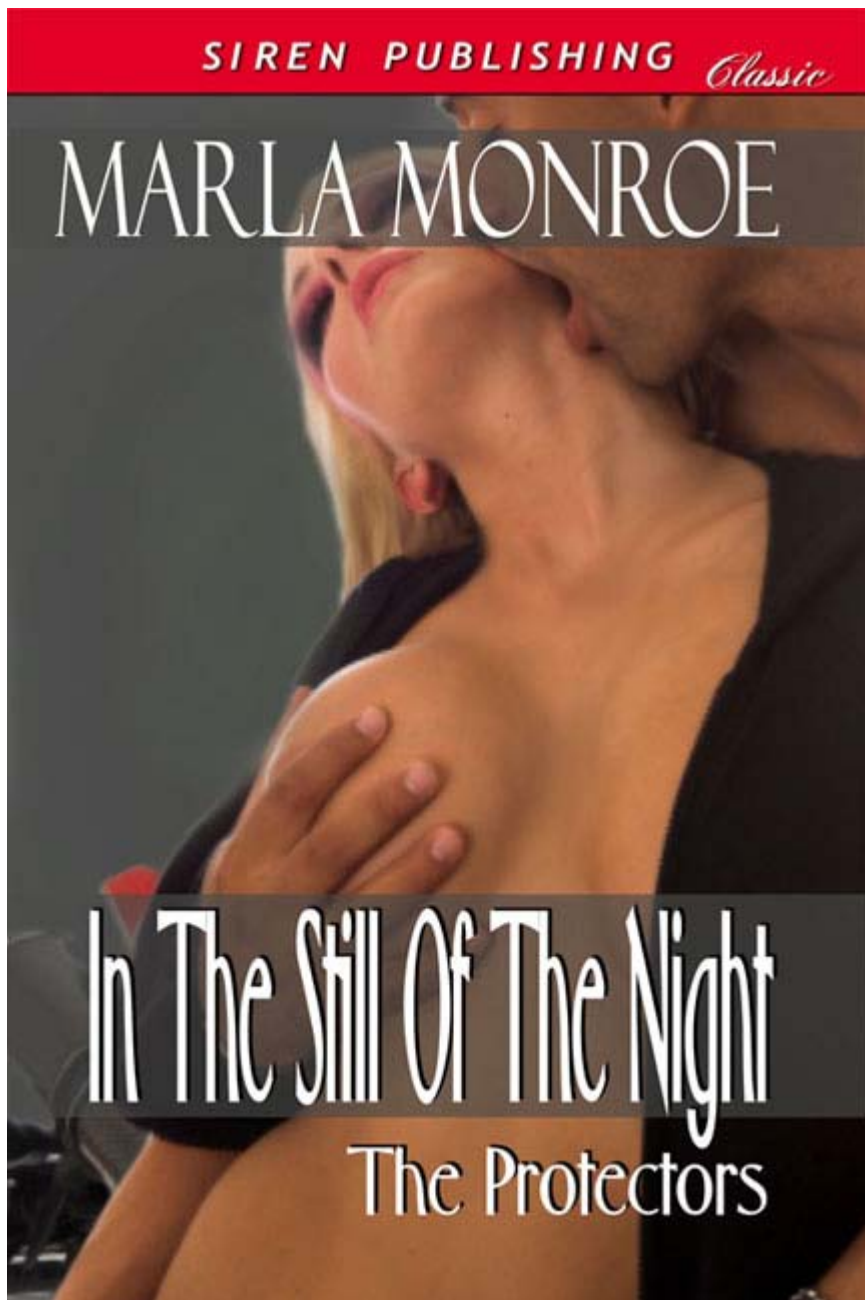


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MARLA MONROE

In The Still Of The Night
The Protectors



The Protectors 2

In The Still of the Night

Take one gun-shy woman and one hotter than hell man and watch the sparks fly. Jenna's taste in men has been pretty pathetic to date, but when she meets Riley, she hopes her luck has changed. Riley is a little wild and a lot hot, but will he stick around long enough for them to explore the sparks between them? Can they build a relationship that will last?

When Jenna's ex shows up with blood in his eyes, Riley appoints himself her bodyguard. He plans to stick around long enough to rid Jenna of her ex, but after that, he plans to ride off again. Jenna plans to pull out all the stops to change his mind about leaving. In the end, will love prove the one constant in both of their lives?

