set it up. Tomorrow would be okay, I think. We’re doing practice jumps and checking equipment.”

She gave them her hut number and told them to either call or show up at the meeting place where they would catch the bus to head to the landing strip.

After she waved goodbye, Erin moved back up the beach and headed to the room. That was enough fun at the beach for her for the day. She needed to call Crosby.

When Erin approached the main building she saw Brandon walking...with a man dressed all in white! “Oh shit, the man from the vision!”

A moment later Brandon looked up only because the man stopped and stared at her with his mouth dropped open.

Her gut gave her a bad feeling about him yet she steeled her features and smiled at Brandon. Something about that man’s energy wasn’t right. There was a darkness surrounding him and that usually meant he was one of the proverbial bad guys.

“Erin! Hi sweetheart, come and meet our new boss.” Brandon kissed her, though he shot her a look of warning before he turned to the man to introduce her.

“Carlos Cavazos, meet my future bride, Erin,” Brandon said, his body tense.

The man was about fifty pounds overweight, carrying most of it around his stomach area. Dark, cold eyes were the prominent feature on his round face. Although he looked to be in his fifties, his hair was completely black, without a gray strand on his head or his eyebrows. Erin was sure he'd had it dyed. His white suit looked meticulously spotless, unwrinkled, and very expensive.

Carlos took her hand and bent over it, dropping a wet kiss on her knuckles. He stared at the back of it then looked up, "You have hurt yourself, Senorita. We should take you to the medic."

"Oh, it's nothing. I just hit it on a rock on the beach. I'm fine. It's nice to meet you, sir." Erin pulled her hand away, hiding it behind her back. At Brandon's concerned look, she shook her head in a quick gesture, her eyes asking him not to talk about it. A chill crawled up her spine and she had the urge to wash the dampness off her skin...thoroughly.

"Well, if you do need medical help, we have everything you require here. Make yourselves at home. I will talk to you tomorrow, Brandon, after your jump." Turning back to Erin, he bowed. "Goodnight, Senorita." His eyes raked her body, focusing on her breasts for a brief moment before he left them.

Erin watched him walk away. "Brandon, he's not a good man. Watch your back."

He lifted her hand up to inspect it. “Let’s go wash this thoroughly with soap and water.”

“But, it doesn’t hurt, it’s just a scratch.”

His eyes lit with mischief. “I was talking about getting all the slobber off.

Her musical laughter joined his and they walked hand-in-hand to the hut.

Chapter Fourteen

Freefalling With You

Early the next morning the team packed up their gear and prepared to head to the zone. Brandon had told his team members that all of the rigs should be kept in the hotel rooms when they weren't jumping so they could keep an eye on them.

To cover her story, Erin told Brandon about Davy and Jeremy the night before when he asked about her sore hand, and mentioned her promise to the boys. At first, he'd been furious that anyone dared try to harm her, but she *distracted* him until he forgot about it. She did however get his promise that the boys could jump for free.

When they approached the bus stop for the airfield, she waved at the two young men standing in line, happy to see them. Their faces were lit with excitement as they waved back with enthusiasm.

"Brandon, I'd like you to meet my heroes, Davy, and Jeremy." She stood back and left the introductions to the men.

"I'm pleased to meet you both. Thank you for watching out for Erin. I really appreciate it," Brandon said graciously as he shook both their hands.

By the look on his face, he appeared to be having a difficult time believing that the teens had the power to defend Erin from a bully.

“I’m honored to meet you, sir. Erin said you’d let us jump?” Davy asked, shifting his feet as though uncertain of Brandon’s decision.

“Absolutely. You’re both eighteen?” At their nods, he said. “Okay. You’ll need to have your ID with you when you sign the waiver. If you’re ready, let’s load up.” Brandon pointed to the bus and the boys climbed on, grinning at Erin.

“Heroes, eh? I’d like to see them in action. The small and the mighty!” He grinned as they climbed aboard and left for the zone.



“You aren’t the least bit scared, are you Erin?” Brandon yelled, close to her ear in the plane as it soared upward to gain the right altitude for the jump.

“I have faith in you, Brandon. I can’t wait to fly with you.” As Erin kissed him, their helmets bumped together and she sat back and giggled.

The only clients on board were the two boys so other than the three tandem jumpers, there were others who were going to freefall.

Erin leaned in close to ask over the sound of the engine and the rush of wind at the open door. “Why are the other twelve jumpers going up to twelve thousand feet where we’ll jump at five?”

“The others are going to do a choreographed dive called a boogie. They’ll do some stunts like make a huge circle holding hands. It’s a lot of fun.”

One of the freefall jumpers checked her digital camera equipment and attached it securely to her helmet before placing it on her head and fastening the straps.

“Brandon, do you use a camera when you jump?” Erin asked.

“Yes. Only those professionally trained to do so, like Jill over there can use the cameras since they can get caught on the suspension lines of the chute and break your neck if you aren’t careful.”

“It does sound dangerous.”

“We run a safe group, Erin. The more precautions we take results in less chances of an accident.”

“What are you doing with that?” Erin pointed at the paper streamer Brandon was prepared to throw out the open door into the wind.

“It’s called a WDI or ‘*wind drift indicator*’ to see which way the wind is blowing. We do it only on the first jump of the day so we can estimate the winds under the canopy. That will allow us to pinpoint when we should jump so we can land in the target area.”

“That’s fascinating.”

Her cheeks were rosy from the fresh, cool air that rushed in the doorway as they rose higher in altitude. Today, they would meet the ground on the beach in a section cordoned off from the guests. Precision was extremely important so that the jumpers didn't land in the wrong spot or worse, in the ocean.

Brandon let the other two tandem jumpers take Davy and Jeremy first then eased out the door with Erin attached to him by a harness, her back to him. When they were given the all clear, Brandon pushed them out of the plane, releasing a warrior cry that matched Erin's.

He was surprised at how calm she was about the jump. It was only her second, and since her first one had been a disaster, her cool attitude impressed and confused him.

She yelled over her shoulder, "It's beautiful." The water below them had turquoise, aqua, and dark blue bands of color molded around the shoreline. One hundred and twenty mile-per-hour winds cushioned their bodies as they fell. The other two jumpers had already released their chutes and floated peacefully down toward the beach.

Brandon shouted, "Will you marry me today?"

Erin laughed, much of her voice carried off on the wind. "I'm not going to answer until we land in case you get mad at me!"

"I never thought of that. Here, let me adjust your harness."

Screaming, Erin slapped his hands. “Oh, no you don’t!”

The final beep sounded in his ear, telling him it was time to pull the chute.

“Here we go, hang on.”

“Okay!”

Once he pulled the ripcord and the chute opened, their descent slowed as if they’d reached the end of a bungee cord. Though it tugged upward for a moment, they began to float toward the ground. Brandon maneuvered the canopy using the steering toggles, or handles, attached to the lines and directed them toward the beach.

The other two tandem jumpers had landed, their chutes already being gathered up by the team and moved out of the way. As soon as the sand came up to meet them when they landed with a gentle thump, they ran for a few feet to gain their balance.

The fluffed up curtain of teal material fell in a graceful heap to the ground and teammates scrambled to gather it up. Erin pulled off her helmet, looked up and watched the freefallers as they formed into a circle hand to hand. It was perfection. A moment later they had reached the designated altitude and started pulling their ripcords. The sky was soon filled with colorful canopies as the divers approached the ground.

“Let’s get out of the way, Dark Angel.”



Once Brandon had unhooked her harness from his, they moved out of the landing zone. He jogged off to supervise the crew as they worked together to clear the way for the next jumpers to come in.

One-by-one, the crew members landed and the proficient team moved back and forth like worker ants until finally the last one hit the sand. Fifteen successful jumps!

Erin was impressed with Brandon's skill at skydiving *and* his management of the entire group. He was an amazing businessman. Once the harnesses and other gear had been removed, she helped the team load up the rigs to be repacked when they were back at the landing field where they would have enough room to spread them out.

Brandon had his helmet under his arm when he came up to her and gave her a kiss. He wore the skydiving jumpsuit that matched his chute.

No wonder women drool all over him.

"We have to get together with the group for a special ceremony. One of the guys just had his one hundredth jump and we have an interesting way to celebrate that." Based on Brandon's wicked grin, Erin didn't want to miss it for the world.

By the look of mischief in his eyes, she figured that the celebration included a prank.

“I’m ready when you are.”

Just as she was about to follow him, she looked over at the crowd, feeling malicious eyes on her. Her gaze locked with the bully’s from the day before. He made a threatening gesture to her. Erin narrowed her eyes, flicking her thumb under her nose in a motion that indicated that she was ready for the next round. Then she wiggled her nose, mocking his broken one and turned her back on him, following Brandon.



Chuter stood in the center of a circle of jumpers. Brandon was beside him holding a scroll. He raised his hand for silence and postured. It was a grand occasion.

“We have with us here today...ay...ay...ay.” His fake echo had everyone laughing uproariously. “Our friend and colleague, Chuter...er...er...er.”

Brandon waited until the laughter died down before he continued.

“He’s made his one–hundredth...edth...edth...edth...jump...ump...ump...ump.”

As she watched Brandon fight back laughter, Erin enjoyed the high energy coming from the team of enthusiastic people.

“Chuter...er...er...er, I present to you...ou...ou...ou, a certificate of achievement...ent...ent...ent.

As he held up the certificate to show the team, Brandon walked around the circle and held it up for each person to see. Once viewed, they bowed their heads until he returned to Chuter. He slipped the scroll into a plastic cover and presented it to the proud young man, slapping him on the back.

“And now...ow...ow...ow, we have a special gift for you Chuter...er...er...er.” Brandon stood up tall, with a ridiculous exaggerated expression of confusion as he looked around for someone.

Chuckles came from the team mates, and Chuter stood there with a silly grin on his face.

“My friends...ends...ends...ends, it is time...ime...ime...ime.”

Frisker pulled up in the Jeep, a flatbed trailer attached.

To capture everyone’s attention, he clapped his hands together twice. “Chop, chop. We have a ceremony to finish.”

Each member of the group ran to the trailer and picked up a pie, moving back into place as fast as they could.

Hands placed on Chuter’s shoulder, Brandon cried out in a sorrowful voice, “I’m sorry my son...on...on...on, but there are some things that you must do alone...lone...lone...lone.” He grinned and ran out of the circle. “Ready, aim, fire...ire...ire...ire.”

They twelve pies flew through the air leaving Chuter covered head to toe in whipped cream. Bedlam broke out and Erin began screaming with laughter as she swiped tears from her eyes. Davy and Jeremy stood beside her, laughing so hard they had to hold their stomachs.

Unable to talk without laughter in his voice, Brandon said, “My son...consider yourself...initiated...into...the hundred jump...club!” Breaking down, Brandon sat on the ground then fell on his back holding his stomach as he roared with laughter.

Chuter didn’t take his initiation lying down. He looked like a cream puff donut as he ran over and jumped on Brandon, making sure to get as much cream on him as he could. Brandon shouted, barely able to fight off the slippery man for the mirth. The entire crew was in hysterics, many of them rolling on the ground.

Cindy came to stand beside Erin, tears of laughter in her eyes. “Well Erin, you’ve got two jumps down. I wonder how long before you get your initiation?”

Shaking her head, Erin gasped, still holding her belly. “You wouldn’t do that to your best friend, would you?”

Cindy wiped her eyes again. “Ha! In a New York minute! Why should you be the only one who doesn’t get initiated?”

Erin’s eyes swung to Cindy’s. “You got it?”

“You betcha! And so shall you, my friend. I can’t wait.”

“You are too cruel! I can’t believe you’d do that to me! After I let you take care of me and everything!”

Cindy laughed harder but shrieked when Brandon lunged at her. “Hah! Picking on my woman are you,” he cried. “That’s my job!”

His evil grin had Erin shrieking as she ran away to escape his whipped cream covered body. It didn’t take him long to catch her and take her to the ground. He cushioned her fall with his body and then climbed on top of her, rubbed his cheeks on hers, and covered her with the white froth.

Erin couldn’t get away, not sure if she wanted to.

When Brandon stopped cold and watched for a moment, all laughter faded as his lips lowered and commanded her mouth. The taste of him was a sweet as the kiss itself.

When he lifted his head, she licked her lips. “Mmmmm...Maybe we should take this somewhere private?” Erin licked his cheek. “You taste really good.”

“I think that’s the best offer I’ve had all day.” He claimed another kiss.

Loud catcalls and whistles came from the team, making her break off the kiss with laughter. Brandon dropped his head on her shoulder, groaning. “I don’t think I can get up. My flag is a full mast.”

Once again Erin cracked up then she tickled him until he rolled off her. Brandon lay on his side for a few minutes, playing dead. He roared to life when Erin dumped a pail of cold water on him.

Brandon shouted in surprise then leapt to his feet and the chase was on again. Erin threw the pail to the side and ran at full speed, giving him a run for his money.



The next day, Erin had a few hours to herself while Brandon took the first group out to the zone. He would be gone until lunchtime. She was just about to pull out her cell phone when there was a knock at the door.

A young Mexican man greeted her in Spanish and handed her a package. She gave him a hefty tip. With a pleased grin on his face, he walked away, furtively looking around him to make sure he hadn't been seen. Erin closed and locked the door.

Once she'd opened the official package containing her gun, ammunition and identification, she read the letter of instruction and memorized it. Erin took the paper and letter outside, dug a small hole near the fence, and burned them, burying the ashes.

When she went back inside, she loaded the gun and hid it in her luggage. As soon as she picked up her cell phone there was another knock. She rolled her eyes and hid it again.

This was the second package and it was a lot larger. Another Mexican man grinned up at her. "Turtle," he said and handed it to her. Giving him an equal tip, she thanked him in Spanish and watched him leave

"He doesn't look much like a turtle to me." Amused, she snickered then closed and locked the door.

In the larger package, she found two bullet proof Kevlar vests, a pair of binoculars, two pair of handcuffs, and another letter. She followed the same procedure as the first package and hid everything under the clothing in her suitcase. Once she had it closed tight, she locked the bag and hid the key outside in the garden under a rock close to the door.

She scanned the area, making sure no one had been watching her. Satisfied that she was alone, she went back inside, picked up her phone and called Crosby to report in.

"Hey. I got the package and think I met our man. He's creepy and my gut says it's him."

"Just be careful, partner. The precinct wouldn't be the same without you pissing the Chief off."

“Hardy...har...har, funny man. I ran into a few goons yesterday on the beach.”

“Hope you didn’t put them in hospital. It would be in your best interest to curb your temper until we catch them in the act, if in fact they are a part of the deal.”

“I haven’t been able to get the info on them as yet. I’ll keep in touch.” When she ended the call, she turned the phone off, hiding it in her jacket in the closet.

Erin decided to go up to the main building to see if she could find any information about the four men. She locked the door behind her then walked down the path that led to the restaurant. As she passed by the pool, she was stopped by an overly friendly, middle-aged man with a very large keg instead of a six pack.

“Hey, there. Wow, you sure are a pretty gal. You here alone?” His leering grin made Erin feel like putting her fist through his teeth.

“I am here with my *fiancé*, thank you.”

“Well, I don’t see him here, princess. I’m Al. Al Jennings. You can call me Big Al. While he’s gone, why don’t I buy you a drink? A pretty little gal like you shouldn’t wander around alone. You could get into trouble.”

His eyes landed on her breasts and she felt like she needed to shower with a ton of soap, his lust filled gaze making her skin crawl.

“I’ll be just fine, thank you.”

Erin tried to walk around him but he stepped in her way. She moved closer to the pool and he blocked her again. Once more, she edged closer to the pool. She noticed that some of the other guests were watching with concern for her. True to form, when she dodged him toward the pool, he followed. Suddenly, Erin spun around, landing a kick to his side, and he went flying into the water.

She brushed her hands off curtsied with an imaginary skirt to the women closest to her who were clapping and shouting out ‘*way to go*’ and ‘*thank you*’. Apparently, he had ‘*introduced*’ himself to the other women. Erin left her cheerleaders with a wink and walked away.



Erin woke up slowly. The room was quiet; too quiet. When she reached out her hand out, she found the bed empty beside her and her eyes popped open wide. On Brandon’s pillow lay a beautiful purple orchid resting on a folded piece of paper.

Touched by the romantic gesture, she picked up the blossom and lay back on her pillow, caressing the delicate petals with her fingertip. Every day he asked her to marry him. Erin frowned as she wondered how long it would be before she could tell him her secret and accept his proposal. If he still wanted to propose, that was.

She raked a hand through her hair and sat up then picked up the note and read it. *Marry me? Please? I had an early meeting with Carlos. I'll see you soon. Love Brandon.*

As she held the missive close to her heart, Erin pictured life with Brandon. It would never be dull. She grinned, remembering the initiation day. She couldn't recall a time when she'd laughed so hard.

He was persistent and sweet, kind, generous, and had a wonderful sense of humor as well as honor. Erin flopped back on the pillow and groaned. She wanted nothing more than to marry the man. They were perfect for each other.

There was a knock at the door. Not expecting anyone, she threw her robe on and walked over to answer it. When she opened it, her jaw dropped. A blast of romantic Mexican music came from three locals playing guitars and a waiter stood on the threshold with a breakfast tray in his hands.

Stunned, Erin could only move back to let him in. As she watching the musicians, Erin felt her eyes go misty. She didn't see Brandon anywhere.

The waiter bowed. "Enjoy, Senorita." Erin was about to tip him but he stopped her. "The Senor has already taken care of it. You are to eat your breakfast and mi amigos will play for you. Senior Brandon will be back soon." He left, gently closing the door behind him.

The music filled the air as Erin walked to the bed and sat down. There was a silver dome covering her meal and she lifted it off, freezing in shock. There on the

plate, was an open ring box; a beautiful marquis diamond surrounded by smaller diamonds glittering back at her.

Tears flowed down her cheeks when she picked up the note. *Marry me. I love you Erin.*

Erin sobbed then he was there to hold her, kiss her and pull her close.

“Will you say yes, today?” he murmured against her cheek.

Brandon picked up the ring and held out his hand, waiting for her answer.

“Brandon. There are things about me that you don’t know. I have a secret that I just can’t share with you right now. I can’t stand the thought of hurting you when you find out. That’s why I keep saying no. I don’t want to *hurt* you.” Desperate to make him understand, yet afraid of losing him, Erin tried to make him see reason.

“Erin.” He lifted her chin so she would look at him. “Whatever it is, sweetheart, we’ll get through it. I trust you and I know you wouldn’t hurt me on purpose. Let’s just deal with it when the time comes and live for today.” He held out his hand again, the ring flashing in the light. He waited in silence for her response.

Overwhelmed by the love she felt for him, she nodded.

He yelled, “Wahoo! Yes!” Brandon placed the ring on her finger and gave her a fierce hug, kissing her with abandon.

When he stopped cold, she was surprised.

“Just a minute. Don’t go anywhere.” He got up and ran to the door and opened it, he gave the musicians the thumbs up.

They all shouted, “Arriba! Arriba!” and burst into a boisterous Mexican song.

He placed the do not disturb sign on the handle outside the door before he closed and locked it. When he turned back to face her, he stood there staring at her with love in his eyes.

Though she still had doubts, she prayed for a miracle. She smiled at him.

In seconds he’d removed his T-shirt and shorts then came back to the bed. He moved the tray then took her hand and pulled her to her feet. His eyes never left hers as he removed her robe.

When it slid to the ground, Brandon kissed her slowly, passionately until her knees were weak. He lowered her to the mattress as his lips continued their tender assault, his hands holding her body close to his.

Erin threaded her fingers through his hair, the diamonds sparkling in the light from the windows. With her free hand, she caressed his back with a tender touch. Tears still escaped, dampening her cheeks, but Brandon focused on her lips, making her forget about them.

Moving away for a brief moment, Brandon put on a condom and returned to her embrace. They made love at a sweet, slow pace, their fingers entwined, savoring each moment.

When Brandon entered her, she moaned. His steel rod slid to the hilt, moving at a pace that was excruciating to her. Erin soon felt her body seeking that blissful release only he could bring her.

As though sensing her needs, Brandon began to move faster, keeping a steady pace, kissing her, his tongue following his body's movements.

"Oh...ahhh...Brandon I—" Erin screamed as she spun out of control, taking him with her. She arched her neck and gripped his hands tight while she rode the waves until finally she was freefalling toward Earth.

He held her tight against him as he rolled to his side, still resting within her. Tender fingers caressed her hair, running down the lengths in a soothing, repetitive motion.

"I love you so much, Erin. We'll be okay. No matter what your secret is. We'll be okay." His arms tightened around her, making her feel safe.

"I love you too, Brandon. I'll apologize now for later. I trust you with all my heart, but I'm obligated to keep the secret to myself. Thank you for understanding." Erin traced his bare chest in small circles with her fingertips, her head resting on his shoulder.

They lay together for a long while until their stomachs began to protest and they were forced to get out of bed. Brandon picked up his T-shirt and frowned.

“To hell with going out! We’re getting room service.”

After he hung up the resort phone, Erin asked, “Brandon. Aren’t you supposed to be jumping today?”

The mischievous grin on his face made Erin smile. He was like a little kid sometimes with his games.

“I’m playing hooky. I told the crew that if I didn’t show up, then you said yes. If you said no, I’d be working. You’re stuck with me for the day.”

Proud of himself, he flopped back down on the bed on his back, putting his hands under his head and grinning with satisfaction.

“You were pretty sure of yourself,” Erin accused, raising an eyebrow.

“I figured that eventually I could wear you down. I’m glad I don’t have to romance you anymore. It was *exhausting*.”

“What do you mean you don’t have to romance me anymore? You’re just getting started. If you plan on stopping, then...” Erin tried not to grin at the look on his face when she made as though she was going to take the ring off and give it back to him.

He jumped up. “Wait! Don’t take it off. I’m sorry. I promise I’ll romance you for the next fifty years if you want me to. I was just joking. Honest!”

With her back to him, she hid her smile and said in a bored voice. “Well, okay then. I guess I could give you another chance.”

As she struggled to hold back laughter, Erin suddenly noticed that he could see her face in the mirror over the dresser and screamed in surprise when he picked her up and swung her around.

“Why you little brat! You were pulling my leg. You had no intention of taking off that ring, did you?” Brandon blew raspberries on her neck, making her shriek with laughter as he lowered her to the bed, he began kissing her.

She pushed gently on his chest and broke off the kiss, smiling as she looked into his eyes. “I don’t need romancing if I have you, but it sure was nice while it lasted. I love the orchid, and the musicians. That was such a sweet thing to do.”

“I think I can handle being sweet once in a while.” He was about to kiss her when there was a knock at the door. “Room service.” He got up to throw his shorts on. Erin quickly slipped into her robe. Both of them were surprised to see Frisker.

“What’s wrong?”

Since Brandon’s tone was filled with alarm, Erin was sure that something bad had happened, especially since Frisker was supposed to be at the zone. “We have a big problem.”

Brandon let him in and closed the door.

Frisker looked over at Erin, regret in his eyes, “Sorry, Erin, this is important.”

She nodded and Frisker turned back to Brandon.

“BLT and Flare both got into some trouble last night with drugs. Flare is dead and BLT is on her way to the hospital. It doesn’t look good.”

Fury had Brandon’s face flushing red. “Any idea who sold it to them?” When Frisker shook his head, Brandon continued, “What kind of drugs?”

“Cocaine is what the cops said. I called them as soon as I found the kids. They were holed up at the hangar. When they didn’t show up and weren’t in their rooms, I had the gang search for them. Flare was already cold and BLT was unconscious. They must have done it late last night.” Frisker’s hands were shaking.

Brandon spoke gently, placing a comforting hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Can you gather the team together? We need to have a meeting right away.”

“Sure. I’ll assemble them.” Frisker left the hut.

For a few minutes, Brandon stood silent, his clenched fists on his hips while he stared at the floor. With a muttered curse, he turned to Erin. “Let’s get cleaned up. If you don’t want to come to the meeting, I’ll understand.”

“Whither thou goest...” Erin slipped her arms around his waist and gave him a hug then gently kissed him. No matter what, she was going with him to do some investigating on her own.

Chapter Fifteen

Secrets Unearthed

The crewmates sat silent and reserved as they waited for Brandon to speak as he stood in front of them. His shoulders slumped forward at the weight of the situation and the strain of what he had to talk about.

“I’m sure you’ve all heard about Flare and BLT. Carla is still in a coma in the hospital. At this point, we don’t know if she’s going to make it or not—I’ve spoken with the police and if she survives, she stands to spend a long time in a Mexican prison for drug possession. The penalties down here are harsh and include fines and an extended time in jail.”

Letting that soak in, Brandon continued, “I’m going to ask you all a question. If anyone wants to talk in to me in private, come and see me anytime, day or night. I want to find out what happened and where these kids got the drugs. Does anyone know who sold them the cocaine? Brandon waited a minute but no one spoke up.

“This *will not* happen again,” he said firmly. “Any one of you, if you are caught with drugs of any kind that a doctor didn’t prescribe, or that’s not sold over the

counter, then you are out of here. I'll have you on a plane back to Canada so fast, your head will spin, and once you land at the Toronto airport, you will go directly to jail for possession. I can't stress to you how dangerous this situation is. Flare is dead. I have to call his family and tell them how we let this happen. Do I make myself clear enough?"

Frustrated at their silence, Brandon raked his fingers through his hair. "You're excused. There will be no further jumps today. Be ready tomorrow morning to continue on schedule."

The crewmates moved silently toward the door. Not one of them met Brandon's eyes.



Since she had experience dealing with calling parents to tell them that their child was dead, Erin felt great empathy for Brandon. He also had to call Carla's parents to tell them that their daughter was in a coma. It was going to be very hard on him, she was sure, and he had to call *two* families.

"Would you like me to call one of them?" Erin asked, placing her hand on his chest.

Brandon shook his head and blew out a breath of frustration. "No. Thanks anyway, but I need to do this myself. I'll go to the lobby to use their phone."

"Would you like me to come with you?"

With a grim curve of his lips, he smiled at her. "I'd like that Erin."

"I'm with you all the way, buddy, whether you want me to be or not!"

"Maybe we can hide in our room for the rest of the day. I don't much feel like talking to anyone else."

Brandon's eyes were full of pain. Erin took his hand in hers. "Your wish is my command. Let's get this done." They together to the front lobby so he could make the calls.



While Brandon spoke with the parents, Erin scanned the lobby. There were two Mexican women manning the reception counter and two others were cleaning the sitting area where guests usually waited for buses. The large room was empty, all tours having left early in the morning. The staff members spoke in Spanish in hushed whispers.

Erin moved over to the counter to appear to be browsing the tourist brochures.

A young Mexican woman, wearing the nametag Lolita came over to her.

"Can I help you with something, Senorita?"

Erin gave the woman an apologetic look. "No thank you, I'm waiting for my fiancé. Do you know where I can find information on skydiving?"

The woman looked confused and Erin acted as though she didn't know a word of Spanish, even though she was fluent.

"I'm sorry, I don't speak any Spanish. Uh, it's skydiving. You know, jumping out of a plane?" Making engine noises and using her hand to indicate someone falling from the sky, Erin asked, "Skydiving?"

Shaking her head, the woman muttered in Spanish that she didn't understand and Erin let her off the hook. "Oh, it's okay. Never mind. Thank you, anyway." She smiled and went back to looking at the brochures.

The woman appeared to be confident that the 'gringo' had no idea how to speak Spanish and went back to speaking with her colleague.

"That kid died and the other one is in the hospital. It doesn't look like she's going to survive. What did they lace those drugs with anyway? We've never had anyone die before."

The other woman hissed, "Gilligan said the stuff was top quality or he wouldn't have sold it. I'm not sure I believe him. I'd better tell my Manuel to stop buying from the bastard." Her eyes shot to the office door and back to her friend.

Lolita gave Erin a quick glance. Erin pretended she hadn't noticed.

"A few weeks ago Crash caught one of his men stealing some cocaine and the man simply disappeared the next day. It is too dangerous to deal with him."

From the corner of her eye, Erin saw Lolita take another glance so she turned away to watch Brandon then shrugged and went back to the brochures.

“Angelina, you must tell Manuel to stop dealing with Crash before it is too late.” Her eyes widened with fear when Carlos came out of his office. Suddenly finding plenty to do, Angelina picked up some papers to study and elbowed Lolita, who joined her, watching the computer screen with avid interest.

Carlos immediately noticed Erin and came over to speak with her. “Ah, Senorita, it is good to see you again. I trust you have everything that you need?” His gaze dipped down, focusing on her breasts.

Erin nodded over at Brandon where he sat at the phone in deep discussion.

“We’re fine, but Brandon is calling those poor families about the two kids who got into drugs. I wouldn’t even know where to buy anything like that. Where do they find them anyway?”

Carlos put his clammy hand over hers, showing what her gut said was false concern, even though his eyes never lifted up to her face. “My poor dear, I have no idea where they would get drugs. It’s possible that someone from one of the local towns approached them. There are always unsavory characters around who take advantage of young people.”

Carlos shook his head in evident sorrow and shrugged. “I do my best to keep our resort free of those ruffians, but who knows?”

Glad that Brandon was done, Erin slid her hand out from under Carlos' grubby paw. As soon as he looked up and noticed Carlos standing with her, he stood and walked over to them.

"Hello, Carlos," he said. His face was somber.

"It is such a sad thing for you to have to call the parents, so tragic, mi amigo."

Wanting to puke at his lies, Erin saw the colors around him were darker today. Wearing a white suit didn't make the man seem less dangerous in her eyes.

"I appreciate your concern. Has your security team come up with any leads, any suspicious people at the resort?" Brandon asked. He was all business now, his gentle side hidden.

"Brandon, as I have told your lovely *novia* here, we work very hard to keep undesirable characters away from the resort. There are no drugs here. I will not allow it."

Carlos did a good job of playing the innocent, but Erin knew a liar when she saw one. She noticed that the man's index finger twitched when he lied. It was a big 'tell', or subconscious move.

"Thanks, Carlos. Let me know if any of your staff hear anything." Turning to Erin, he took her hand in his. "Let's go back to the room for a while."

"Goodbye, Carlos, we'll see you soon, I'm sure."

“Oh, I am sure of it, Senorita.” His winning smile gave her the creeps.



“So...do you believe him?” Erin asked once they were back in their room.

“Sure I do, about as far as I can throw him. There is something off with the guy.” Brandon was standing on the back porch staring into the forest, his mouth pinched white from stress.

She felt his pain and reached up to his shoulders to begin massaging his tense muscles. His chin dropped to his chest and he groaned. “Why didn’t I get a vision to stop them?”

“You can’t control what others do, Brandon. They’re adults and responsible for their own actions. Why don’t you take your shirt off and lie on the bed, and I’ll give you a good massage?”

Her heart ached for him, knowing the turmoil he felt. She could tell that what had happened to the two young adults weighed heavily on him and he felt liable.

Brandon turned around and pulled her close, claiming her lips in a tender kiss. “Wanna get married tonight?”

Laughter bubbled up as she smacked his arm. “Are you kidding me? Your sister would kill you for not letting her come to the wedding. There is no way I’m going to be a part of that after all she did for me.”

Brandon kissed her neck. "Marry me tonight and we can keep it a secret until we have the real wedding at home."

"No!" she giggled. "You're such a goof. Now get over there and lie down on your stomach." Swatting him on his butt, she giggled again. Erin ran outside and picked up the key from under the rock then slipped back in before he noticed she was gone. She had a bottle of scented massage oil in her bag.

Once she had the oil in her hand, Erin slipped the key under the suitcase, planning to relock it when she was done with the oil.

She found him lying on his stomach, face down on the bed patiently waiting for her. He had removed all his clothing.

"You are a cheeky devil, aren't you? What happened to just the shirt?"

His body shook with mirth. "Maybe you should follow suit. I hear that you can massage a body much better if you are skin to skin."

"Oh! I'm so sure! And just where did you get that information; Playboy Magazine?" The oil was warm from the temperature in the room and Erin placed a generous amount in her hand before putting the bottle down. When her strong hands began to knead the taut muscles, Brandon groaned. He began to relax beneath her fingers.

“Boy, did I make the right choice. I have my own personal slave now and can get a massage anytime I want to.” His shoulders shook as he held back his laughter.

She gently slapped his back. “Your own personal slave, eh?”

“Mmmm. She is a bit abusive though.” Brandon’s voice was getting weaker and drowsy.

“Just be quiet for a while, cowboy. You have more knots in your shoulders than a sailor’s net.” Erin’s soft voice soothed Brandon and he finally dozed off while her fingers moved over his strong muscles. After another fifteen minutes, Erin climbed off him and used a towel to remove the oil from her hands.

She stood and stared down at him, pleased. Every muscle in his body was liquid now. Once she’d covered him with a sheet, she went to dig out a book to read when the phone rang. Erin jumped and ran to answer it, hoping he would stay asleep.

“Hello?” she whispered.

“Oh, hi, Erin, it’s Cindy. Ah, I need to talk to Brandon about...well...about today’s meeting.” Cindy sounded worried.

Erin glanced at Brandon. “I’ll meet you up at the bar in ten minutes, okay? He’s sound asleep.”

“Okay. Thanks Erin.”

After she'd replaced the receiver on the cradle, Erin left the room, careful to close the door without a sound behind her.



Cindy was already in the bar and had ordered them both a beer. When she saw Erin, she looked relieved.

“Hi, thanks for coming to talk to me.” Cindy’s eyes scanned the room, as though to make sure no one was listening to their conversation.

Erin had just done the same thing. “What’s going on, kiddo?”

“Well, I have some information about...last night.” Nervous, she fidgeted in her seat.

“Go on. I’m all ears, Cindy.” Speaking in a soft voice, Erin touched the woman’s hand in reassurance.

“There’s this guy named Mike Wilcox, people call him Gilligan because he looks just like Gilligan from the TV show. Well, I heard a rumor from some of the younger people on the crew that he was hanging around Flare and BLT last night. The three of them left in a car and that was the last time anyone saw them until—” Cindy’s eyes filled with tears.

“It’s okay, Cindy. I get where you’re going. Is this guy a guest at the resort?”

“That’s just it. He’s a guest but he’s been here for at least a year. Apparently, he works for some guy they call Crash, but under the table. He’s staying in a hut just down the path from Frisker and me.” Cindy’s hands were shaking.

“Do you know which one?”

She nodded and told Erin which hut it was. “You’ll tell Brandon won’t you?”

“Absolutely! He had a rough day so I wanted him to rest. I’ll be sure and tell him. Now...how it’s going with you and Frisker?” Erin changed the subject and tried to distract her friend.

Cindy’s cheeks flushed with heat. “Alec is amazing. He never told me he liked me before. When he finally got around to it, I didn’t believe him, but I do now. In fact...I think I’m falling in love with him.” Cindy looked down at her hands and shifted in her chair.

“Must be something in the water, eh?”

A chuckle escaped then suddenly Cindy gasped and grabbed Erin’s hand. “You said yes?” she cried, staring at the sparkling ring.

“I sure did. He’s one persistent character.” Erin chuckled, shaking her head.

“Lana’s going to be pissed that she lost the bet,” Cindy’s eyes popped wide open when she realized what she’d said. “Oh, my God. I’m so sorry, Erin.”

“What bet?” Erin asked, her cheeks flushing with the heat of anger.

Cindy tried to make a quick escape. “I have to go, Alec will be—”

Quicker than Cindy, Erin stopped her from leaving the table by grabbing her wrist. “Alec can wait. Tell me about it, now!”

“I am in so much shit—Look, Erin, Lana bet Brandon that he could get you to marry him in three weeks, but he said he could do it in one week. He didn’t mean anything by it. He wants to marry you more than anything.”

“Save it, Cindy. I’m not angry. They’re siblings and have always competed. It’s just a joke between them. I’m fine with it.” Erin tried to hide her pain and fury but wasn’t quite successful. “I have to go. I’m going to take a walk before I go back to the room—Thank you for telling me about...that guy. We’ll catch him if he’s the one. I’ll talk to you later.”

Standing, Erin smiled and turned to leave the room.

Once outside the bar, Erin tried desperately to walk in a measured pace and act as though she wasn’t dying inside. When she looked down at her ring, she nearly cried out. A joke! It had all been a joke! She raced down to the beach and walked along the shore, head down.

Allowing the sound of the soothing waves to wash over her, Erin fought back tears. There were few people out since it was suppertime and the heat of the day was only beginning to lessen.

Brandon had made a bet with Lana. That was fine with Erin, but did he only ask her to marry him because of the bet? She couldn’t imagine him doing that. He

was an honest man who was persistent when he wanted something. And he was so romantic! Yet shadows of her past resurfaced and she wondered if he'd leave her now that she'd given her love to him.

Tears slipped from her eyes as she walked along, the waves rushing over her feet. She loved him with all her heart. Being with him made her feel incredibly safe and whole, like she finally belonged somewhere. For a cop to find someone who made her feel safe, now that was a challenge.

Brandon was also protective of her, and had a great sense of humor. She thought about the initiation when he'd been covered in whipped cream, laughing and teasing. He was so funny.

She swiped at her tears then turned around to head back up the beach. It was time to face Brandon and ask him about it. Suddenly remembering that she had her own secrets, she realized that she had no right to be angry with him. It wasn't like he'd bet a stranger. It was Lana, for crying out loud! Her heart ached as though it had broken in two as Erin walked back to the hut.



The phone rang, jarring Brandon out of a deep sleep. He jumped up and answered it since Erin was obviously out somewhere.

"Hello?" he said in a groggy voice.

"Hey, boss. You might have a problem when Erin gets back," Frisker said.

“What’s going on?” He tensed up, sleep forgotten.

“Cindy didn’t mean to, but she let it slip about the bet. Erin made her tell. Please don’t be angry with Cindy. She’s really upset.”

He knew that Frisker was trying to protect Cindy from Brandon’s anger. Seldom did Brandon lose his temper, but Frisker might believe that this one slip would set him off.

“I’m not angry with Cindy. I should have been upfront with Erin from the beginning. I’ll talk to you later. Tell Cindy not to worry about it.” Brandon hung up the phone and wondered where Erin had gone.

Seeing the massage oil on the bedside table, he picked it up. He might as well put it back in Erin’s bag. Going to the hallway, he went to her suitcase and opened it. He had to dig out a corner to make room for the bottle. Something hard on the bottom was in the way so he reached in and pulled it out, stunned when he found a gun in his hand.

It was similar to the one Brett had, a police issued gun. Curious, Brandon dug a little deeper and found two sets of handcuffs and a pair of binoculars. There were also two thick vests made of...bulletproof vests! Brandon stood still, staring in shock at his findings.

“This is the secret she was afraid of me learning about. She’s an undercover cop like Brett and Jessie. Brett must have known her when I introduced them. Now I understand the weird looks they had given each other. She’s a cop!”

Shaking, he replaced the items in the suitcase and pushed it back on the shelf. The key fell to the rug by his feet.

“Now my vision makes sense. She’s going to die! I’ve got to get out of here for a while,” he muttered. Anger and fear built in his gut and he needed air. Brandon prayed that he wouldn’t run into Erin, and left the hut like he was being chased by the devil. He walked at a fast pace away from the buildings toward the front of the resort area. It was suppertime and most vacationers were inside having dinner. Fear clawed at his stomach when the images came back from the vision.

That’s why she gets shot. That’s why she’s going to die! He started running.



When Erin returned to the hut, she was surprised to see that Brandon was out. She’d thought he might still be sleeping. Since Erin had news, she figured it was a good time to call Crosby. Moving to the suitcase, she froze. It had been moved. She saw the key on the floor and gasped.