Genre: Contemporary

Length: 80,470 words

IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT

The Protectors 2

Marla Monroe

EROTIC ROMANCE



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IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT

The Protectors 2

MARLA MONROE

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Chapter One

“You’re going to have to hold on to me tighter than that, or you’re going to fall off.” Riley took Jenna’s hands and wrapped them around him to emphasize his point.

Jenna had never been on the back of a motorcycle in her life. She didn’t want to ride this one, and especially not with Riley. He was taking her to pick up her car, so she didn’t have a choice.

“Okay, I’m ready.” She swallowed and held on.

Riley started the big bike and revved it a couple of times before taking off. Jenna didn’t know if he was speeding, or if it was that she had never been on the back of a bike before, but she felt like they were flying. She couldn’t help hanging on tighter to Riley. After a few minutes, she began to relax and enjoy the sensation. If it hadn’t been Riley, she probably would have been excited about her first ride, but it was Riley. He made her uneasy. She didn’t think he would ever hurt her. Not like any of the others she had dated, or her ex-husband. But then, she wasn’t dating Riley. He was just helping out a friend.

“Are you okay back there?” Riley threw over his shoulder.

“I’m fine,” she yelled back.

A few minutes later, they pulled into the parking lot of a large hotel for extended-stay travelers. He circled around the back of the building. She saw her car backed into a parking place in front of room one-eighty-nine. He pulled in next to it and cut the engine. Jenna stayed where she was. She wasn't sure what to do to get off. Riley pulled off his helmet and turned back toward her.

"Can you get off? Just put your foot where I told you and slide off."

Jenna swallowed and nodded. She stepped off the bike and slid her other leg over the seat. She nearly lost her balance, but Riley's hand shot out and caught her before she did.

"I'm not very graceful I guess." She laughed nervously. Then she struggled with the strap of the helmet.

"Here, let me do that." Riley had gotten off the bike and leaned down toward her to unsnap the strap for her.

His scent teased her, all earthy and male. Jenna dropped her hands as soon as his touched hers. If he noticed, he didn't let on. Instead, he removed the helmet and stowed it in the saddle bag.

"Thanks for taking care of the car. I should be going now," Jenna said. She stood there not looking at him for a few moments, waiting on him to hand her the keys.

"We need to talk before you go."

Jenna looked up at him. "About what?"

"You and your taste in men." He walked toward the hotel room door.

Jenna didn't follow him. She had no intention of following him inside or talking to him about anything. Instead, she stood there with her arms crossed.

He stopped and slowly turned around. For a few seconds, he just stared at her then he blew out a breath and closed his eyes then opened them again.

"I'm not giving you the keys until we talk."

“Then we can talk out here. I’m not going in your room with you.” Jenna winced when her voice broke.

“Fine.” Riley leaned back against the room door and crossed his arms over his chest.

He was big. Probably six feet six with muscular arms and a broad chest. She had seen it bare before and could remember the washboard abs and narrow waist. His dark eyes were mesmerizing. The sight of his bald head turned her on even more so than those dark eyes. He was eye candy, no doubt about it. But he was too intense and a very dangerous man. She knew this for a fact.

Less than twenty-four hours ago, he had broken an ex-boyfriend’s nose and possibly his jaw for hurting her. She had fading bruises on her arms where Todd had grabbed her, and Riley hadn’t liked it. Why did he care? Then why had he helped Morgan catch the stalker terrorizing her best friend, Tina? None of it made sense.

“What did you want to talk about?” she asked again.

“You need to stay away from Todd.”

“I have no intentions of seeing him again, not that it is any of your business. It wasn’t my fault he came looking for me anyway.”

“He won’t be doing that again. If he does, you call me,” he said.

“Since he isn’t going to be bothering me, there is no need for me to call you.”

“Which brings me to the subject of you going out.”

“I don’t go out alone. Tina and I go out together. I’m not stupid.” Jenna planted her hands on her hips.

“Yeah, well I think Logan is going to have something to say about that from now on.” Riley growled.

“I can guarantee that if Tina wants to go out, she will.”

“As long as Logan is with you, I’m not worried. But, you aren’t to go anywhere alone. It’s too dangerous.” Riley took a step toward her.

“Look, I’m grown. I can make my own decisions.”

“Then act grown. Remember there are people out there who will hurt you.”