“Oh, my God! Brandon was in the suitcase. I forgot to relock it. Shit! Shit! Shit!” Her cover was blown. The whole operation was at risk now. As soon as she started to make headway, it was finished.

All of the anger went out of her. Tears filled her eyes and she went to the bed to lie down as dismay washed over her in waves. She figured she hadn't had a good long cry in a while, at least since that morning. No time like the present.

Hopelessness filled her as she stared down at her ring, anguish roaring through her heart. Slowly, she slipped it off and placed it on the bedside table.

It was nice while it lasted.

Unable to stop herself, she bawled like a baby, knowing she'd never find the love she sought, the one she'd found with Brandon.



Exhausted and pouring with sweat, Brandon walked toward the main building. He needed to call Lana. In the lobby he sat down, picked up the phone and dialed. She would still be at the cottage on her honeymoon.

Brett answered on the third ring. "Hello?"

"You knew didn't you, Brett?" he said in a defeated voice.

"Brandon, what—"

"Don't try to deny it. I found her gun, the vests, the binoculars, and the handcuffs. You and Jessie both knew didn't you?" Brandon's voice was hoarse.

Lana picked up the extension. "Brandon, what's going on?"

"Did you know too? Were you both laughing at me for being so damn gullible?" Bitter anger tasted like bile in his throat.

“Yes, we both knew. We couldn’t tell you. I guessed, but Brett and Jessie work in the same precinct as Erin. Please Brandon, don’t be angry with her. She had to keep it to herself; she’s obligated by law to protect her identity. The case—”

“The case wouldn’t have anything to do with the two kids who got into some nasty cocaine would it? One of them is dead and the other is in a coma—Would it?” When his voice rose, he checked it, looking around to see that a few employees stared at him in question.

“Can you tell us anything else about it? Brett has been helping. He sent the vests so that when your vision...so that it won’t come true. It’ll protect her if she’s shot.”

Though Lana sounded calm, Brandon sensed her fear. Bitterly, he snarled, “You’ll be happy to know that I won my bet today. You should be proud of me.”

“Brandon. The bet was a way to get you to wake up and smell the coffee. Would you have really tried to get her to marry you if I hadn’t nudged you?” Lana asked.

The anger left him and he dropped his chin to his chest as anguish ripped through him.

“I don’t know. I love her. I still want her to marry me but I don’t know what to make of this. She wouldn’t be in danger if it weren’t for her job—Did she only

come to the zone and get cozy with me *because* of her job? What if her saying yes is just a part of her damn duty! Shit!”

His eyes burned with unshed tears. Brandon never cried, but for the first time in his adult life, he felt like it.

“Brandon. When I met Lana it was my job to integrate with her and her staff. I didn’t plan to fall in love. I doubt Erin did either. Can you honestly say that she’s only there for her job? Do you think so little of her?” Brett’s tone was firm and no-nonsense.

There was a short silence while Brandon digested Brett’s questions.

“No. She told me she couldn’t say yes because she had a secret she was obligated to keep. I understand now. She was afraid I would react just like I am this minute.” Things were starting to make sense.

“Have a little faith in her, Brandon. She’s only doing what she was trained to do. The falling in love part has nothing to do with her job. Talk to her. She’ll tell you the truth. I’m sure of it.” Lana didn’t plead with him but spoke with calm logic.

His voice was softer now that his fury began to cool. “You’re right, sis. I guess we just need to talk. Have it out. I’m sorry I interrupted your honeymoon. When I have more information, I’ll call you.”

“Brandon...I love you. Marrying Erin is a wise move. She’s awesome sister material.”

A short, bitter laugh escaped Brandon. “I doubt she’ll want to keep me now since she knows about the bet. It’s time for me to face the music. Goodbye, you two. Thanks for listening.”

After he hung up the phone, he sat there for a while and stared down at it. So many things made sense now. If Erin was going to die, at least he would die with her.

Chapter Sixteen

On The Trail

As he opened the door to the room, Brandon saw that Erin was asleep on the bed. They hadn't eaten all day since so much had happened. He wanted to take her out for dinner so they could talk.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and brushed a strand of ebony hair out of her eyes. She was so beautiful, his breath caught. He could tell that she'd been crying, trails of leftover tears having dried on her cheeks. Suddenly he noticed his ring lying on the bedside table and his heart ached.

So, she's dumping me. That stupid bet! Then again, maybe she hadn't really meant to marry me after all. It was probably just part of her job.

Erin's eyes were open when he looked back at her, so full of pain that he pulled his hand back from where it rested on her arm.

Her eyes filled with fresh tears. She sat up quickly and turned her back on him, staring out at the forest.

Brandon sighed, unsure if he should speak or not. Since one of them had to start, he figured it might as well be him. “I’m sorry about the bet. It was just a joke between Lana and me. I never meant to hurt you.”

Her voice was husky with pain. “It doesn’t matter. It probably wouldn’t have worked out anyway. I told you I shouldn’t have said yes. I told you I would just hurt you.”

“Are you saying you never truly loved me, Erin?” Brandon asked softly.

A sob escaped, her shoulders shaking as she tried desperately to answer, “Does it matter...Brandon, I *lied* to you...I doubt you can forgive that.”

“I guess you could say I lied to you too. Doesn’t that make us even?”

Swiping at the tears angrily, she groaned. “I haven’t cried so much since I was a little kid, until the day I met you. This love thing hurts.”

In contemplation, Brandon picked up the ring in his fingers and stared at it. “Everything I said to you, I meant, Erin. I do love you. I want to marry you. I want us to grow old together. I don’t want you to die with a bullet in your back—Can’t you try to forgive me?”

She cried out and spun around to face him, her face ravaged with pain, tears staining her cheeks. “Forgive you? What am I supposed to forgive you for? I was the one who lied and schemed.”

Confused, Brandon said, “Erin, I lied to you by not telling you about the bet—Hell, I should never have made it in the first place. Lana said she did it to make me ask you to marry me sooner. I love you. You aren’t to blame for my stupidity.”

Again she wiped away her tears. Her forehead wrinkled slightly as she frowned as though puzzled. “Let me get this straight. You aren’t angry with me for lying to you about my job, but you think I’m mad at you about that ridiculous bet?”

At his nod, she started laughing. He stared at her in confusion.

“Brandon. I thought you would want me to give you your ring back because I had to keep my job secret from you. That you would think I started our relationship only because of my job. That you would think I wasn’t telling you the truth about loving you. I thought that—”

Brandon resolved the whole thing by taking her in his arms and kissing her with a wild passion, aching to prove to her how much he loved her. Lost in her, he reached out without looking and slipped the ring back on the table then held her tight he showed her just how angry he *wasn’t*!

They stripped while their lips remained locked, ripping and yanking at their clothes in a frantic effort to be together. Finally naked, they made love with a craze greater than they had ever felt before. It was desperation, need, love, and triumph all rolled into one.

Barely able to get the condom on since they continued to kiss, Brandon struggled to open the packet and roll it into place. Erin welcomed him home with a desperate groan, wrapping her legs around him. She held on tight, rocking her hips to meet his rhythm. Their passion climbed faster than it ever had and exploded in wave after wave of glory long before they were ready.

Relief and joy filled her gaze as she rained kisses on his face. Her legs tightened around him as she held him close to her.

At her exuberant display of love, he chuckled then pulled away while still resting inside her. He worshiped her mouth, cheeks, and eyelids and reached over to the table for the ring.

“Does this mean we can put this back where it belongs?”

Tears filled her eyes again as Erin held up her hand and Brandon slipped it back into place.

“I don’t ever want to see that off your finger again, Dark Angel. I will love you forever. Don’t make me call the musicians back to prove it!” he joked.

A tearful laugh answered him, and she kissed him hard. For a moment she moved her lips away. “I’ll never lie to you again. I promise—Well, unless I spend too much on groceries or clothes.” She giggled as he tickled her, wiggling her hips against his groin.

“Ready for a second round?” Brandon growled low in his chest and thrust deep.

Her heart in her eyes, she whispered, “Only if you promise to feed me afterwards. I’m starving!”

He groaned in answer. By the time they arrived at the restaurant for dinner, the kitchens were getting ready to close and the restaurant was nearly empty. After Brandon handed over a large tip, they were served a hearty meal. They didn’t even notice the cleanup going on around them. Their focus was on each other.



“The stuff I sold them was top quality. I don’t know what happened to those stupid kids,” Mike Wilcox told his boss. He was cocky and not the least bit afraid of the man.

Tall and skinny with angular features, the twenty-eight year old was the boss’s best man when it came to selling the drugs. He looked ten years younger than thirty years old and was able to mingle with the younger crowd easily.

The boss stared at him, his eyes narrowed. “You’d better get rid of the girl. If she wakes up and talks, you’ll end up in jail, and you better think twice if you plan on taking me with you.”

Gilligan smiled. “Boss, you know I would never give you up. You’d keep me out of jail wouldn’t you? You have almost every cop around on your payroll.” His phony praise to butter up his boss worked, as it usually did. The man was so vain.

“You do your job right and I’ll keep you out of jail.” An aggressive look darkened his features. “But you *will* clean up this mess and there’d better not be another incidence like this one. Get rid of that girl today!”

“Sure boss. I’ll get right on it.” With another big grin, Gilligan left the room.



The boss’s bodyguard stood by the wall, ready and waiting for orders. “Follow him. See that he finishes her.” The man nodded and left to follow Gilligan.

The boss stood up to look in the mirror and smoothed his greased hair back with his hands, ensuring there were no stray strands. Satisfied he was in perfect order, he picked up the phone, “Lolita, get in here.” Not waiting for an answer, he hung up and sat in his chair, lighting up a cigar.

The door opened quickly and the woman came in, subservient, her eyes on the floor. “Si, Boss, what can I do for you?”

“I have a little chore for you, Lolita. Come here.”

She began to tremble beneath his gaze. He was pleased that she knew just what he wanted her to do and even more thrilled about her fear of him.

“Si, Boss.” Kneeling before him, she slowly undid his pants, her hands shaking. No one refused the Boss or they simply disappeared. Once she’d freed him from his pants, she took a deep breath as tears escaped to slide down her cheeks.

“Come on girl, I don’t have all day,” he said, viciously grabbing her hair and pulling her head toward him. He shuddered when her mouth took him. Closing his eyes, he pictured the mouth belonging to a very tall Canadian woman with long dark hair and very long legs. “Faster girl,” he said, shoving her head down to show her the speed he wanted. Very soon, he gasped, the image of Erin’s face floating behind his eyes.

She will be happy to come down on me. She’ll lick her lips afterwards with relish.

Once done, he opened his eyes to see her substitute then shoved Lolita away in disgust. “Get back to work.”



While running to the door, Lolita wiped the tears from her eyes. It wouldn’t be good for the guests to see her upset so she tried desperately to calm herself.

Angelita’s look of sympathy nearly undid her. It would be Angelita’s turn next time. He always took turns with them. At least this time he hadn’t wanted sex. The thought of his disgusting body rutting over hers again was so repulsive that she shuddered. Lolita went to the small washroom behind the counter and rinsed her mouth out, spitting into the sink to remove his taste.

If she had said no to him he would have either had her disappear or she would have lost her job. Jobs were rare and this one paid well. Her four small children depended on her since their father had moved on to one of his other girlfriends. He had many women but didn't bother to support his fifteen children, leaving it up to the mothers. No, she had to do what the boss told her to. She had no choice. After brushing her hair back from her face, Lolita went back to work.



The next day, a very somber crew went back to work. Brandon organized the first group of jumpers as they prepared to load up in the plane while Cindy checked them off one at a time on her clipboard.

He'd just loaded the final client for that flight and turned to see that a man was leering at her. He had a broken nose, his eyes blackened. She appeared to be uncomfortable around him. His muscles were so large he looked like the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. It just didn't look natural.

I'll need to check these ones out before I let them jump. On his info sheet, he claims to have jumped over a thousand times, but he doesn't have the confidence most people attain when they had jumped that often. Not only that, but he doesn't seem to be familiar with the equipment.

"Hi." The man moved closer to Cindy.

Her back went ramrod straight as he stood over her as she looked up at him.

“Your name please.” As she’d always done when confronted with difficult customers, she spoke to him on a professional level keeping the conversation impersonal.

“I’ll tell you mine if you’ll tell me yours,” he joked, touching her lip with his thumb.

“Your name, please,” she repeated.

“Rob. Wanna go out for a drink after my jump?” he asked with confidence.

“No. Last name, please.”

“Why not? I think you’re cute. I’d give you a real good time.” His wandering hands slid up her arms. When Cindy tried to move away, he gripped her arms firmly and his expression became menacing.

“What’s going on here? Get your hands off her, buddy,” Frisker growled in warning as he rushed past Brandon.

Even though Frisker was only half as muscular as the man, Brandon knew he was twice as tough, having been a boxer in his day. When the creep began to hit on Cindy, he wanted to punch his lights out himself, but he had to keep his cool since it was a customer.

Ready to back Frisker up, Brandon waited and watched the exchange.

The men stood eye to eye, but the steroid-pumped-up jerk had about fifty pounds on Frisker. He wouldn't be quick on his feet with all that muscle to fight through.

Instead of letting Cindy go, Rob slid his arm around her waist and squeezed her tight to his side while he faced Frisker. Cindy tried to get away, but Rob increased his grip until she gasped with pain. Brandon motioned to some of the crew for help.

"She's going out with me, so get lost, loser."

His eyes flaring with rage, Frisker held back for a moment, his shoulders and arms stiff with anger. "Let her go. Now!" he said through clenched teeth.

"You gonna make me, wimp? You're just a scrawny little punk," Rob snarled, shoving Frisker's shoulder with his free hand though Frisker barely budged.

The three men who'd signed up with him had moved up behind Frisker. He didn't stand down. "Can't fight your own battles, eh, creep? Need your muscle head buddies to back you up when I kick your ass?"

Without warning, Rob shoved Cindy away and sent her flying to the ground, Rob moved in, ready to fight. His three buddies edged closer and made a grab for Frisker.

"Enough!" Brandon roared. He and three crewmembers stood behind the three men. "You and your friends clear out. You're not welcome here."

Davy and Jeremy moved over to Cindy's side and helped her up. Rob hadn't noticed them yet. They had become like fixtures at the jump zone, helping the crew wherever they could. "I'm welcome if I say I'm welcome. I paid my money and I'm going to jump," he snapped at Brandon.

"Or what? You're going to pick on more women? We don't put up with bullies here.

"Hey, Davy, I thought he'd given up picking on women after Erin broke his nose!" Jeremy snickered.

Rob reared back like a bull and yelled at Jeremy. "You little bastard. I'm going to break more than your nose when I get a hold of you!"

"You couldn't catch me, shit for brains!" Jeremy taunted.

"Move out now. I won't tell you again," Brandon said. His voice was low and dead serious, the veins in his neck throbbing.

Rob shrugged. Rather than fight Brandon and Frisker, he snarled, "Sure, we'll leave. But you better watch your backs. No one messes with me!"

"Apparently only women do—Get out of here," Brandon smirked, showing what he thought of the bully's threat.

Eyes narrowed in anger, Rob glared at him for the reminder of Erin beating the crap out of him. Finally, he and his friends left but not before he aimed a venomous look at Jeremy.

Brandon and Frisker walked over to Cindy once the four men were far enough away.

“Are you okay?” Frisker asked, slipping his arm around her waist as he tugged her close.

Nodding, Cindy tried to smile but broke down and cried, burying her face in his shoulder until Brandon spoke to Jeremy.

“So, maybe you should tell me the real story about meeting Erin on the beach?”

Even Frisker had confided to Brandon that he didn’t believe the two kids could have protected Erin alone, especially after meeting the bullies in person.

Jeremy shot Davy a look and at Davy’s nod, he grinned.

“Those idiots were pushing us around and calling us names. Erin jumped in and took on Rob and another guy on. You should have seen the look on his face when she broke his nose. It was priceless. Davy and I took out the other two guys, but Erin asked us to keep her part a secret. She didn’t want you to think she wasn’t safe alone at the resort. We didn’t lie. We are both martial artists.”

Brandon put his hands on his hips and started laughing.

Their expressions showing their confusion, Frisker and Cindy looked at each other then back at Brandon.

“What’s so funny?” Cindy asked.

Still chuckling, Brandon shook his head. “Here I thought she was so helpless, needing someone to watch over her, and she takes on four men and beats the hell out of them...with help,” he added, winking at the boys. “All right everyone, let’s load up!”

Turning to Cindy, Davy, and Jeremy, he said, “I’d rather not leave you three alone down here. I guess you’re all jumping today.”

“All right!” yelled Davy.

Jeremy gave his friend a high-five, grinning from ear to ear. “Thanks, Brandon, you’re the best!”

With a sudden serious look, Brandon stared at Jeremy, “Well, it’s actually rather selfish of me, I assure you. I might need a bodyguard up there!”

They all laughed as the tension left them and excitement took its place.

Brandon waved at the boys to head to the plane and get into their harnesses then looked over at Frisker, giving him a wide grin.

“I can’t wait to get back to the room and ask Erin about her day on the beach. What a woman!”

Smiling down at Cindy, Frisker said, “I feel the same way about my girl.”

Her eyes were filled with hero worship while Frisker stared down at her with pride. Gently, he kissed her then walked her to the plane.



“I’ve got the four names for you, Crosby. Run a background on them. They’re all from California. I found their addresses in the main computer at the front desk last night. It was hard to get access to it since there is usually someone at the counter around the clock. Last night I lucked out since *somehow* there was a big distraction when the ladies’ room down the hall flooded. Don’t know how that happened.” Erin snickered.

“Right, you don’t know. You’re such a smartass, Bond. How’s the girl?” Crosby asked.

“I called the hospital before I phoned you and she’s still unconscious but stable. Do you think we can get her out of Mexico, A.S.A.P.? I have a feeling that if she comes out of it, she could be targeted for being able to ID the perp.”

After dealing with Carlos and overhearing the two Mexican women talking about the person named ‘Crash’, Erin had a bad feeling about BLT’s safety.

“I’ve got the Canadian Consulate working on it. We should be able to move her within the next twenty-four hours.”

“Crosby, my gut says we need to move fast on this. Do we have anyone who can guard her until then?”

“I doubt it, but I’ll look into it, Erin. Maybe you should head to the hospital and check up on her.”

“I think that’s a good plan, partner. I’ll take my cell with me just in case. Expect me to call later tonight.” Erin closed the phone and gathered up her things. She left a note for Brandon and left the room.

Cindy was walking up the path to her hut when she stepped outside.

“Hey, Cindy, what’s going on? Aren’t you scheduled to stay at the zone for the day?” Erin asked.

Tears filled Cindy’s eyes. “Brandon and Frisker wanted me to stay here with you since we had a problem—You know the four guys you beat the crap out of?”

Stunned that Cindy knew about that, Erin nodded slowly.

“Well they paid us a visit and the biggest jerk, the one whose nose you broke, came on to me. He was stoned out of his head and tried to start a fight with Frisker, but Brandon and a bunch of guys from the crew stopped him and his three buddies. Your new friends Davy and Jeremy were there too. Brandon made Jeremy tell him about your day on the beach.” Cindy smiled at that.

“Oh, shit! Is he mad at me?” Erin cringed at the thought of Brandon being angry again when they had finally worked things out.

“Actually, I think he was proud of you, not angry. You are one tough cookie!”

“I’m not sure if I should be upset or happy—Anyway, I’m on my way to check on BLT at the hospital.”

“Would you mind if I come with you? I’d really like to see if she’s okay,” Cindy asked.

“Sure, I left Brandon a note but I could add your name to it.” Having Cindy with her would be great. Erin liked hanging around with her pal and they hadn’t had a lot of time to catch up lately.

Once Erin had added Cindy’s name to the note, they left for the main office to catch the bus to town. It was expected within twenty minutes.

Erin was joking with Cindy about something as they walked along when Carlos came out of his office and intercepted them.

“Ah, two beautiful Canadian women, it must be my lucky day. How are you both doing?” he asked. The leech’s eyes were drawn to Erin’s chest and kept missing her eyes again.

“We are just fine. Carlos, I don’t know if you’ve been introduced to my friend, Cindy. We’re heading out on a short shopping trip.” Not wanting the man to know where they were going, Erin kept the information sketchy.

“Senorita Cindy, it is a pleasure to meet you.” Erin bit her lip to hide a grin at Cindy’s quick look of revulsion when Carlos’ slobbering lips met the back of her hand.

“I’m sorry, Carlos, but we’re in a hurry. We’d like to return by the time Brandon brings the crew back to the resort. It was nice talking to you.” Erin made

a bid to escape by taking Cindy's arm and walking away but the persistent man put his clammy fingers on Erin's wrist to stop her.

"Senorita Erin, wait. Why don't you allow me to get my car for you and have one of my trusted guards take you into town? It can be dangerous for such beautiful women to walk around alone in a strange place." Carlos' beady dark eyes glittered. He licked his wet lips, which had Erin suppressing a shudder.

"No, thank you, Carlos, we've already made arrangements. Have a nice day." Once she'd broken his grip on her wrist, Erin led Cindy to the bus stop.

The bus had just arrived when they left the building. Relieved, they climbed on right away.

"Yuck! Do you have any disinfectant on you?" Cindy wiped her hand on her shorts over, and over again.

"I know what you mean. I scrubbed my hand ten times when he slobbered over it. He grosses me out big time." Unable to stop a snicker from escaping, Erin wiped at her wrist too.

Cindy laughed. "At least I'm not alone."

Erin suddenly fell serious as she met Cindy's gaze. "I'd never leave you alone here, especially not with that creep."

“Thanks, Little Buddy. I knew I could count on you. Would you show me some of the moves you used to break that bastard’s nose? I’d like to do a bit of that myself.”

A snort, followed by a chuckle from Erin had Cindy laughing again.

“I’d be happy to show you how to protect yourself. Did I tell you I’m a black belt in martial arts?”

Eyebrows lifting in surprise, Cindy looked up at her in wonder.

“No! Boy, I sure would like to see you in action. I’ve got my own personal Amazon princess bodyguard. *Sweet!*”

During the trip to town, Erin showed Cindy some quick protective measures that she could use to disable a man long enough to get away. The ride seemed very short by the time they got off the bus near the hospital.



Carla Browning lay in a single room hooked up to a heart monitor and oxygen with an IV bag attached via needle to her arm. She was still comatose. The male nurse who stood by the bed held a vial and a syringe loaded with a colorless liquid. Just as he, reached up to grab the cord, holding the small port designed for adding medication and painkillers, Erin spoke up from the doorway

“*Hola*. We’re here to see Carla. Is there any change in her condition?” Erin asked. Her gut instinct said the man was up to no good. He acted nervous, his eyes

darting past the two women as though looking for an escape. Red flags went up and she pushed Cindy gently behind her.

The man babbled in Spanish that he didn't understand what they were saying and tried to leave the room but Erin blocked him.

Noting that he had his hand hidden behind his back, Erin moved forward with a kind smile plastered on her face. She didn't let on that she knew Spanish fluently.

"*Mi amigo*, I'm sorry, I don't understand you." Using her hand to emphasize her question, she kept talking as she pointed to Carla, then to the heart monitor, and the IV bag, drawing his eyes to follow. Suddenly Erin punched him in the nose with the heel of her palm.

As his arm swung around with the syringe to stab her, she caught his wrist and used pressure points to weaken his muscles until he dropped it, then forced him to the ground.

"Call the consulate, Cindy, not the cops. Use my name, and hurry." Erin heard Cindy leave and sat on top of the man to restrain him. With her free hand, she picked up the syringe bottle he'd dropped and read the label.

In Spanish, she spoke to him. "My, my, it looks like you had a little overdose planned for my friend here, *amigo*. You are in deep shit now!"

The man began babbling again, terrified.

“Who sent you?” she growled.

When he wouldn’t answer, she increased the pressure on his arm until he was all but screaming. He only said one word. *Crash!* If Erin’s hunch was correct, Crash had some connection with Carlos. Still holding him, she pulled out her cell phone, hit the speed dial, and cursed when she got Crosby’s answering machine.

“Shit!” She left a quick message then called the precinct, asking for Jessie or Brett.

Jessie picked up and Erin gave him as much info as she could in a short time. “We have to get her out of here now, Jessie, or she’s as good as dead. Cindy and I will stay here at the hospital until someone gets here to guard Carla. The local cops appear to be under this guy Crash’s payroll and I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them.”

“You watch your back, Erin. This is getting critical. Maybe you should pull out,” he said in all seriousness.

“Right, just like you would if you were here. I think I’ll whip out my fucking suntan lotion and hit the beach!” sarcasm laced her words.

“All right, Erin, I get your point. Let me make some calls. Will you have your cell on for a while?”

“Sure. They aren’t as stringent here about cell phones in hospitals as they are in Canada, and if they complain, I’ll kick their asses. Call me soon Jessie, real soon.” She hung up the phone just as Cindy raced back into the room.

“Are you all right, Erin?”

She nodded, focusing on the man squirming beneath her. “I’m fine. How goes the call to the Consulate?”

“I got a bit of run around until I said your name but someone is on their way here now.” Cindy looked down at the man. “What are we going to do with him?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Cindy.” She spoke in a distracted voice. “Hmmm...we could stick the needle in his arm and see what would have happened to Carla if he’d given it to her.”

The man began to scream and struggle to get away.

“Well, well, well. It seems to me our little *amigo* knows a bit of English after all.” Erin winked at Cindy. “Would you like to try some of those self defense moves I showed you? You know the one where you cut the guys dick off and—”

With another scream and weaker struggles, the man began to cry.

“Maybe I should wait for a little while, Erin. Can I stick the needle in him if no one comes to take him away?” Cindy was warming up to Erin’s acting skills to extract information.

“No, Senorita, *por favor!* I will tell you what you want to know. Please don’t hurt me! I have three women and many children. They need their papa,” he begged.

“Isn’t that amazing, Cindy? The man speaks English!” In a dead serious voice, Erin said, “So talk. Who is Crash and where can I find him?” Erin loosened her hold slightly so he wouldn’t feel as threatened and talk to them.

“Senorita, if I tell you, I am a dead man. Please ask me anything else.”

“Cindy, can you pass me that needle?” her soft voice was all the man needed and he spilled.

“He is Carlos. Carlos is Crash. He has a plantation up near the mountains where he manufactures the cocaine. His man, Gilligan, told me to do this to the girl. He will kill me and my family if he finds out I told you. The police will tell him. Please don’t let them take me. They will kill me. Please let me go!” His pitiful sobs began to annoy Erin.

“Can’t we just let him go?”

“Sure we can, Cindy. Then he can come back with his friends and finish Carla off. This is what you call Mexican crocodile tears, designed to make us feel sorry for him, but, if you want me to let him go—” Erin made a move to get off him, and the man immediately tried to fight for the syringe. She forced him back down to the floor.

“Oh, I see. He’s a good actor.” Cindy stared at Erin with fear in her eyes.

“Yes, he’d have killed us if I’d let him go, the little worm.”

The cell phone rang and Erin answered it. Cindy tried not to show her surprise that Erin had a phone.

“Bond.”

Erin listened for a minute then frowned. “You mean I have to sit on this guy for *two hours* before you can get anyone here? What the hell kind of crap is that, Crosby? I might as well snap the bastard’s neck and finish it myself!”

Her captive whimpered at Erin’s words. She grinned up at Cindy and continued listening. “No. I don’t trust the local cops. I already told you the bastards were on his payroll. Check into a guy named Carlos Cavazos, alias Crash. See what you can pull up on him. Apparently he has a plantation nearby...hold on.”

Erin nudged the man on the floor. “Where is the plantation?” When the man remained silent, she picked up the syringe and touched his neck with the tip of the needle. He went wild.

“It’s in Oaxaca, that’s all I know, I’ve never been there. Please, stop!” He sobbed.

“Shut up now, creep, I can’t hear the phone—Did you get that Crosby? Yeah, find out and get back to me fast. The crap’s ready to hit the fan.”

There was a commotion in the hallway and Cindy looked out. Turning back, she hissed, “Erin, it’s the Mexican police!”

“Shit! The cops are here. Get a hold of Brandon or Frisker and they can tell you more about what’s going on. Give them the info I just gave you. Off the record! Gotta go, pal.”

She closed up the phone, slipped it into her pocket then sat quietly on the man’s back while she schooled her features. She murmured close to his ear in Spanish, “You don’t tell them about me, and I won’t tell them about anything you told me. You got that?” When he nodded his head, she sat back up.

Moving away from the door, Cindy followed Erin’s silent command as she nodded toward the bed.

“Don’t move, buddy. I mean it!” she hissed in his ear. Erin stood and moved close to Carla, pushing her hair back to make it look presentable.

The police officers came into the room and spoke in fast Spanish, asking what was going on. Erin acted like she was unable to speak a word of Spanish as she shrugged.

“Oh, officers, thank goodness you’re here. This man was going to put some drugs into our poor Carla’s IV bag and when I asked him what he was doing, he tried to run away. I thought that was strange, so when he tripped and fell, I...well, I sat on him until you could get here. Thank you for coming so fast!” Her helpless look had them eating out of her hands.

After some terrible attempts at translation, Erin let them know that the man didn't speak English so she had no idea what he had said to her. The gullible men told her they would take care of him in halted English and took him away. He shot Erin a pleading glance over his shoulder so she nodded, shooting him a warning glare.

Shortly after that a member of the consulate came into the room and Erin explained what was going on. She was assured that not only would there be a guard on the door at all times, but Carla would be taken by a consulate jet to Canada within the next few hours. She was safe.



"You were amazing back there, Erin," Cindy praised Erin.

"All in a day's work, my friend. I think we missed the last bus so we'll have to cab it."

As Erin stepped to the curb, a black car with tinted windows came to a squealing stop in front of her. Reacting fast, she yelled, "Cindy run!"

Cindy had only gone two paces when a man on the sidewalk grabbed her, covering her mouth with his hand then forced her into the car.

Not so easy to subdue, Erin sent her fists and feet flying. One man's nose cracked under her knuckles. When the other two men couldn't get her into the car

during the vicious struggle, one of them hit her over the head with the butt of his gun and knocked her out.

Cindy screamed behind the hand as they threw Erin on the back seat where another man held Cindy immobile and slammed the door shut. When the car finally took off, he let her go. She grabbed Erin's shoulders and pulled her close.

When she pushed Erin's hair aside from where the man had hit her, she found blood.

"You bastard, you hurt her, she needs—" Cindy's head jerked when a fist slammed into her jaw and she too fell unconscious.

Chapter Seventeen

Needle In A Haystack

A shudder of alarm went through Brandon's body when he realized that Erin and Cindy weren't back from the hospital yet. He had just received a call from Brett at the main desk and found out what had happened. The attempt on BLT's life had been four hours ago and the women should have been back at the resort by now.

"What the hell do I do? How can I find them? Brett, tell me what to do!" Brandon shouted into the phone, frantic as he realized how helpless he was to find them. People standing or sitting in the large hallway stared at him in surprise.

"I'm coming down with Jessie and Crosby. When we get there, you don't know us. You never met us before. Do you understand, Brandon?" Brett was all business.

"Sure. Tell me what I can do until you get here. You're about ten hours away from here, what if they kill them, or...or worse!" Brandon raked a hand through his unkempt hair. Frisker stood beside him, his face cold as stone, his fists formed into solid rocks of fury.

“We know the area where we believe they’ve been taken. Wait until we arrive and I’ll set up a private meeting where we can meet but not be seen. It’s important to keep our anonymity. You’re obviously a target, Brandon. This guy knows your weak spot. Stay out of sight as much as possible—I’ll be in touch. Don’t let Carlos know you’re aware of his part in all this. Can you do that?” Brett asked.

“I’ll do anything to get them back, Brett. Just get moving.” After a few more instructions Brandon slammed the receiver down.

“What do we do for ten hours?” Frisker asked in a low tone.

Brandon sat quiet for a minute then looked up at his friend. “Can you bring me something of Cindy’s that she’s recently used?” At Frisker’s nod, Brandon said, “Bring it to my room. I’m going to see if I can pick up anything on my own radar. I’ll do the same with Erin’s things.”

He hoped his visions would give them a clue as to where the women were located. Not willing to think about what might be happening to them, Brandon raced back to the hut while Frisker headed to his own.



A pleased grin on his face, Carlos came out of his office. He had heard Brandon’s yell and came to the door to listen and watch. Even though he hadn’t heard what Brandon had said, it was obvious that he was upset.

“So, he knows the women are missing. That is good.” Carlos shivered with excitement at the thought of Erin subservient under him. Unfortunately, that would have to wait until the next morning, since he had to stay in view as an alibi for the kidnapping.

Scratching himself, he called, “Angelita, come here.”

The woman swallowed hard and followed her boss into his office.

“Take off your clothes and make it quick.”



Angelina was back at the desk within minutes and stood beside her friend gagging in revulsion that he’d touched her again.

“I feel so dirty! I’d like to hand him over to the Canadian after telling the man where Crash had his Senorita taken. I’d like to watch as Senor Brandon kills him with his bare hands.” Shuddering, Angelina spit on the floor. “His is such a disgusting pig!” Through her fury, tears filled her eyes.

“I know exactly what you mean.” After a short silence, Lolita looked at her friend with calculating eyes. “Maybe we *can* tell the Canadian, secretly. If he received a package from an unknown person to lead him to Crash’s hideout then maybe he could take care of the pig for us.” Lolita smiled her eyes hardening with vengeance.

Angelita nodded. "I think it could work. He can't fire us or have us killed if he's dead or in jail and doesn't know we sent him there. Let's do it!" she whispered.

The door to Carlo's office opened and the women suddenly were all business, talking to each other about issues with the guests.



It had been hours since the kidnapping when Erin finally began to stir. She groaned, feeling something soft beneath her aching head. Through the barest slits beneath her lashes, she looked up to see that Cindy cradled Erin's head in her lap on the floor of what appeared to be a storage room.

The only window had bars blocking the exit and the door was locked solid. A small cot rested in the corner but looked too well used to try. In another corner was a broken pot that emitted a horrendous smell.

Suddenly the phone in Erin's pocket rang. Before she could react, Cindy scrambled to grab it to prevent the men from hearing it. When she pulling it out of Erin's pocket on the second ring, she opened it and slipped it under her shirt as the door locks clicked. Erin closed her eyes again so the guards wouldn't know she was awake.

Cindy's voice rose to match the tone of the phone as she kept her head in her hands and ignored the man who entered the room.

The guard shouted at her in Spanish.

“What? I don’t know what you’re saying. Please...let us go!” Cindy’s voice rose again in a cry so loud that he held his ears.

Erin nearly cringed herself, but kept her features relaxed.

“You do not make the noise woman. You stay the quiet, si?” he scowled, trying to make her understand in his halting English.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m just so terribly afraid. Please will you tell me why we’re here?”

The guard seemed uncomfortable and didn’t answer her question only shaking his head. “No more noise. Okay?”

“Okay.” The door closed with a clang.

When he was gone, she picked up the phone and whispered, “Hello? Are you there?”

A hiss and groan gave Cindy hope as Erin began to move, her hand moving up to her head. “Shit. What the hell kind of truck hit me this time?”

A hysterical laugh escaped as Cindy whispered, “You get hit on the head often?”

“It’s a living.” Erin moved to get up but groaned, holding her head between both hands.

“It’s Brett Colton, Erin. He said you know him.”

“Yeah. You talk to him until the birds in my brain stop spinning. I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Okay, Erin. Hello, Brett? I’m Cindy, we need help.” she whispered then paused to listen.

“I’m okay, but Erin is still just waking up. They hit her over the head with a gun. She’s been out for hours now.

“What time is it?” Erin grumbled.

Cindy relayed the question then answered.

“Our time it’s about six o’clock at night. We were taken at around three p.m. and arrived half an hour ago. I was knocked out too. I don’t know if we stopped anywhere.” “Erin, Brett says that’s about two, to two-and-a-half hour’s travel and will help narrow down the search.”

When Erin tried to open her eyes again, she hissed out a breath and lay still. “Cindy, when you get off the phone, I want you to turn the power off so it doesn’t ring and give us away. It’ll also keep the battery from dying. Tell Brett I’ll call him when I can.”

“Okay, Erin. Brett asked us to describe where we are.”

“I don’t know about you, but I’m in hell with a lousy band of drummers. My head is killing me.”

Cindy brushed wayward strands of hair from Erin’s face as she spoke to Brett.

Telling him all she could, Cindy suddenly whispered frantically, “I hear someone coming.” Without another word she hung up and turned off the phone, slipping it under her shirt inside her waistband.

To keep up her act and hide the fact that Erin was awake, Cindy kept whispering to her.

“It’s going to be okay. Don’t you worry, Erin.” She repeated the words a number of times while she ran her hand over Erin’s hair in a repetitive motion, even after the door opened.

A second guard entered with a food tray and put it down. “You eat. Good food.”

Erin watched from beneath her lashes as the man nodded to the tray and shook his head in disgust when Cindy held her silence. The guard slammed the door behind him and left them alone.

As soon as he was gone, Erin tried to sit up but fell back, groaning.

“Erin please, stay put for a bit until you get your sea legs. I just spoke with Brett. He’s on his way here.” Cindy whispered close to Erin’s ear.

When Erin opened her eyes fast, she gasped then closing them again right away.

“You’d make a good cop, Cindy. You think fast on your feet.” Erin grabbed at her stomach, her face paling.

“Hang on, there is a container in the corner, let me get it,” Cindy hissed. Gently lowering Erin’s head, Cindy crawled over and was about to pick up the pot when she gagged.

“Just pick a corner anywhere, *Little Buddy*. That pot will only make you barf worse.”

Crawling to a corner near the door, Erin emptied the contents of her stomach. She had a concussion and was weak and shaky. Once finished, she crawled back to where Cindy sat waiting for her. The bottled water and dinner tray caught her eyes. “Cindy, check to see if the seals have been broken on the water bottles. If they haven’t, we can drink them.” Dropping her forehead onto the sandy ground, Erin lay still, breathing hard.

After Cindy checked them and found the seals intact, she brought two bottles over. “Erin, put your head back on my lap and I’ll open one for you.”

“You are a gift from the God’s, my friend. How long have I been out?”

“About three hours, give or take. I told Brett what happened. Cindy began shivering. Erin noticed the temperature was dropping.

“I have an idea that the boss, or whoever is in charge of this thing, wouldn’t want his two women captives to get sick or hurt any more than we already have. There’s no way we are eating that food, it could be drugged, and we require nicer digs than this with a functional washroom. So...we’re going to make some

demands and the idiots out there are going to give in! Let me tell you what we're going to do..."

While Erin explained her plan, Cindy nodded in agreement. A slow grin came to her face at Erin's deviousness and she nearly laughed aloud. "Ready?" Cindy asked Erin. She was standing at the door ready to begin stage one.

Erin nodded then grimaced, holding her head. "Let 'er rip!"

At the door, Cindy shouted and banged on it frantically. "Help, help me! Oh, please help me! My friend is dying! Help!" Cindy's scream rose to a shriek and then the locks clicked as the door was opened. Cindy ran back to Erin, dropped to her knees and began crying, "Erin? Oh, my God. Erin? Please, wake up."

Two guards came into the room, fear and uncertainty on their faces. One of them cleared his throat. "What is wrong, Senorita?"

"Oh, my God, I think you have killed her. She woke up for a short time and threw up," she pointed to the mess beside the man's foot and he jumped away from it. "...and then she fell asleep and now I can't wake her."

Cindy's demeanor turned to pure fury. Leaping to her feet, hands clenched into fist, she stared at the men with pure venom.

"Look at what you've done! If your boss sees her dead from your neglect, will he be happy with you?" she shrieked, her hands balled into fists as she jumped to her feet beside Erin.