"I think I know that better than anyone. Besides, you aren't going to be around much longer anyway. What I do or don't do is irrelevant to you." Jenna huffed out a breath in irritation.

"I'm not gone yet. As long as I'm around, you are going to be careful, you and Tina both. Now that they are engaged, Logan will see to it with Tina," he said.

"And you think you're going to see to it for me?" She crossed her arms again.

"Tell me about your ex-husband."

The abrupt change in subject took Jenna by surprise. "Why do you want to know about him?"

"Tina said he abused you. How long were you with him?" Riley asked.

"None of your business. Give me my keys. This conversation is over." She held out her hand.

"Not until you answer my questions."

"What questions?"

"Where is he now?" he demanded.

"In prison," she said.

"What for?"

"He nearly killed me. They gave him six measly years. They called it aggravated assault instead of attempted murder. Six years."

"What are you going to do when he gets out?" Riley asked.

"He won't bother me. It's supposed to be a part of his final release that he can't come near me."

Riley shook his head and huffed out a breath. "You need self-defense classes."

"Tina and I both took them several years ago," Jenna said.

"They don't seem to have been very effective. You need something along the lines of martial arts. I'll get Logan to find out who is best to teach you."

"Look, you can't tell me what to do," Jenna argued.

Riley had her backed against her car in a second. “You will take the fucking classes and learn how to protect yourself. You can’t do a thing to protect yourself from me or anyone else right now.”

Jenna swallowed hard. He wasn’t touching her anywhere. He had placed his hands on either side of her head against the car and leaned in toward her. But he wasn’t touching her. She wasn’t afraid of him, but she was nervous around him. She didn’t think he would hurt her.

“You’ve made your point. Can I have my keys now?”

Riley stared into her eyes for a full ten seconds before backing away and digging in his pocket, producing the keys. He held them up for her to take after pushing the door lock button to unlock the door. She breathed a sigh of relief and reached up and grabbed them. He held on to them for a few seconds but let them go. He opened the door for her then closed it once she was safely inside.

Without looking at him again, Jenna fumbled with the keys in the ignition and finally got the car started. She pulled on her seatbelt and drove away without looking back. Her insides shook the entire drive back to Tina’s house. She wanted to go home and curl up in bed, but her things were still at Tina’s. She just hoped she could get in and out before Tina realized she was upset. Why had she let him bother her in the first place? He didn’t mean anything to her. She didn’t mean anything to him.

She was lucky. Tina was busy talking about Logan. She helped her load her stuff in the car and waved her off without so much as speaking Riley’s name. Jenna sighed in relief when she finally made it home. She checked and didn’t see anyone around to give her any trouble. She grabbed her overnight bag and unlocked her door. It was wonderful to be home again. She enjoyed staying with Tina but liked her own place. She returned to the car for her suitcase then locked the car and the house up for the night. She had laundry to do, and she wanted to go to bed early. Jenna smiled and promptly forgot about Riley and his demands.

* * * *

Riley grabbed his helmet off the bike and unlocked the hotel door with his key card. After dropping the helmet on the loveseat, he went straight to the fridge for a beer. He started to pop the top and then sat it back on the shelf. It was too fucking early for a beer. He poured a glass of orange juice instead and sat at the little kitchen table. What in the hell was he still doing in town? Logan didn't need help with Tina anymore. They had the guy in custody who had stalked her for over a year. Morgan would be moving on soon. So why was he still here?

He drained the OJ and sat the glass down on the table with a smack. For the first time in a long time, Riley wasn't in any hurry to ride. What was up with that? His thoughts turned to Jenna and her pretty, long blond hair. She was slim and probably about five feet five or six inches, nearly a foot shorter than he was. Her dark blue eyes haunted him. He could see her eyes in his sleep. He could picture her laid out on his bed with all that blond hair spread out on the pillow around her. She'd be a natural blond, too. He had little doubt of that. Those long legs would feel good wrapped around his waist as he fucked her. She would scream when she came. Riley ran a hand over his bald head and swallowed. He didn't need to think about her like that. She was off limits. She looked at him like he might sprout horns and attack her at any minute.

Riley pushed up from the table and rinsed out the glass in the sink. He needed a ride whether he thought he did or not. He pulled out his cell phone and called Morgan.

"Let's ride."

"I'll meet you at the gas station down from Logan's," Morgan said.

Riley hung up and grabbed his chaps, jacket, and gloves. He suited up and picked up the helmet then locked the door behind him.

* * * *

“Come on, Jenna, please. I want to go out tomorrow night. Logan will go with us. We’ll have a blast,” Tina pleaded. “I can’t believe I’m begging you instead of the other way around.”

“Why don’t you two go out alone? You’d have more fun by yourselves,” Jenna argued.

“Cause we are by ourselves all the time and I want you to go with us. I can’t have a great time without you.”

“What would Logan think about that if he heard you?” Jenna asked, laughing.

“He understands,” Tina countered.

“Oh, okay. I’ll go with you.”

“Great! We’ll pick you up at nine.”

Jenna laughed, shaking her head when Tina hung up. She picked at her salad and flipped the channel on the TV again. There really wasn’t anything on she was interested in anyway. Maybe she would start her new book she had bought the other day. That idea didn’t appeal to her like it should have.

Face it. You’re jealous of Tina finding Logan.

She was happy for them but jealous all the same. Now Tina was busy all the time with him, and Jenna found herself more and more on her own. Well, tomorrow night would be fun. She hadn’t been out in over a month. Actually, since the last time all of them had gone out. She wouldn’t be driving, so she could have a couple of drinks and know that Logan would make sure everyone behaved around them. She smiled to herself. Yeah, it would be great. She decided a nice, long bath would be relaxing, and she would read in the tub. That would calm her so she could sleep. The phone rang again. She sighed and wondered what Tina had forgotten to tell her.

“Hello?”

Nothing. No one answered.

“Hello? Is anyone there?”

Nothing—then a dial tone. She shrugged and hung up. Wrong number, she figured. She ran her bath and didn't think about it again.

Saturday morning, Jenna woke early and groaned. Why couldn't she have slept in for once, she grouched as she got up. No use lying in bed. She stripped the bed and loaded the washing machine before fixing toast and a bowl of cereal for breakfast. She thought about everything she needed to accomplish and added a few things to the grocery list. Her mind drifted to Riley. She wondered if he had left yet. Surely he hadn't stuck around once everything had calmed down. There wasn't anything to keep him here, was there? Morgan, too, for that matter. They were probably both long gone. The thought of never seeing Riley again actually made her sad for some reason. She had only known him for a couple of weeks, a few seriously dangerous weeks at that. She was very thankful for his and Morgan's help. That was all there was between them. Right?

Jenna was just about to leave to go shopping when the phone rang. She almost let it go to the answering machine but decided to grab it instead.

"Hello?"

No one answered

"Hello? Hello?" Still no answer. That was odd. Twice in two days? She hung up the phone and stared at it for a few seconds. Then she shrugged and left. She needed to get home in time to shower and dress before Tina and Logan came to pick her up. She was already running behind. She wanted to stop by the store and buy a new pair of jeans to wear.

Jenna made it home and had the groceries unpacked by seven. She jumped into the shower and rushed around until finally at a quarter to nine she was ready, out of breath, but ready. She laughed and realized she was really looking forward to the night ahead. She turned off the music she had playing and nearly jumped out of her skin when there was a knock at the door. She checked her watch. It was ten till. They

were early. She grabbed her purse and threw open the door only to have the smile fall from her face.

Riley stood outside the door. He wore black jeans, a black T-shirt, and black boots. He frowned at her.

“Don’t you check to see who it is before you open the door? Especially at this time of night?”

“What are you doing here? I’m going out with Tina and Logan,” she said.

“Yeah, I’m picking you up. They’re still at the restaurant and asked me to.”

“I can wait on them,” she said. To think that earlier she had wondered if he was still there, and she was sad that he might not be.

He took her elbow and pulled her out of the house. Then he locked the door and pulled it shut.

“You need a deadbolt on the door. It’s safer than a keyed lock.”

“Look, I can drive myself to the club. There’s no reason for you to take me. I’m sure you have better things to do,” Jenna said.

“Nope, I’m carrying you. Morgan will be meeting all of us there, as well. It’s the five of us tonight. Morgan and I will be leaving in a few days.” Riley guided her to where his bike was parked.

“I’m surprised you are still here as it is. You don’t strike me as the sticking around kind of guy.”

“Yeah, I don’t stay in one place for long. I had things to do before I could move on.” He handed her the helmet and let her put it on. He fastened the strap for her. He put on his helmet and got on the bike. He waited while she got on and then started it up.