Cindy gave them a star performance. Erin was lying on her side, her hair partially covering her face and hands limp beside her. As Erin watched them from beneath her lashes, she realized that they were terrified, glancing at each other often as Cindy raged.

Once she'd run out of things to shout, Cindy threw in the zinger, pointed her finger at them in accusation, and yelled, "You! You will find us a comfortable room to stay in, with clean beds, clean sheets and a proper bathroom. You will provide as much bottled water as we need and cans of food with a can opener. You will do everything you can to help me make her well or I will tell your employer that you are responsible for killing my friend!"

Her chest was heaving as she raised her voice even louder, "Do it now! Go!"

The men scrambled out of the room and quickly locked the door while they ran to do her bidding. Erin fought back a snicker, her grin hidden beneath her wild hair. When Erin's body shook with laughter as Cindy added a little more juice to her rampage, her voice shrieking, "Oh my God, she's convulsing, you bastards!"

Tears of mirth rolled down both women's cheeks.

"Cindy, you are such a great actress," Erin laughed, speaking low. "Thank God for that—I have to pee so bad I can taste it, and I am *not* peeing in that pot."

Gasping for breath, Cindy smothered her laughter with her hands. When the guards returned a few minutes later, it looked like Cindy was hysterical and the tears had them moving the 'unconscious woman' with the greatest care.

"If you hurt her again, I will scream so loud that your boss will hear me wherever in hell he is." Cindy cried in a strangled voice.

Erin began to shake. "Look what you've done! She's convulsing again. Damn you! Let's get moving before she dies right here!"

Without further hesitation, they were taken to a modern hut where the men placed Erin gently on a wide bed and left the room at top speed. The food, can opener, and water bottles were already sitting on the small table.

"So, where are we?" Erin whispered, not moving.

Holding her hand to her mouth as if she was upset, Cindy sat beside Erin, running her other hand over Erin's hair. She whispered, "We have a hut similar to the ones at the resort. Nice bathroom. No bars on the windows but guards out front and back. I'm going to shut the drapes on the patio doors so you can use the washroom. I'm hungry. I think I'll check out the canned food."

The guards would never know that Erin was fine or that Cindy was laughing in delight at acquiring the new prison. She handed Erin the cell so she could phone Brett. The guards hadn't frisked the women to see if they had any weapons or phones. Things were finally looking up.



Frisker handed Brandon a bottle of water. The man was shaking and pale as a ghost. He had used Cindy's hairbrush to bring on a vision and was trying to stay awake to tell Frisker what he'd seen.

"They're okay, for now. They've been taken to a hut similar to this one, but not close to the resort. Erin looked like she was hurt, holding her head, but Cindy was grinning—I think they're fine. They were alone in the room."

"Brandon, why don't you lie down and sleep for a while? Help is on the way and you'll need your strength. I'll bring you some food in an hour or so." Frisker put his hand on Brandon's shoulder in a gesture of comfort.

Nodding, Brandon dropped down on the bed and fell into a deep healing sleep.



In the early hours of the morning, Brett, Jessie, and Crosby arrived at the resort. Crosby acted as though he didn't know the other two men and was assigned a room in the same building. Rather than a hut, Brett and Jessie were given a luxury suite in one of the small apartment complexes. The room had two queen sized beds and an extra large bathroom.



When a quiet knock on the door of the hut broke the stillness of the night, Brandon yanked it open fast.

“Yes, what—Oh, you must be her partner, Crosby. I saw you talking to her at the wedding. Come in.” Brandon’s eyes scanned the area behind the man.

“Thanks.” Crosby held out his hand.

Brandon shook it. “Brett? Jessie?”

“They’re here too.”

Crosby entered the room with him. Frisker stood silent, his appearance not much better than Brandon’s. Crosby nodded then handed Brandon a cell phone. “Just press ‘A’ on the speed dial and you’ll get Brett’s cell. He’s in a room near mine waiting for your call. Oh, wait. I found this outside. It was on your doorstep.” Crosby held out an envelope.

Brandon was about to take it, but Crosby shook his head. “Don’t touch it. There could be fingerprints. I’ll open it so we can read it.” Crosby took out his penknife and opened the envelope, carefully sliding the sheet of notepaper out.

Once it lay flat on the table, the three men were silent as they read the missive together.

“Looks like you have some good friends, Brandon. Let’s get Brett on the phone.” Crosby said, a wide grin on his face.



Brett answered on the first ring. “Brandon. How are you doing?”

“We just got a note, Brett. It’s the directions to where Erin and Cindy are being held. It seems Carlos has some enemies.” Brandon’s voice was husky from lack of sleep.

“Where is the location?”

After telling Brett what the note said, there were a few moments of silence.

“Brandon. That address jives with the location of property owned by one Carlo Cavazos—Is Crosby still there?”

“Yeah, have you heard anything?” Brandon asked.

“As a matter of fact, I have. I spoke with Erin a few minutes ago. Seems the men who took them didn’t think to look for her cell phone. She and Cindy pulled a fast one on the kidnappers and the girls are cozy as can be, waiting for us to rescue them. Are you up to it?”

“Nothing will stop me. Let’s do it.” Brandon was more than ready. What do you have in mind?” he asked, his voice animated with new life. Brandon put the phone on speaker while Brett outlined their plan. Once he hung up, he turned to Frisker.

“Let’s go get our women back!”

For the first time since Erin disappeared, Brandon was grinning and laughing as he told Frisker what the girls had done to make their situation better.

Frisker chuckled at Cindy's acting abilities. "I'll have to remember that when she tries to pull the wool over my eyes," he grinned, then his eyes hardened. "How do we rescue them?"

"We wake up Super Boy. Let's break out the night vision goggles Brett brought with him and get going." Once Frisker took off to get the pilot, Crosby went outside to keep an eye on the area.

As an afterthought, Brandon pulled out the two vests from Erin's suitcase and the two sets of handcuffs. At the last minute, he slipped the gun in the back of his waistband, careful not to let the men see it. He put both vests on and threw his light jacket over them, slipping the cuffs into his pockets then left the room.



"The guys are going to be really pissed, especially when they find us in our kinky disguises."

Tina's husky laugh brought the attention of a couple of men sitting across the aisle. She glanced at them a moment then completely ignored them.

"My brother and Erin are in danger and I'm going to make sure that his vision doesn't come true. I don't care what Brett says or does to me. It's my brother were talking about!" Lana's started to get angry as her fear escalated.

In a quick move, Tina grabbed the plastic cup that floated in front of her, and hissed, "Ixnay on the emper-tay! Your temper is going to get us in trouble."

Besides making things float, fly, and crash to the ground when Lana got angry, machinery and computers tended to malfunction. She knew it wasn't a good idea to lose her temper in a plane thousands of feet in the air.

"Sorry. It's hard to keep in control when your husband won't let you help your own brother when he's in danger." Lana met Tina's soft brown gaze. "I will not lose my brother, Erin, or Cindy. We'll stop the kidnappers one way or another."

"That I don't doubt, my friend—We're landing in a few minutes. Buckle up."

Chapter 18

Everyone To The Rescue

“Brandon, I’m asking you to use one of your other jumpers. You know what might happen if you come with us.” Brett tried to reason with Brandon about going on the rescue mission.

“You’re wasting darkness, Brett. I’m going, so shut up and get into your harness, now!”

Brandon was firm in his decision, his chin raised, lips pursed in a tight line, and eyes hard as marbles. There was no way Brett was going to talk him out of it.

“You’re just as stubborn as your sister,” Brett grumbled, buckling up the straps.

Super Boy had his plane warmed up and Frisker was loading in it with Jessie. Brandon followed Brett inside and closed the door. “Take off, Super Boy,” he yelled, banging his fist twice on the wall between them.

The small Cessna was in the air in minutes. Super Boy had the coordinates and would do the fly over, returning to the zone to organize a road crew that

would pick up the group when they rescued the girls. Unfortunately, by ground it would take a lot longer to reach the destination.



As Jessie clenched his hands into fists, the plane began to climb on a sharp angle. Brandon could tell the man wasn't thrilled about flying in the tiny plane, and even less so about jumping.

Frisker grinned. "First time jumping can be scary, even for a cop," he yelled over the noise of the engine.

The quick glare Jessie shot at Frisker nearly made Brandon grin as Jessie yelled back, "I'm fine. How soon do we jump?"

"Should be another twenty minutes or so." Frisker's knowing look obviously grated on Jessie's already jangled nerves.

"Do we have our wind speed yet?" Brandon yelled at Super Boy.

"Yup! Nice and calm. It's a good day for a jump. I have to do a flyover first to check it out, but you should have no problems as long as you can find a place to land. Thankfully you still have some time before you lose the night." Super Boy went back to his flying.



"Brandon. How close can we get?" Brett shouted.

“Based on topographic maps, there should be a clear area a couple of miles south of the building—Erin hasn’t called. Should I be worried?”

“She’s probably sleeping. She has a concussion, but told me it’s nothing to worry about. Let’s get to the ground and check out the compound.”

Brett looked away from Brandon. Since it was still dark as pitch, he knew that for Brett and Jessie, skydiving in the dark, especially on his first jump was going to be unsettling to say the least.

The men set up the harnesses to Tandem Jump and spent the next few minutes checking the gear. Brett and Jessie checked their weapons, securing them so they wouldn’t fall out of their safety harnesses during the jump.

“Coming up, Stomper. Two minutes,” yelled Super Boy from the cockpit.

Brandon slid the door open and stared out with the night vision goggles. Frisker wore the other pair. When Super Boy yelled the all clear, Frisker moved to the door, with Jessie in front of him. At Brandon’s okay, he dove out the door.



Following right behind Frisker and Jessie, Brandon and Brett soared in the darkness. Brandon spoke into his radio, “Frisker, adjust your decent five degrees north by northwest. You’re off target.” In seconds, Frisker was back on track and a moment later pulled the ripcord.

Brandon did the same with Brett and guided them to the open area below. Within the next hour, they would be at the compound and Erin and Cindy would be safe—He hoped.



The sun was just rising as a lone jogger ran along the empty stretch of beach with his dog, staying just above the rolling waves as they rushed in and receded from the sandy shore. When the dog took off, barking as it ran off, the man yelled, calling him back, but the dog kept going.

It stopped down the beach sniffing at a large dark mass that appeared to be a dolphin washed ashore. When he got closer, the jogger realized that it was a man. He lay on there still in death, buffeted by the waves. As he stood by the body, the jogger shuddered. The body was bloated, the sightless eyes staring beneath the bullet hole in the center of the his forehead.



Entering the lobby, Lana and Tina became the main focus of attention. Men drooled and women frowned. Wearing suggestive clothing and makeup that accented their features, they strutted along, luring men like moths to a flame.

Their curvy bodies were barely incased in satin shorts and metallic satin cowl neck tank tops Tina's disguise was sexy and evocative while Lana's was

voluptuous and erotic, calling men to come hither. They'd painted their lips red aiming for the look of glorified hookers on the prowl.

"Brett will kill me if he catches me looking like this," Lana hissed at Tina.

Soaking up the attention, Tina laughed low in her throat. "I can only hope that Jessie catches me. I'd love to see his face and...pay the price!"

Giggling, Lana murmured, "I can just imagine what Jessie will say. You love pissing him off, don't you?"

"Sure do! It's a lot of fun. You should try it with Brett sometime. The results can be...yummy." Tina's throaty laughter had men dropping their jaws as she walked past them. She reveled in her woman power.



When he saw the women coming up to the main desk from the security screen in his office, Carlos nearly fell off his chair. He grabbed himself and licked his lips. Scrambling to the mirror, he made sure he was immaculate, hands sliding over his perfectly straight hair. Adjusting his white suit around his groin, he made sure all was in order before finally exiting the room to greet the women.



Standing back, Lana watched while Tina spoke to the women at the desk. "Could I speak to the manager?"

Since Lana and Tina had been privy to the information that Brett and Jessie had about Carlos Cavazos, they knew exactly which pigeon they were going to work on right away.

The women behind the desk seemed stunned at the appearance of the white women and remained quiet, staring. When Carlos opened his office door, they both cringed and their eyes shot to the ground.

So, these women are being abused by that jackass. Lana knew an abused woman when she saw one, in this case two. Struggling to contain her fury, she let Tina take over the show.

“Excuse me, I am the manager. How can I be of assistance to you lovely ladies?” His eyes looked no higher than their chests. Taking Tina’s hand he slobbered over the back of her knuckles with his idea of a kiss then followed the same procedure with Lana.

Swallowing her revulsion, Lana did her best to keep a straight face, fighting the urge to scrub the back of her hand on her nearly nonexistent shorts.

A coffee cup smashed to the floor behind him and he turned to yell at his employees but stopping as though he realized that the women in front of him were more important. The two employees stared at the cup in confusion. Neither one had been near it when it fell from the center of the counter.

“Welllll...” Tina drawled the word. “It just so happens that my friend Anna and I are here for some *fun*, if you know what I mean.” Tina dragged the words out, leaning forward slightly and flexing her breasts at his drooling face. “We want to make sure that we are assigned to the *very* best room you have. You see...we are *very* close. We do *everything* together.” At Carlos’ glazed look, Tina tipped his chin up with her finger. “Can you help us?”

Snapping out of his daze, he turned and snarled at the girls in Spanish.

Tina draped her arm over Lana’s shoulders and was running her fingers up and down her arm while Lana did her best not to giggle at her friend’s outrageous actions.

Carlos said in a strangled voice, “We have the *very* best room for you. You do want to share, do you not?” He looked like a puppy waiting for a biscuit.

After a slow nod, Lana purred and looked affectionately at Tina. “Oh, yes. We certainly do like to...*share*. How will we find this room?”

With a loud yell, Carlos had two men running to get the women’s bags, tripping over each other.

“Why thank you, darling—Will we...see you around later?” Tina teased.

“Oh, *si*, Senorita, you can bet on it.” He swiped his hand over his hair.

“We look forward to it. Don’t we, *kitten*?” Tina kissed Lana on the cheek, leaving a lipstick smudge.

A strange sound left Lana's throat at Tina's use of Brett's pet name for her, Lana nodded and swatted Tina on the butt, hard.

After Tina winked at the speechless man, the women followed the porters to the room, exaggerating the wiggle in their hips as they walked away from the creepy man.

"Nice touch, babe. Want me to spank you too?" Tina teased in a hushed whisper.

"You try it and I'll break every dish in your house...from here!" Lana warned, fighting to keep a straight face. "Let's get to the room fast. I need to wash my hand. I think something is crawling all over it."

"I agree with you one-hundred percent."

Lana looked around, studying the layout of the place. She wondered if Brett and Jessie were still at the resort or if they'd already left to look for the women. Freezing in surprise, Lana whispered, "Oh boy, there's Erin's partner, Crosby."

"It's too late to avoid him now since he's seen us, so just ignore him

"Sure, but he looks pissed. I bet he calls Brett right away." Lana tried to be nonchalant, but she was shaking. When Brett got angry, he was very intimidating. Not that he'd hurt her, but he sure would make things uncomfortable for her.

Tina gave a slight nod to Crosby to indicate she wanted him to follow them. Lana hoped they could postpone his call to the men for as long as possible.

They finally reached the room, much to Lana's relief.



After tipping the porters, Tina shut the door behind their dazed faces and snickered. It only took a few minutes for Crosby to knock. Tina let him in and quickly closed the door behind him.

Pointing her finger at his chest, she narrowed her eyes and warned, "You will not tell the guys a thing, Crosby, do you hear me?"

He shook his head. "Girls, you have to be kidding me. Who's scarier, you or them?" he asked with confidence.

Tina just raised a brow.

"Okay, so it's very close. You know I have to tell them. What the hell are you doing here anyway?" he asked, staring at the outfits they were wearing.

"Using our *assets*! We're going to help them close up this mission, and you are not going to tell them a thing. Where are they anyway?" Tina asked changing the subject.

"They're on a mission and you two are not leaving this room until they get back!" Crosby brought his cop mode into gear, his arms crossed over his chest. His chin was raised in stubborn assurance.

“So what are *you* doing here, Crosby? Did you get left out of the fun? Did they make you stay here to do nothing until they get back? Afraid you might get hurt or something?” Lana asked.

Since cops usually loved to get into the thick of things, Lana figured she was on the right track.

His confident attitude slipped a little, showing his hand. “Doesn’t matter about what I’m doing. You two aren’t getting yourselves into trouble. You’ll stay here.”

Narrowing her eyes, Tina pushed a little harder. “Since you won’t tell us where our boys are, wouldn’t you rather help us catch the drug dealers and have that mess all cleared up before they get back? We make really great decoys.”

Lana knew Tina had hit the jackpot when he tried another weak protest, “How can *you* catch the dealers? You haven’t got any cop training and you don’t know any of the players.”

Tina shrugged. “We were going to just sit around the pool in our bikinis and wait for them to approach us. Now how dangerous can that be? We couldn’t possibly get into trouble that way in plain sight of everyone, could we, Crosby?”

Lana felt triumphant when Crosby finally caved in. After all, they’d promised they would be sitting around the pool. He would be watching them every minute. It was a perfect deal.

“Okay then, I’ll let you do this if you promise you won’t leave the pool area, for anything. I’ll be close by at all times.” A glitter of excitement showed in his eyes.

Looking over at Lana, Tina grinned. Together, they said, “Deal!”

Crosby left the room while the women changed into their bathing suits. Tiny, bikini bathing suits! Once they’d packed up their suntan lotion, beach towels, placed sarongs around their waists and large straw sunhats on their heads, they left the room, heading to the pool. Both of them ignored Crosby, who followed at a distance. The heat of the day was beginning to rise. It was the perfect time to spring a trap!



If landing in the dark wasn’t intimidating enough, the whole jumping experience had been hard on Jessie. He was barely out of his harness before he ran for the bushes and lost the contents of his stomach.

Keeping his laughter to himself, Brandon grinned. He admired Jessie for going through the whole jump without complaint even though he was afraid. Brandon knew when a jumper was scared, and Jessie was scared through and through, yet he was a tough cop and had handled it well.

Brandon and Brett had landed seconds after the other two men and moved in to gather the chute for temporary packing. The knapsack sized rig bag would be easy enough to carry.

Only slightly recovered, Jessie said, “Let me have the night vision goggles, Frisker.”

Without a word, Frisker handed them over.

Brett took the other pair of goggles and tried to see where they were.

Brandon pointed to the north.

“The compound is just over a mile away. Since we jumped in the dark, it gives us the element of surprise. We’ll have to keep it quiet though. Noise travels far in this terrain,” Brandon murmured to Brett.

Once the chutes were packed up, the men began their hike. They remained silent while they traveled, careful to make little noise. There was no way of knowing what kind of security precautions there were at the compound.

Brandon’s heart began to pound. He hoped Erin and Cindy were okay, and prayed that they weren’t too late to save them!



When she awoke the next morning, Erin found her headache much easier to deal with. *Damn, it would be nice to have a hot shower and a toothbrush.* Able to open her eyes without the excruciating pain of the night before, she looked over at Cindy

curled up beside her, and smiled. Her friend sure had spunk. She hadn't even flinched when she was bullying those big guards. Cindy was only five foot three, yet she had taken on two men who were close to six feet and twice the size of her petite form.

It was just barely light out now, a good time to call Brett. As soon as she'd slipped the phone out of her pocket, she dialed his number. He answered before the first ring went completely through.

"Hello, Erin?" he whispered.

"Yes, where are you?" she asked, also whispering.

"About fifty feet from the complex you're relaxing in," Brett joked. "Hold on a second." He murmured something in the background then tears pricked her eyes as Brandon's welcome voice came on the phone. Her heart skipped a few beats as his warmth surrounded it.

"Erin. Are you all right?" Brandon whispered.

A sob escaped, "We're both fine. What are you doing here?"

"Well, I think they call it rescuing you. Are you up for it?"

His deep, confident voice filled her with relief. "Sure we are. But this place is apparently heavily guarded. I only had a quick peek when they were moving me, but I noticed there were two guards at the gate, the two guarding us, and a few

more scattered throughout the compound. Cindy counted six, all of them heavily armed—Did BLT get out of Mexico safely?”

“Yeah, she’s in Canada. Brett said she came out of her coma on the flight. She’s going to be just fine. She can nail the dealers.” Brandon hesitated while Brett spoke to him in the background.

“Brett said we might have to wait a while before we head in. Can you get out of the room?”

“Based on what I’ve seen, we have one guard out front and one out back. I can take them if Cindy distracts them, and we aren’t far from the tree line. There’s a bent palm right behind the hut we’re in and a large bougainvillea bush with purple flowers just to the left. On the back porch are a few painted Mexican pots about two feet tall, and two chairs made from some kind of twigs or vines.” Erin moved back from the window when the guard came into view.

“I see it. We aren’t far from there. The phone is on vibrate and call me when you’re ready for me to come charging in with my shining armor,” Brandon quipped, but Erin heard the strain in his voice. She knew he was worried about the vision coming true.

With a tremulous smile, Erin started to speak but heard the door lock jiggle as someone began to open it, and hissed, “Gotta go.” On the run, she hung up and

slipped the phone back into her pocket, and lay down on the bed. Cindy was just waking up.

“They’re coming in. Follow my lead kiddo,” Erin whispered and feigned sleep.

The door swung open slowly and the guard stepped into the room with a tray of canned food. He cleared his throat, but they didn’t budge. Moving over to the bed, he put the tray down on the small table and turned to look at Erin. He bent down to peer into her face, and suddenly ended up flat on his back with a broken nose. Before he could call out, Erin leapt on him, driving her fist across his jaw and knocked him out.

She shook her hand to relieve the pain then went to the door and listened. With a wave, she motioned to Cindy and urged her to do the same at the back door.

Carefully opening it, Erin peered outside. It was light now and she didn’t see any guards nearby so she closed it tight and locked it.

“I’m going to tie this one up, but first I want to lure the other one in here and take him out too. Our guys are about a hundred feet away. You ready to be rescued?”

Relief washed over Cindy’s face. “You bet I am, partner! Tell me what to do.”

Erin explained her plan and moved the guard into position on the bed before arranging her body to look like she was still unconscious beside him. A quick wink was Cindy's signal to begin.

In one swipe, Cindy whipped open the curtain and began banging on the patio door window, waving at the guard frantically, while she managed to look terrified.

The guard ran to the glass door and fumbled with the lock, glancing at the other guard on the bed in shock. Erin had planned on his fear of the boss killing any man who tried to touch the women before he got there and made it look like the guard had ignored the warning.

Once the door was opened, he asked in Spanish, "What happened? Juan! What are you doing, you fool?"

Cindy spoke fast and raised her voice to nearly a scream as she moved over to the bed.

"He came into bring the food then shoved me off the bed. My friend hasn't even woken up since your guard tried to kill her yesterday but this creep jumped into bed with her. Do something!"

She appeared tearful as she urged the guard to step forward. The guard edged closer, leaning over to nudge the sleeping guard.

Erin sprang up and caught him across the jaw, but he didn't go down. Not giving him time to react, she slammed her fist down on his arm as he tried to reach for his gun. His other arm swung around, his fist landing a heavy blow to Erin's cheek, snapping her head to the side.

He moved in, his fist raised up to hit her again, but Erin slammed her shoulder into his stomach and he gasped for breath. Fingers gripping her hair, he pulled her head up and was about to hit her again when there was a loud crash and his surprised expression changed as his eyes rolled back in his head and he fell to the floor.

Shrugging, Cindy stepped over the broken vase. "Sorry. I know you were having fun, but we need to get moving if you're going to save my life." At Erin's laugh, Cindy grinned.

"Help me carry them to the bathtub and we'll tie them up and gag them."

It took a while to get the men in place and restrained. Erin was about to call Brandon to tell him that they were ready when her phone vibrated.

"Yeah?"

"Incoming. Carlos himself has arrived. You better get out of there." Brett whispered.

"Two down. The coast is clear. Expect Cindy first, I'll be backing her up with one of my new guns." After closing the phone, Erin said in a hushed voice,

“Let’s block the front door and head out the back. Your boyfriend is waiting for you.”

“Man! I am going to kiss him so much, he won’t be able to speak for a week,” Cindy whispered.

Once the dresser was shoved against the door, Erin checked the area behind the hut and finally waved Cindy closer. Erin whispered in her ear, “Keep as low as you can. Drop to the ground if you see anyone and stay there. Head straight past that large palm tree, I’ll be right behind you.” After one final check she nodded. “Go Cindy! Careful now.”

Cindy hugged Erin for a moment. “Thank you, Erin. You’re the best.” Then she left the building.

No one saw Cindy cross the compound and slip past the palm tree. Everything looked clear until someone tried to open the front door. Erin froze and scanned the area before trying to make a run for it. As she turned to follow Cindy, she was stopped in her tracks by two burly guards with guns who came from either the side of the hut.

Hands rising in surrender, Erin held her gun loose in her fingertips and let the men capture her. Now was not the time to fight. One guard took the gun from her hand and the one that was tucked into her waistband behind her back while the other one held his on her.

Since the odds weren't in her favor and she wanted to make sure that Cindy had escaped, she allowed them to capture her. She would just have to wait for another opportunity.

Chapter Nineteen

Laying The Groundwork

“Hon, can you rub some of this tanning lotion on my back please?” Tina smiled at Lana and acted bored.

“Sure, baby. Roll on your stomach.” Lana wasn’t enjoying being the center of attention like Tina was. There were men all around them staring, drooling, and trying unsuccessfully to hide the unusual shape of their shorts.

Lana muttered under her breath to Tina, “You owe me big time for this one, my friend. I’m going to need a very long shower with a ton of soap to get rid of the creepy crawly feeling all over my skin.”

After a husky laugh low in her throat,, Tina sighed aloud and said in a passion-filled voice. “Oh, baby, that’s just wonderful. You have the best hands!”

Lana had to clear her throat before she could speak then raised her voice a little. “Your skin is so smooth and silky, *puddin’ pops*. I love the way it feels.” Her hands moved slowly up and down Tina’s smooth skin, covering every bare inch. Lana kept her eyes on Tina’s back, completely ignoring the men.

“Bingo, Lana. I think those are the men that fit the description Erin gave Crosby. Time to catch a jerk or two,” Tina whispered. With her eyes half shut, she watched four muscular men approach. The others moved back out of the way, intimidated as the one with the bruised eyes and swollen, broken nose shoved them aside. Lana assumed he was the one Erin had fought with on the beach.

“Hey, babe, you chicks looking for a little fun?” He sat down on the lounge chair beside Tina, with confident arrogance.

Tina opened one eye. “I doubt you’d have the kind of *fun* we’re looking for, buddy.” She went back to relaxing under Lana’s ministrations.

With outrageous daring, he ran a finger down Tina’s arm. “Oh, I might have *just* what you’re looking for. What did you have in mind?”

She gave an exaggerated sigh then rose up on her elbows to look him in the eye. With her arms, she squeezed her breasts together but made it look accidental. His eyes dropped to view her ample cleavage.

“We’re from Canada. We like white, fluffy snow. I doubt you’d have any *snow* down here.”

At her reference to cocaine, he grinned. “I can build you a mountain of snow to ski on if you want me to, *chicky*. How much are you looking to buy?”

“How much you got?” Tina turned over on her back, and purred, “Do my front for me, baby, will you?”

As Lana bit back a grin, she lowered her lashes and filled her hand with lotion then massaged it over Tina's hard stomach. The four men followed every movement of Lana's hand and she heard a few of them swallow hard.

"I've got as much as you need," he said, his voice hoarse now.

"We want enough to last two weeks, babe," Lana whispered loud enough for the men to hear her.

Tina looked over at Lana with calculating eyes. "Why don't we stay an extra few weeks, *kitten*? That way we can have a whole lot of fun. Daddy doesn't care how long I'm away."

As she fought to hold back her laughter at Tina's use of Brett's nickname for Lana, , she kept her expression subservient and nodded. "Okay *hon*, whatever you want."

Tina shrugged. "Make it enough for both of us for four weeks plus a little *extra* for our...friends." Tina dropped her head back, arching her neck while Lana rubbed cream on her chest.

Audible groans came from the men.

Lifting her head again, Tina looked at him, all business. "When and where?"

It appeared that the man was lost in lurid thoughts so she repeated herself. "When...and where? Oh, and I don't know your name. Are you staying here at the resort?"

He snapped out of his daze, he nodded. "It's Rob Parsons. I'm here at the resort. If you want company to go with the...*snow*...let me know. I'd give you a *very* good time." He finished with a leering grin, his eyes soaking up the sight of her body. "I can bring it to you before dinner tonight. Be in your room."

She raised an eyebrow in query. "Don't you need to know which room we're in?"

He shook his head and licked his lower lip. "No. I can find out. See you later." He stood up, adjusted his snug shorts and left with his cohorts.

Waiting until they were out of sight, Tina looked up at Lana. "Jackpot!"

Crosby lay down on the lounge chair beside her and closed his eyes. He murmured, "Nice job, ladies. I'll have backup ready."

Tina grinned at Lana, pretending she hadn't noticed him lying there. "Well, isn't that nice. Our first day here, and already we're having a party!"

Lana joined her in laughter but it faded fast as she thought about the danger Brett and the others were in. The beautiful paradise was filled with peril on all sides.



A man stood alone at the bar watching their every move as the woman and man conversed. In the shadows of a palm bush, he pulled out his cell phone, spoke quickly to someone in Spanish then closed it. He watched as the two women

walked away from the pool followed by another man who tried to appear like he didn't know them.



Frisker's face lit up with joy as Cindy came into view. She was about fifty yards away, keeping low and running straight toward him. He moved to meet her, silent. When she looked up and saw him, tears filled her eyes then gasped and threw up her arms, her body slamming into his. His arms wrapped around her in a tight embrace as he spun in a circle as he kissed her, his lips locked with hers.

Brandon turn back to look for Erin to show, his entire body tensing. When she didn't come into view, he made a move to go find her but Jessie grabbed his arm, shaking his head.

Brett came racing out of the woods behind the hut, fury on his face. Brandon's stomach hit the ground at his look.

"They caught her. We have to move fast and leave this area, circle around. We have to get away from this area. Let's go." Brett whispered in a harsh tone and moved toward the west, keeping low.

Cindy looked around, frantic, "Where—"

Frisker's hand covered her mouth. "Shhh. She got caught. Let's move before they come looking for us."

Tears blurred Cindy's eyes. "No—Oh, my God, Erin!"

When Frisker took her hand, signaling her to silence with a finger to his lips, she went with him, following Brett as he disappeared into the bush.

“Brandon, let’s move.” Jessie whispered.

On wooden legs, Brandon followed the group.



Blood dripped from her lip as another fist shot out and rocked her head to the side. She took a deep breath and spat blood on the floor near Carlos’ foot.

The man jumped back as though a snake had bitten him, his immaculate white pants splattered with her blood.

Anger had his face flushing deep red. “You will tell me where she went. She cannot have gone far. Where did you hide her?”

Erin grinned, with blood covering her teeth, and spat again. “I told her to hide in your car, of course.” Satisfaction made Erin snicker when Carlos sent one of his men to check the car. *Idiot!*

“You Canadian women are so stupid! I captured you easily and now I have stopped you from escaping. I will stop her too. You will see.” Carlos’ arrogance would work to Erin’s advantage if she could keep him distracted long enough for the rescue team to make their move.

Erin spoke in Spanish, “Huh! It was your *men* who caught us, not you. All you do all day is sit on your fat ass and tell them what to do. That is, when you

aren't staring in your mirror or slobbering over women's hands—Oh, by the way, you should put disinfectant in the hotel rooms. I've heard many women ask for it after meeting you.”

At his expression of fury when he clued in to what she meant, Erin laughed at him and prepared for more punishment. Carlos became nearly speechless with fury, his face a bright red and eyes bulging as he stared down at her.

From the looks on their faces, the guards admired Erin for standing up to him since none of them did. He was a bully who ordered others to do his dirty work then took the credit for himself. She despised that kind of criminal.

“Put her on her knees,” he ordered.

Forcing Erin to her knees, the two guards held her arms out to the side rendering her helpless.

Carlos grabbed her hair and yanked her head back. “Now we will see how you laugh when you have to swallow me.”

She snorted and stared into Carlos' eyes with a venomous expression. “Think *Bobbitt!*” she growled.

Surprise on his face, Carlos paused in undoing his pants. “What does that mean?”

With an intimidating grin and narrowed eyes that made him take a step backward, she explained, “A woman named Bobbitt cut off her husband's dick

because he was abusing her. It means that if you think you're going to put that tiny excuse for a penis in my mouth, you'd better be prepared to lose it. I have very...sharp...teeth." Erin gnashed her teeth together twice, showing him she meant business.

Carlos was saved from answering when his guard returned. "No sign of the Senorita, boss."

Returning his gaze to Erin, Carlos seemed unsure of what to do next until a knowing look came over his face. "Take her to the factory. Make sure she samples some of our 'special' blend. Give her a little extra."

The two guards lifted her to her feet.

Erin spat on Carlos' jacket, taking pleasure in his reaction when he jumped back in alarm. "What's the matter, Carlos? You have to get your women stoned to do anything with them? Boy, are you pathetic. It's no wonder they all cringe when you walk in. You're so disgusting!"

He lost patience with her and smacked her across the face again, taking out his handkerchief to clean the blood from his hands.

"Oh, was that supposed to hurt? Wimp! You are weak, you have a puny little dick, and you disgust me!" Poison laced her voice, as her fury built.

"Get her out of here now!" he shrieked in Spanish.

Erin glared at him until they left the hut then walked between the two men who held her arms in a firm grip. She spoke to them in Spanish, “I can’t believe you two take orders from that bastard. He is so useless. You two could run this operation way better than he could—Why don’t you just take over and kick his ass out?” she urged.

The men looked over at each other, considering her idea. “Senorita, we work for him. It wouldn’t be right to take over. He does take care of us and our families.”

She stopped walking, forcing them to also. “You aren’t afraid of his fat ass are you? He is weak and you both are...quite strong.” She took a measured look at each of their bodies, giving them admiring glances to make them feel strong and handsome.

“Seems to me he has nothing to offer, where you both have...everything a girl could want.” Her gaze shifted to one man’s groin as she licked her bloody lip.

She shook her head and started walking again. “It’s too bad you know? All those women who would love to get their hands on two fine looking men like you and they have to get stuck with that pig.” She shuddered dramatically. “But, you have to kill me now, so let’s just get it over with.”

As she walked along and sighed dramatically, she noticed Brett hiding behind a large palm tree twenty feet ahead of them. She kept talking to distract them.

“Boys, let me tell you a little secret,” she murmured, which made them both lean in closer to hear what she had to say. “It’s always been my fantasy to have *two* handsome men make love to me at the same time. Since I’m going to die anyway...”

Turning to look at one, and then the other, she pouted. “Not interested?” She shrugged as she directed them toward the tree.

The man on her left stopped her. “No, Senorita, wait—If...if you want to have some fun before we take you to the factory, I think we could arrange it.” He looked over his shoulder and then nodded at his partner. “We could take some time with you. I think you will like us. Both of us would be very good for you.”

“Really?” she cooed. “Oh, that would be wonderful. I haven’t had...well, you know, in a very long time, and since I’m going to die anyway...well. Let’s go over there in the bushes where they can’t find us.” Nodding toward the trees past where Brett was hiding, she smiled and fluttered her eyes at the men to hold their attention.

The one on the right touched her bruised cheek and leaned over to seize her lips with his. She gave him a passionate kiss, trying not to gag. The grip on her arms loosened as she began to talk in hushed whispers about the things she was going to do to their bodies. They were focused on her completely as they walked closer to the trees.



Instead of taking them down right away, Brett let Erin lead them into the bush where Brandon, Jessie, and Frisker were waiting. He snickered when he heard the sound of struggles as he kept his eyes on the compound. The noise finally stopped and Jessie joined him in his hiding spot.

“Well Erin sure had them eating out of her hands. We should have just stayed by the pool at the resort.”

Brett chuckled. “Erin is something, that girl. Brandon’s got his hands full.”

Watching the compound, Brett tensed. “There’s Brandon’s buddy, Ripper; George Carson. After Brandon fired him, he did a lot of vandalism around the zone in Toronto. He’s the one that Brandon suspects fixed three chutes to fail. We couldn’t get any proof, but it looks like he’s up to his elbows in illegal drugs and kidnapping.” Brett whispered, “Jessie check on the progress with the two guards and I’ll keep watch.”

Jessie nodded and vanished into the bushes once again.



When Erin’s guards relaxed and loosened their grip on her arms, she didn’t pull away but giggled and led them forward into the forest, flirting outrageously. Just inside the trees one of them placed his hand on her lower back. Erin immediately did a back kick into his stomach, taking away his ability to yell and spun toward his buddy, surprised to find he was gone.

With both hands, she grabbed the guard by his shirt lapels and flipped him over onto his back then slammed her fist into his jaw, knocking him out. She shook out her aching hand and tensed at the noise coming from behind her. Though she'd expected the other guard, she saw Brandon run out of the trees toward her.

Tears filled her eyes as she jumped up and ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck. He held her in a death grip, as she began shaking with relief.

For a moment he pulled away and studied her face, frowning. As he brushed his fingers over her bruises and swollen lip, he tensed. His eyes hardened in fury at what they had done to her.

When Erin tried to pull him in for a kiss, he held back.

"Are you all right?" He cupped her cheeks in his palms as he studied her face.

"I'm fine now that I'm with you. Kiss me, please?" she whispered.

His lips captured hers gently but she had better ideas and pulled his head close, ignoring the pain and kissing him with all of her heart behind it.

A quiet clearing of his throat, Frisker interrupted the reunion as he stood near them with Cindy.

"You think maybe you two can continue that later? We have a job to do!" He nodded toward the two unconscious men.

When Erin saw Cindy, she turned and put her arms out. Cindy cried out softly as Erin pulled her close. “It’s all right now, pal. You’re going to be just fine.”

A sob escaped as Cindy touched Erin’s face. “You let me get away and sacrificed yourself. I can’t believe you did that for me!”

A quiet chuckle slipped out as Erin murmured, “You did great, Cindy. I couldn’t have helped you escape without all the work you did getting us the hut and catching those two guards. You’re my hero!”

Amazement filled Cindy’s eyes. “I’m the hero? Why you—”

“Ladies, we need to keep moving. Let’s get these two tied up and gagged. You can fight over who gets to be the hero later.” Frisker grinned. They went to work together.



After they’d secured the guards, Brett and Jessie came back to talk to everyone. Now they had six people against at least a dozen; much better odds. Erin had two guns, confiscated from her guards and Jessie and Brett were armed. Brandon had Erin’s gun but didn’t let the others know about it since he wasn’t registered to use firearms. Brett, Jessie, and Erin were the cops. They led the show.

In pairs, they were going to spread out around the compound and take out their opponents a few at a time. It was mid afternoon. There were about six hours

left of daylight and the rescue crew would be along any time. They wanted to lower the odds before help arrived to minimize anyone getting hurt.

“We need a distraction,” said Brett.

Before Erin could speak up, Brandon hissed, “You’ve already been enough of a distraction, so don’t even say it!”

Raising her eyebrow, she grinned. “That’s not what I was going to say, but thanks for the vote of confidence.” Turning to Brett, a smile still on her face, she said, “They have a cocaine factory, and it should be loaded with enough equipment that we could set off an explosion. That should distract them.”

Jessie nodded. “I have experience with explosives, so let me handle that.”

“We still have to clean out the riffraff for you first. I could—” Erin began.

“You are not going to do anything. You’re staying with me,” Brandon growled low in his throat.

Rolling her eyes, she turned to him, “Stop telling me what to do, I—”

“Erin, Brandon, we don’t have time for your power struggle.” Brett grinned though he still appeared to be all business. “Here’s what we’re going to do—”

Brett organized the group, giving each of them a job and cutting Brandon off when he was about to protest Erin’s involvement.

“We need every man...and woman, Brandon. Let’s get it together and stop this bastard so we can put him out of business for good.” Brett spoke firmly.

Even as he ground his teeth, Brandon nodded, giving in with great reluctance.

“Fine. Let’s get it over with.”



Butterflies racing around like wild bats in her stomach, Lana paced back and forth in their room. She had put on a respectable dress over her bathing suit and brushed out her long hair.

Tina’s warm brown eyes followed Lana’s movements. She too was wearing a sundress.

“Lana, chill out girl! It’s going to be just fine. We have everything under control.”

“Under control? Brett and Jessie should be here for this. What if Crosby can’t take all four of the men?” she fumed, trembling with nerves.

“We have your gift to fall back on. Relax. I know it’s all going to work out just fine, at least until our guys get back and kill us for being here and dealing with criminals, that is!” Tina laughed as though looking forward to the fight with Jessie.

A knock sounded on the door and Lana jumped, stifling a scream with her hand. Tina nodded at the chair and Lana sat at the table, trying to appear calm. She clicked the record button on the small tape recorder and hid it among the floral arrangement.

Tina went to the door, and called out, "Who is it?"

"It's your new friend, Rob Parsons," his muffled voice came through the door.

With the chain still on, Tina opened the door. She made a show of checking to make sure the men were alone then closed it, removing the chain and opening the door. "Come in."

Before his friends could follow, she put a hand on his chest to stop him. "Leave your sidekicks out there."

As he released a snicker, Rob grinned and looked back at them, "No. Where I go, they go."

After she gave a Gaelic shrug, Tina stepped back and admitted them. "Well if you're afraid of a couple of women, then by all means."

Tina took a chair beside Lana, crossing her legs as she posed to draw their attention to them.

"So. What's the deal?"

Before he spoke, he nodded to his buddies and they did a search of the room. Smiling at Tina, he said, "I get the fun part. I get to frisk you."

"The hell you do!" cried Lana. "You're not touching me!"

Tina patted Lana on her arm. "She's a little shy around men. Since she's not wearing too much, maybe you could just concentrate on me?"

Licking his lips, he said, “Nope. I get to check both of you out or the deal is off.”

Sighing, Lana looked over at Tina. “Okay fine. But you better keep your hands impersonal. I hate men touching me.”

Since Lana and Tina had given the men the impression that they were lesbians, she figured she was safe from his touch, yet from the excited look in his eyes as he moved forward, she got the impression that he wanted to do more than frisk them.

The men came back from the washroom area and nodded. When Rob nodded back, another one locked the door, leaving the chain off.

Her heart nearly stopped as Lana sucked in a deep breath. This didn’t feel right. These guys were interested in more than just a drug exchange. She started trembling.

Once Tina stood, she held out her arms. Even though there was only a small amount of material covering her, he frisked her as though she was in full combat gear, pulling her body close up against his as he touched every part of her back. Tina took it without a grimace. When he let her go, she sat back down in her chair.

He waited, staring at Lana with a questioning leer.

“Fine, but my knee’s going into your groin if you get fresh,” Lana warned.

His confidence slipped a little and he frisked her quickly and stepped back.

“Okay. They’re clean. Bring out the stuff,” he snapped, resentment in his tone at her rebuff.

One of the men placed a package on the table.

With a bored look on her face, Tina opened it then took a small taste of the contents. Pretending to be satisfied, she raised her voice a little. “Okay, the stuff is good.”

Rob’s eyebrow rose. “So where’s the money.”

“Oh, I have the money. Just give me a minute,” Tina said. She moved to the suitcase and pulled out a traveler’s check.” Handing it to him, she asked, “Is that enough?”

Stunned silence followed her question then Rob threw it down on the table. “We don’t do traveler’s checks, lady. We want cash, now, or we take it out in trade.”

Two of the men moved behind Lana and took her arms, forcing her to stand up.

Rob leaned in close to Tina. “Cash or trade?” he said in a deadly calm tone.

Suddenly there was a knock at the front door. Lana concentrated and unlocked it with her mind. The men drew guns and the two holding her dropped to the floor when two large vases crashed into the backs of their heads.

In a quick move, Rob swung around to face her. He and his other cohort stared at Lana who just shrugged. Another ceramic pot crashed to the floor by the patio door and the men turned with their guns drawn just as the front door behind them swung open, slamming against the wall. Again they spun around and came up against Crosby and a Mexican man, holding guns on them.

“Drop it, buddy, now,” Crosby said, his face dead serious.

The Mexican beside Crosby held his gun on the second man. “Senor, drop it and place your hands on top of your head.”

Rob obviously decided he wasn’t going without a fight and swung his gun toward Tina. “She’s dead if you don’t back off.” Stunned surprise showed on his face when his gun rose up toward the ceiling and he couldn’t control it. Yanking at it with both hands he turned around and tried to aim at Crosby, who was forced to shoot him, disabling him. The second man handed over his gun without issue.

Once his wound was taken care of, it took about ten minutes for the police to remove the four criminals. The cops had been recruited from another city since the locals were on the payroll. Rob and his cohorts would spend a very long time in jail.

The Mexican man shook Crosby’s hand then bowed to the ladies. “Thank you for your assistance. We have been trying to catch these men in the act for some time now.”

“Crosby, how did you get all the help?” Lana asked.

“This is Tank. He’s one of Brandon’s crew. He’s also an undercover cop for the Mexican police, one of the few in this area who aren’t controlled by Carlos.” He slapped Tank on the shoulder.

“A rescue crew was dispatched to help bring the others home. We should be hearing from them soon,” Tank said gently.

“Oh, thank you so much, Tank. We have been worried sick about them all,” Lana said in relief.

“How did you hit the men with those vases? You were in front of them when we came in the door,” Crosby asked, a confused expression on his face.

“Gee, I’m not really sure. It was like they just flew up in the air and attacked the men all by themselves! Weird, isn’t it?” Tina said in awe, the look in her eyes one of innocence.

Lana bit her lip.

Chapter Twenty

Truth Of The Vision

Brett nodded to Jessie and held up his hand with four fingers raised. Jessie acknowledged the signal and indicated that he would swing around to the left. They crouched just inside the rear door to the factory building, about to take down the four men inside before setting the makeshift bomb.

Heady from the smells in the building, Brett fought to focus. He watched while a short Mexican took a quick look around then snorted some of the cocaine he was processing. He was shuddering, his head thrown back as the drug took hold.

There was barely a sound heard above the noise of the machines when Brett saw a man on the other side of the small plant disappear from his workstation. A few minutes later, a second one vanished.

Brett crouched down behind his man. As another one fell to the floor unconscious, the last one noticed his colleagues missing and came to investigate. Adrenaline pumping, Brett prepared to take the man down. His heartbeats increased as his quarry walked closer, eyes darting around the room in alarm.

The moment the worker was close enough, Brett leapt forward from behind the large equipment and swung his arm, connecting a fist with his jaw to render him unconscious.

“Let’s get them outside, Jessie. We can use the twine over there to tie them up. I prefer to leave them alive when this thing blows,” Brett said, his eyes scanning the area in case they’d missed someone

Once the first two were tucked safely out of sight a good distance from the building, Jessie went to work on setting up the bomb with the materials at hand while Brett finished moving the last two men. By the time Brett was done, Jessie nodded at him. “It’s ready to go?”

“It’ll blow in ten minutes. Let’s get out of here.”

“Good job, Jessie.”

The two men moved away from the building and disappeared back into the forest.



Nearby, Erin and Brandon were ready to take out three more men but Brandon wasn’t cooperating.

“No. You stay here and I’ll get them,” he hissed. His stubborn determination to keep her safe should have made her happy but it only pissed her off.

A sense of urgency increased her anger as she hissed right back at him. “You listen to me, Brandon Anderson. I’m a cop, not a damsel in distress, and I will be working *with* you or I go alone. You got that?”

A tick showed in his jaw, veins pulsing in his neck as he answered. “I don’t want the vision coming true. I don’t want to lose you, Erin. Please, just let me do this!”

The anger faded as she placed her hand on his arm. She wanted to show him how much his love meant to her, but this wasn’t the place or time. “We’ve already taken precautions Brandon. We have to work together to get it done. Let’s just do this, okay?”

He ran his fingers through his hair in frustration. “Fine, but if you get killed, I’m never speaking to you again.”

She chuckled low in her throat at his attempted humor then kissed him gently. “Let’s go.”

Erin tensed as a rush of excitement filled her veins when they got close enough to see the men they were going to capture. Her cop mode was up full force as she stalked the first one, Brandon at her side.

One guard stood alone. The other two were around the corner of the building. Erin was able to sneak up behind him and used a headlock to put him to sleep. She lowered him to the ground and dragged him over to the wall, propping

him up. At Brandon's frantic wave, she slipped behind the thick bush beside the wall.



The next man was facing Brandon, in a poor position for Brandon to take him out, so Erin tried a little distraction. From the bushes, she hissed like a snake.

Spinning around to look toward the building, he saw his friend lying on the ground as was about to yell at him when Erin hissed again hoping to make him think his friend had been bitten by a poisonous snake. He froze and looked back at the unconscious guard in fear.

Before he could call out, Brandon's fist met with his jaw, dropping him like a rock. He and Erin worked together to prop him up against the building next to the other one. They hid in the bushes just in time as the third guard came around the corner of the building and walked toward them.

For a moment, startled, he stared down the two others. He shook his head and went over to the one nearest Erin's position and kicked him, saying in Spanish, "Wake up, you lazy fool. The boss is here and will kill you for sleeping on the job." Receiving no response, he kicked him again.

With a look of disgust on his face, he turned about to leave them to their fate but stopped cold when a sultry giggle came from the bushes. "Rosalita, is that you, my dove?"

A wide grin spread on his face when Erin giggled again. His eyes searched the bushes until Erin moved a branch little to capture his attention.

“Come out and play with me, little flower.” As he tiptoed closer, Brandon stepped out behind him and had him on the ground in seconds, dreaming about his little flower.

Erin pulled some twine from her pocket. Jessie had made sure everyone had something to tie the men up. Hiding them under the bushes, Brandon covered them with brush, grabbing Erin’s hand they moved toward the trees.

When Ripper stepped in front of them, grinning with malice as he held a gun on them, Brandon stopped short and shoved Erin behind him.

“Well, well. Look what we have here. Just popped in to visit your girlfriend?” He made a grab for Erin’s arm but Brandon moved in front of her once again.

Ripper’s eyes turned hard and cold as he called over his shoulder, “Chico, Pablo, come here.”

The two men came running with guns raised. Brandon gripped Erin’s hand and kept her close.

“The boss should be pleased to see his escaped captive and her boyfriend.” A wave of his gun to indicated that he wanted them to move. “Let’s go. Make it easy on yourselves and don’t try anything. I’m looking for an excuse, Stomper.”

With Erin by his side, Brandon began to walk with her toward the front of the compound. Her eyes met his with confidence instead of fear as she squeezed his fingers in a gesture of assurance.

When Ripper shoved his shoulder, Brandon stopped and turned to face him, eyes narrowed as he stared the man down without saying a word. Uncertainty flickered in Ripper's eyes until he recovered his courage.

"Move it along."

There were no more shoves, and Brandon made his way with Erin to where the man in white stood. His vision had begun to replay in real life.



"Shit! They have Brandon and Erin," Frisker whispered, wondering where Brett and Jessie were and if they knew about it.

"What can we do?" Cindy said under her breath.

"We keep moving. We have to continue taking out the guards to even the odds." Frisker looked over at the front gate. "Help should be here soon. Maybe we should take out the two at the gate?"

"We can do that. Since they're already looking for me, maybe I can use that to lure them away." Cindy had become confident and strong since the beginning of her ordeal, and Frisker was proud of her, but he also was terrified she would get hurt.

“No, Cindy. You stay out of it.”

Fury burned in her eyes. “Erin needs me and I’m going to help whether you like it or not, so while you make your *decision*, I’m going to get started!” her whisper had turned into a ferocious hiss.

Stunned, Frisker could only watch while she moved off through the bushes toward the gate. Though he hesitated for a moment in surprise, he soon followed close on her heels. She had changed so much since the day he had met her. What happened to the sweet, innocent girl she’d been? He grinned as he realized that he actually liked the new feisty woman better.

Cindy told Frisker her plan and had him wait a short distance from her while she set herself up as bait.



Letting her soft sobs and sniffles lure the men, Cindy put her head down and pretended to be lost in her tears, unaware of the men.

She felt their presence behind her. Leaning over the log, one of them spoke in a soft voice, “Senorita, do not worry, I will help you.”

Cindy gasped and covered her mouth with her hand as she began to back up. “Please, don’t come any closer. Don’t hurt me!” she whispered.

One guard moved closer and Cindy fell to the ground, distracting him. His friend dropped to the forest floor behind him as Frisker’s fist contact his jaw.

Before the other guard could reach for his gun, Frisker was on him, knocking him out on the first punch.

“Remind me about this moment when you pull that one on me. You are way too good at acting!” Frisker teased, helping her up. He and Cindy tied the men to the trees.

“You’ll never see it coming!” She grinned with confidence.



Venom in his eyes, Carlos stared at Erin, ignoring Brandon.

He snarled, “You will pay for making a fool of me. No one makes a fool of me!”

She smirked. “You’re pretty good at doing that yourself, pig!”

He smacked her across her bruised face.

Brandon went wild, his eyes full of rage as he tried to get at Carlos, three men barely able to hold him back.

Startled, Carlos stepped away, fear in his eyes then yelled in Spanish, “Hold him still, you fools!”

Also in Spanish, Erin shouted, “Yeah! Hold him back because your boss is such a *coward* that he has to get all of you men to do his dirty work. He can’t do it himself because he might mess up his pretty white suit!”

As he pulled his arm back to strike her again, Carlos stopped, his gaze meeting Brandon's. He lowered his hand and backed off. After he straightened his jacket, he asked in English, "How did you get here? How many people are with you?"

"Unlike you, you bastard, I don't need an army of men to do my job for me. You want to hit someone? Quit picking on women and come try me out. I dare you!" Brandon's scathing tone chipped at Carlos' confidence as the man backed up again, his eyes filled with unease.

"Take him to the factory. Give him some samples of our product."

"Gee, that sure worked on me. I'll bet it will be even easier with him!" Erin snarled.

Reminded of his failure to dispose of her, Carlos lost his temper.

"Move it now, you idiots! Take him to the factory, or I'll have you all taken there!" he shouted.

"You see how he disrespects you? Now he threatens to kill you too! He is a coward. *Coward!*" Erin shouted, struggling to break free from the guards.



Fighting for all he was worth, as he was dragged toward the factory, Brandon turned his head to watch Erin who fought the two men who held her.

The vision was close to coming true. His heart beat faster, the breath leaving his lungs in a whoosh as the images became reality.

“Erin!” he shouted desperately.

They both knew that the factory was going to blow any minute. Erin fought like a wildcat and was able to get away from the men, grabbing one of their guns. Unable to hold her, they fell back, releasing her arms. She ran toward Brandon, yelling, “Down, Brandon, drop!”

“Noooo...Erin don’t—” A shot sounded and Erin’s eyes widened as she flew forward, her arms outspread as she dropped to the ground and landed face down, still and silent.

With a ferocious roar, Brandon knocked the surprised guards away and tried to go to her. Ripper grabbed him and hit him in the jaw. Brandon fell onto his back on the hard packed earth.

Staring up at Ripper, Brandon felt a cold calm come over him. He was not going to die unless this man came with him. He turned his head to look at Erin’s still body, all hope of saving her gone. His heart felt like it was ripped in two at the loss of his love. He shouted his outrage and reached behind his back for the hidden gun.

Laughing, Ripper used his foot to keep Brandon on the ground and pointed his gun at Brandon’s chest.

“One down, one to go. Say goodbye Stomper. Consider yourself...*Stomped!*”

His laughter was full of madness as he moved his foot and prepared to pull the trigger. A sudden bang had Ripper’s eyes opening wide in surprise as he turned around to look for the source of the shot.

Erin lay on her stomach, gasping for breath as she held her gun on Ripper. When he turned toward her, she pulled the trigger again. Ripper’s body jerked as he shot the gun into the air and dropped to the ground.

In horror, Brandon turned to look over her shoulder as he heard a gurgling gasp. Ripper’s bullet had found a home in Carlos’ heart. He stood silent in his white suit, a large red stain spreading over his chest.

Suddenly there was an explosion as the factory went up. Brandon watched as Erin jerked in surprise, though she kept her eyes trained on Carlos, the gun held steady. He fell in slow motion, his knees hitting the ground first as he stared in disbelief at his factory then down at his chest where his lifeblood flowed down his jacket. His final breath echoed in the still air around him before he dropped on his face.

The danger gone, Erin collapsed. Brandon ignored the guards as they watched in stunned silence. He jumped up and ran over to her, gathering her gently in his arms. With a wild cry, he pleaded, “Don’t die on me, Dark Angel. Please don’t die on me.”

Eyes closed, Erin gasped, “I’m with you. I’ll always be...with you.”

Her head fell to the side and Brandon sobbed in a breath while he pulled her close. His vision had come true!



Jeeps and trucks filled with the skydiving crew and an army of military men and women arrived. Jessie and Brett came running from one direction, guns out, scanning the area. The guards had all given up.

Brandon heard Cindy scream and looked up, pain washing over him in waves of anguish as he held Erin’s body. His expression grave, Frisker held her back.

As the four friends surrounded Brandon and Erin, they all stood quietly. Brandon held her close and rocked her. He kept running his fingers through her hair, kissing her forehead as hot tears poured down his cheeks.

Burying her face in Frisker’s shoulder, Cindy sobbed. Brett squatted down and placed his fingers on Erin’s neck, looking for a pulse.

Brandon closed his eyes closed to hide his agony from the others.

“That...hurt...like...hell.”

Stunned, he opened them at the sound of Erin’s voice and joy filled his heart. “You’re alive?”

Gasping for breath, she said, “Hell, yes! I...told you...I wouldn’t...leave you.”

Cindy dropped to her knees, touching Erin's cheek. "I don't understand! You were shot in the back, Erin. How can anyone survive that?"

Tears in his eyes, Brandon grinned. "We both have bullet proof vests on, thanks to Brett and Jessie. Thank God they worked!" He leaned down and gently kissed her lips.

"It's more thanks to your vision. We were able to be prepared," Brett said. "Let's get this girl to the hospital."

"No—No hospital. I'm...fine," she croaked between gasps as she fought to take in a full breath.

Brandon grinned. "Sorry, babe, you're outnumbered. The hospital it is."

"Shit!" she grumbled.

Brandon and the others began laughing. In the face of everything, Erin still had the energy to swear. She was going to be fine.

Chapter Twenty One

Here Comes Trouble!

Deep in discussion as they walked toward their room, Brett and Jessie made plans to finish the rest of Erin's mission and head home to their wives as quickly as possible. Frisker and Cindy had walked off toward their hut and Brandon was with Erin at the hospital.

No lives were lost on their team which made Brett happy the operation was a resounding success. There were still details to work out, but it was time to sit back, relax, and get some well-earned sleep.

As they approached the pool, Brett and Jessie noticed a large crowd of men. Curious, they stopped to watch for a minute and heard strangely familiar laughter, as if someone had told a joke. Since the drug dealers hadn't been rounded up yet, they decided to investigate.

"Before you two lose it, just remember that they helped catch the perps and finished the job for you." Crosby grinned from behind a cement pillar, a toothpick hanging from his mouth.

"Who are *they*?" Brandon asked.

Nodding toward the circle of men, Crosby said, "See for yourselves!" With a wide grin, he stepped back to watch the show.

Jessie met Brandon's gaze and shrugged. They moved over to the circle of men and stood back to listen.



"Oh, and then there was the time where Lana went out with this rich guy who wined and dined her. Well, as it turned out, the guy's *name* was Rich but he didn't have a *penny* to his name! When he said, "I'm Rich," she thought he meant with money so the next time she met a guy named Bill, she refused to date him in case he came with a stack of bills!" Tina finished with a cute grin.

The men laughed, but Lana didn't make a sound, her head down, hiding a grin. Tina had dragged her out of the room to enjoy the sun and the next thing they knew they were surrounded by admiring men. It wasn't Lana's idea of fun, but watching Tina in her element made her laugh. Since they'd heard that everyone was safe, they decided to wait by the pool for the gang to return.

"Move aside." A deep voice filled with fury spoke and the men scattered like flies.

"Oh, shit!" Tina snickered.

His eyes filled with simmering anger, Jessie moved toward them. Lana noted that he looked exhausted, his beard shadowed and his clothing filthy. His handsome face was covered in a scowl that said it was time to pay the Piper!

“Oh, hi, Jessie, nice to see you back in one piece. Have a seat and—” Tina screamed, then grinned and winked at Lana from her position over Jessie’s shoulder as he marched away with her.

Holding one her hand over her mouth to hide her smile, Lana stared down at her other hand on her lap while Brett stood above her, hands on hips.

“Lana?” he growled in warning.

“Hi, Brett,” she whispered over the sudden lump in her throat.

“What are you doing here?” When she didn’t answer right away, he yelled. “Answer me!”

Though Lana jumped at his question, she remained sitting and didn’t look up at him. A drink fell to the ground a few tables away and she cringed. She knew he’d get her out of the line of fire before he questioned her.

He picked her up in his arms and strode off toward the room, not saying a word.

Wrinkling her nose, Lana said quietly, “You smell like you’ve been rolling in animal waste.”

The only way she could tell he had heard her was by the slight tightening of his arms. He walked faster and soon stood outside his room.

Since he didn't have a key, he knocked on the door. It opened a couple of inches and a furious Jessie handed Lana a key then slammed the door in their faces.

Lana pointed to the room next door then inserted the key in the lock when he stepped close to it. The maid had cleaned up the broken pottery and the room was once again clean and orderly.



Carefully, Brett placed Lana on the bed and went back to lock the door, pulling the chain across in a deliberate move. He took a deep breath and leaned against the door, arms crossed as he stared at her. Although he was exhausted, raw power raced through his veins at the sight of his wife.

"What the *hell* are you doing here?" he asked his voice hoarse.

"My brother was in danger. I couldn't just sit around and wait for some word about him. After his vision—" tears filled her eyes. "I just couldn't wait in Canada." In a worried voice, she asked, "Is he all right? Is Erin? Cindy?"

Sighing, Brandon's anger receded a little.

"They are all fine and Carlos, the ringleader is dead. Erin's at the hospital." When Lana cried out, he put up his hand to stop her.

"She's fine, just bruised from the bullet hitting the vest."

Scrambling to her knees, Lana cried, "Bullet? She was shot, just like in the vision?"

Rubbing his bristled chin, Brett pushed away from the door and walked over to her. He squatted down and looked into her eyes. "The Kevlar vests are bulletproof. Brandon had put both vests on before leaving his room and when he was able to, he gave one to Erin. It saved her life. She was shot in the back, just like in his vision. She's got a nasty bruise, but she'll be just fine."

Eyes wide, mouth slightly open, Lana stared at Brett for a moment, then scrambled off the bed, heading to her suitcase. She began to dig through it and pulled out pants and a shirt. About to put them on, Brett suddenly grasped her wrist.

"You are not leaving this room! Brandon is taking care of her and you're staying here with me."

"Like hell I am! She's like a sister to me and Brandon...he needs my support." Unable to break his grip, she cried out, "Let me go, Brett!"

He took the clothes from her and walked her backwards into the bathroom. There was a large shower stall and he planned on having a shower. His past experience with his headstrong wife was that if he didn't keep her with him, she would bolt, so he locked the door, still holding her wrist as he turned on the water.

Stubborn determination showed in her tense shoulders and clenched jaw. Her eyes sparkled like green gems, fury building. Brett sighed, knowing it was going to be a big fight to the finish. Since he read her thoughts and knew she planned on taking off for the hospital, he figured he would have to fight dirty.

Lana was only wearing a very skimpy bikini so he only had to undo a few laces before she was naked. When he slipped his T-shirt over his shoulders, he winced.

She cried out suddenly worried about him. “Did you hurt your shoulder?”

Brett hid his smile as he realized that if she focused her concern on him, she wouldn’t be plotting to run out the door to go to the hospital so he played it up.

“It’s nothing,” he said, in a pain filled voice. “I just wrenched it trying to help your brother. I’ll be fine.” Guilt was a powerful weapon. When he moved his hands to push his shorts down, he faked another cringe and Lana was hooked.



“No. Damn it, not again,” Erin groaned. She was coming to. The smell of antiseptics, doctor’s being paged, crisp sterile sheets. She was in a damn hospital again! The one place she hated being above all.

Afraid to open her eyes, she lay still. When warm fingers threaded through hers, she peeked beneath one eyelid to see who was holding her hand.

Brandon's warm, loving, and worried eyes met hers. He looked tired. The beard growth on his face attested to the rough night they'd had. Erin wanted to brush a wayward strand of hair from his eyes, but she hurt all over.

"I told you no hospital. I hate hospitals," she snapped.

Unrepentant, Brandon replied. "Brett told me you hate hospitals. I vetoed your order because I care about you and I want you to live. Sorry."

By the look on his face, he wasn't sorry at all and was delighted with the opportunity to boss her around.

"So, can we go now?"

"Not until we speak to the doctor." Brandon leaned down and gently kissed her lips, his touch feather light.

"What's the status on the drug runners at the resort?" Her cop mode kicked in.

"I spoke with Crosby. He said that Lana and Tina helped him catch the men red handed."

Erin was stunned. "Lana and Tina? They're here?" She tried to sit up and grimaced. She had no strength to fight him when his hand gently held her down. Pain washed over her and she gasped, struggling to catch her breath.

"So talk!" she hissed.

“Well, my sister and her sidekick decided that since Brett and Jessie were here already, they should come down and help. It seems that Lana didn’t like the fact that her new sister was in danger and wanted to join the rescue team.”

A reluctant grin escaped. “Are they okay?”

“Yes. They caught your ol’ buddy Rob Parsons and his three cohorts in the act of selling drugs. Crosby and Tank brought in the cops for the takedown. Tank is an undercover cop too.”

“But the local cops are in Carlos’ pocket. They’ll just let them off.”

“Not these ones. The Canadian Consulate brought in their own troops. The local cops are under investigation and even the employees at the resort are being questioned—In short, you successfully fulfilled your mission and now you and I can get back to getting married.”

He looked pleased with himself. She was in enough pain to make her snap at him, “Oh, shut up!” But the reluctant grin on her face took the punch out of her words.

The doctor entered a few minutes later and spoke with Erin. Since she didn’t want Brandon to know what he said so she asked him to speak to her in Spanish.

“Well, you are a very lucky woman. The vest saved your life. The bullet hit you just one inch to the side of your spine, not far from your heart. You would have

been killed instantly if not for the vest. You have severe bruising and will have to take it easy for a few weeks, but over all, the bruising and contusions on your face and back will heal without scarring. The concussion is mild and you don't require stitches. You may leave the hospital and I have a prescription for painkillers for you. You are a very lucky woman, Detective."

The doctor nodded, handed her the prescription and left the room.

Erin immediately tried to get out of bed. Brandon's arms encircled her, holding her still. "Wait a minute, cowgirl. Tell me what he said."

"I'm fine. I can leave," she gasped as the pain nearly overwhelmed her.

"And?" he persisted.

"And, you saved my life by bringing the vest for me to wear, okay? Now get me the hell out of here, please?" Erin felt like biting his head off for making her admit that he'd saved her.

Once he'd helped her get dressed in her dirty clothes, she had to rely on him to take her out of the hospital. She hated having to depend on others yet she had to admit, with Brandon, it wasn't such a bad thing.



Since Brandon couldn't carry her because it would be too painful for her bruised back, he slipped his arm around her waist to support her as they walked to

the exit. There was a pharmacy at the entrance and he had her sit in a chair while he filled her prescription.

Handing her the pills and a bottle of water, he waited until the stubborn woman swallowed them before taking her outside and flagging down a cab. They headed back to the resort with Erin resting her head on his shoulder. The drug had made her sleepy and she couldn't keep her eyes open.

Brandon called ahead on his new cell phone and made sure there was a wheelchair from the medical facility waiting for them. He also called Brett and told him they were coming.

He pressed a kiss on her forehead and thanked God for the vision that helped him keep her alive. If not for that...he shuddered at the thought of what could have happened. Gently, he pulled her close to help buffer the bumps during the ride. Yes, he counted himself a lucky man.



The hospital smells and noises were gone when Erin woke up, groggy from the drugs. Pain shot up her spine as Brandon and Brett moved her into the chair, cautious not to hurt her. A wheelchair!

Though she tried to take a deep breath, she gasped in pain and came wide-awake. "What the hell am I doing in a wheelchair? My legs work just fine, damn it!" she growled.

Jessie laughed. “Now that’s the Erin I know and love. Boy, I thought we’d lost her charming presence at the precinct. Guess she’s back.”

At the chuckles around her, she narrowed her eyes and gave Jessie a nasty look. “You’re pushing it, Chan.”

He only laughed even more. Behind Jessie stood Tina, Cindy, Frisker, Crosby, and the young boys, Davy and Jeremy. Brett and Lana moved in closer. Lana had tears in her eyes and looked like she was ready to cry any minute.

“Erin. I’m so relieved that you’re okay.” she leaned in and gave Erin a delicate hug, careful not to hurt her.

“I’m fine. Now let me get out of this stupid chair,” she grouched.

“No. You’re staying in that chair until I say so.” Brandon stood there with his arms crossed, just as stubborn as she was.

She frowned, hiding a smile. “I guess you and I have some new ground to cover. Now you get to see the real me. I’ll bet you’ll want your ring back in a week.”

“One hundred bucks and I’ll give him three weeks!” Lana shouted.

“It’s a bet!” said Erin, pleased when Brandon looked affronted.

Erin raised her chin and Brandon didn’t argue. It was payback time for the bet he’d made with Lana. Now it was his job to make sure that neither of them

won, no matter how brutal Erin's real side was. She wondered for a moment if he would like the real woman behind the delicate flower act.

"Well let's not just stand here. Move 'em out! I have a pillow with my name on it waiting for me." Erin smiled, trying to keep her mounting pain from showing.

As Brandon began to wheel her past the main desk, Erin heard Lolita and Angelina speaking in Spanish and had Brandon stop.

"She put the bastard away for good. No more abuse. No more pain and shame," said Angelita.

"You were right to put the note out for the gringo. It was a wise thing to do," Lolita said, staring at the papers in front of her.

Both women's eyes shot up to meet Erin's in surprise when she spoke to them in fluent Spanish. "Thank you for what you did. You saved my life by telling Brandon where I was. I'll make sure you are rewarded for it. No one will treat you like Carlos did again, and if they try it, I'll give you my personal number to call me and be back to take care of him, okay?" Erin stared at them with strength and courage in her gaze.

"Oh! Senorita, we didn't know you spoke Spanish. We are sorry if we—" Angelita cried out, covering her mouth in horror.

“No. Please, you have no reason to be afraid. What you did was courageous. Thank you.” When she patted Brandon’s hand, he pushed the chair toward the hut.

Chapter Twenty Two

We Be Jumpin' Together

“It was nice of you to help Lolita become the manager of the resort and Angelita the assistant manager.”

“They deserve it Brandon after all they went through and helping us. I’m sure there will be no further incidents of drug dealing under their watchful eyes, but if there are, they promised to call me and I’ll take care of it.”

She admired the women for their competent management of the facility. If they did end up having problems, they promised to call Erin right away so she could help them with it.

“If Ripper survives his wounds, he’ll be incarcerated in the Mexican prison system for twenty years. The guards will receive a lot less time because they were under orders. The local police department is going to be investigated by a Mexican government agency. Many of the officers, especially Carlos’ brother-in-law, the chief of police, will be sent to prison for drug dealing and possession. The resort should be clear of drug dealers for a long time to come.”

“You did a great job on your mission, Erin. I’m proud of you.”

At Brandon's words, she felt heat fill her cheeks. She seldom got compliments but he and his family had a way of turning her to mush.

"I'm going to keep my job as detective at the Toronto Police Department, Brandon. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes. I don't expect you to change, Erin. I love you just the way you are. I'll be at the jump zone during the summer months as manager since the owners promoted me to take over the entire facility. With the amount of money they will pay me, I can spend the entire winter months with you in our new home." Erin caressed his lower lip with her finger and sighed while he held her close.

"I love the new trailer, Brandon. It's big enough that I won't have to curse so much when I try to shower, though I much prefer the office shower so we can both fit."

He chuckled low in his throat and hugged her close as they lay on the mattress in the bedroom.

"Anywhere is heaven when I'm with you, Erin."

She sighed and rested her head on his chest.

"With Frisker managing the zone when we leave the country or you are unavailable, that should free us up a bit too. I was as surprised as you were when he told us he was the RCMP undercover cop who liaised with the Consulate." Brandon snickered. "I knew he was an RCMP officer, but he said he was on hiatus

for a year. Since he loved being at the zone, he spent most of his time with me running the place,” Brandon said. “I had no idea he was there to investigate the drug operation though that was only recently. Frisker has been a skydiver for a lot of years and joined the club a long time ago.”

“It never occurred to you that he was working?”

Brandon’s wry grin twisted his lips in that adorable way Erin loved.

“No. As a matter of fact, I believed he was only there because he loved jumping. At first it pissed me off that he never told me, but I understand why he kept his operation a secret.”

“My superiors arranged to work with the RCMP and Mexican government because it was a tricky investigation. I knew someone on the team was my contact, but Frisker wasn’t the one I’d figured until you had your vision at the trailer after touching the red letters. When I asked him to give me the details about the way the situation was handled by the police, he was factual like a cop. I didn’t question him about it because he was undercover.”

“I can’t get angry at him for keeping secrets from me. Frisker is my best friend. He did a great job watching over us all.”

Erin reached up and tugged his hair until he dipped his head and kissed her. Shivers of desire raced through her veins.

“So did you, Brandon.”

The wind pushed hard at them as they struggled against it to reach each other, their fingertips barely touching. Brandon stretched a bit further and was able to grasp her wrist. Time rushed by. A beep sounded in his ear. There were only a few minutes left. Pulling his wife closer, he grasped her helmet and pulled her in for a kiss, a deeply passionate yet brief kiss. Another beep sounded. He nodded and grinned at her, letting her go.

His laughter filled the air as he floated just above her and pulled the ripcord. The parachute opened in a billow of material with the words *I B Jumpin'* on the underside. "I'll be right with you," she yelled and pulled her own ripcord. The identical teal chute opened and lifted her up, cradling her as she slowly drifted down toward the ground. Under the canopy were the words, *I B Jumpin' With Him!*

Expertly they both maneuvered their canopies until they landed safely a few feet apart.

Not waiting for the canopy to fall completely to the ground, Brandon ran over to her and swept her up in his arms, claiming her lips in a passionate kiss.

"Let's get cleaned up and repacked. We have a meeting scheduled after the rest of the jumpers meet the ground."

"Okay, buddy, but you owe me a nice dinner tonight!"

He fought a grin and bent down to gather up his chute and his cell phone rang. "Is Lana all right?" he said as soon as he answered, knowing it was Brett.

“Will you quit doing that? You’re giving me the creeps,” Brett joked with Brandon for always knowing when he was calling. “It’s twin boys, just like you said. Seven pounds, eight ounces and seven pounds six ounces, with thick black hair like their Dad. We are calling them Brandon Darren Colton and Jessie Mark Colton. How do you like that for names?”

“Can’t get much better than that, I suppose. How is my big sister?” he asked, grinning at Erin as she watched him with curiosity in her gaze..

“She’s just fine. Will you two be heading home to meet your new nephews?” Brett asked.

“We’ll be there tomorrow. Tonight we have something special planned. Not as special as my new nephews, but I’ll give you all the details tomorrow. Tell her we love her,” Brandon said and hung up.

Erin’s threw himself into his arms. “They’re here? And they’re all right?” she asked, excited.

“Absolutely! Brandon Darren Colton, and Jessie Mark Colton. Nice names!” Brandon moved to gather his chute. The other jumpers had begun to land around them. Erin followed suit.

Once all of the skydivers had repacked their rigs, Brandon called out to them to gather around for the meeting.

The members made a large circle around Brandon and he stood there, his chest puffed up to look official.

“We are gathered...ered...ered...ered, here today...ay...ay...ay, to celebrate the one-hundredth...edth...edth...edth, jump of one of our colleagues...eagues...eagues...eagues. On this auspicious occasion...ion...ion...ion, we celebrate her courage...age...age...age and ask her to step into the circle...cle...cle...cle.”

Brandon looked around the area, seemingly confused that his prize pupil was missing.

Erin laughed as she stood in the circle with the team. She wanted to know who it was too, remembering the last time they had held this ceremony. It was hard to believe that only seven months before, they had been involved in such turmoil. Life was so much better now. Brandon was still looking around for his quarry and Erin snickered. She loved watching him with his crew. They all adored him, almost as much as she did.

When Brandon’s eyes suddenly met hers with mischief in them, she started shaking her head, and yelled, “Oh, no you don’t! I’ve got more than six thousand jumps buddy, not one hundred!” She prepared to run.

“Sorry, pal! You have one hundred jumps documented with us, on top of your six thousand. That means you’re getting initiated!” Brandon began stalking

her with deliberation. He moved in closer and the whole crew followed, each of them grinning as they picked up their pies.

With a loud scream, Erin took off. They chased her across the airfield until Brandon finally caught her and took her down, spinning around so that she would land on top of him instead of the hard ground.

“No!” she yelled, laughing. “Wait! I have a reason that you can’t hit me with the pies!”

Lots of laughter and shouts came from the crew. “Go ahead, tell us what your reason is,” Cindy yelled above the noise, laughing in delight.

“Um, uh. Well, you see, I have this war wound and it might...it might act up if I get cream all over it!” Erin giggled, squirming to get away from Brandon who was holding her down from behind.

“War wound? Let’s see!” yelled Davy.

“Oh, well, um...it’s right here, on my finger, it’s—” Erin pointed at a tiny area on her index finger, squinting her eyes as if she were trying to find it.

Not accepting her fake war wound story, they all laughed as she screamed while fifteen cream pies hit her as well as Brandon.

He didn’t let her go, holding her with one arm while wiping whipped cream out of his face as he screamed with laughter. “How come I always get the worst of these initiations?”

“Oh, you are so cruel!” Erin laughed at the crew as she twisted around and slathered his body with the white fluff. “And you, I ought to arrest you for turning these sweet, innocent team mates in to vicious pie-throwing criminals!”

Even though he laughed so hard he couldn’t talk, Brandon held her close. He licked at a blob of whipped cream off the bridge of her nose and tasted it. “Mmmm...not bad. It could use some cherries and chocolate syrup though.

Erin clapped her hands on either side of his face and kissed him, whipped cream and all.

The laughter around them quieted and soon the teens were yelling, “Break it up you two, that’s just gross!”

“Ewww, that’s disgusting! Get a room!” Jeremy cried out.

Snickering, Erin continued to kiss Brandon until he was as hard as a rock beneath her. Lifting her head, she laughed at him. Suddenly she screamed as two buckets of cold water hit them.

Looking into her husband’s eyes with a silent question, she waited only for his nod before they both jumped up to chase the culprits. It was a long chase as laughter and whipped cream was scattered all across the airfield by the time they were done.

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!

Red Rose Publishing

Tropical Balm

Extrasensory Elements series: Book 1- Author's Demise

Forever Blowing Bubbles

Small Packages: A Christmas Story

7th Eye, P.I. series- The Mystic Touch