“Hold on.”

He took off, and Jenna was forced to hold on to him to keep from falling off the back of the bike. She couldn’t help but enjoy the ride despite needing to hold onto him. There was something about riding on the back with Riley that thrilled her. Ever since she’d gotten past the first ride, she had wanted to ride again. This was her last chance, and she enjoyed it. She refused to analyze it.

They arrived at the club all too soon. Riley locked the helmets up in the saddle bags. He placed a hand on the small of her back and guided her to the front of the line and pulled out a pass. The bouncer took the pass and nodded for them to go on inside. Loud music greeted them as they walked deeper into the building. The deep thump of the bass reverberated in her throat along with her heart. Riley took her hand and pulled her around the room until he located Morgan sitting at a table near the edge of the dance floor.

“Logan hasn’t made it yet?” Riley asked.

“No, they’re on their way now. I just talked to them before I came inside. Hi there, Jenna. How are you doing?”

“Fine, thanks. What about you?”

“I can’t complain. Getting ready for a road trip. I’ve vegged long enough. It’s time to get back on the road,” Morgan answered.

“Have you ever thought about settling down?”

“Naw, maybe someday, but not right now.” He looked off toward the dance floor without saying anything else. Jenna was about to ask him something else, but Riley touched her arm and shook his head. She figured he didn’t want her to push it. Instead, she changed the subject.

“I could use something to drink. Could one of you grab me a margarita?”

Morgan turned back toward her and smiled. “Got it. How about a beer, Riley?” he asked.

“Sounds good to me.”

Morgan stood up and disappeared into the crowd. Seconds later, Tina and Logan appeared and joined them at the table.

“Thanks so much for picking her up, Riley. I knew we were going to be late with the mix up at the restaurant and all.” Tina hugged Jenna. “I’m so glad you are here. We’re going to have a great time.”

“Is Morgan not here yet?” Logan asked Riley.

“Yeah, he went to get drinks,” Riley said.

“I’ll go get mine and Tina’s then. I’ll be right back.” He reached over and squeezed Tina’s arm before leaving.

“I love that top. I knew it would look great on you,” Tina said.

“Thanks. It was a good buy, wasn’t it?”

“Come on, let’s dance.” Tina pulled Jenna up and started toward the dance floor.

Riley grabbed Jenna’s hand. “Whoa there. Logan will be back in a little bit, and you can dance with him, Tina.”

“I don’t want to dance with him right now. I want to dance with Jenna. We’ll be right there.” She pointed to the edge of the floor.

Riley growled but let Jenna’s hand go.

“What is it with the guys? They are so controlling,” Tina said once they made it to the dance floor.

“I think it’s just how they are, macho and all,” Jenna added.

“How was the ride over?” Tina asked.

“Did you do it on purpose? Because I’m not happy about it.”

“No, I really didn’t. They screwed up our reservations at the restaurant, so we were going to be late. Riley offered to pick you up so we would still all get here about the same time.”

Jenna sighed and continued to dance. She loved dancing and since Tina did, too, they could dance even when they didn’t have dates. This was only the third time Tina had been out in over a year. She’d been the victim of an assault and wouldn’t go out anymore for the longest. Then, she had been stalked a few months ago, which is when Logan, Riley, and Morgan had come into the picture and helped catch the bastard and put him in prison.

“Ladies, how are you two doing?” Jack, a man they had met not long ago, smiled at them.

“Hey, Jack! It’s great to see you again,” Jenna said.

He hugged her. Before she could say anything, Riley was there with Logan, pushing Tina and Jenna behind them.

“Hey, Riley, it’s okay. He’s a friend of ours,” Tina said. She tried to get around Logan, but he kept his arm out to prevent it.

“Sorry, man. I didn’t mean any harm. I was just saying hi.” He held up his hands and backed away.

“Stop it, Riley. He’s a friend.” Jenna managed to get around Riley and stood in front of Jack.

“Hey, I don’t blame you for being riled. I wouldn’t want my women talking to some stranger, either.” He looked at Jenna and Tina. “It was great seeing you two. Have a good night.” He turned and walked off.

Riley grabbed Jenna by the wrist and pulled her over to the table. “Your drink’s here.”

Logan put his arm around Tina and guided her back to the table.

“What in the hell was that all about?” Jenna demanded.

“He had his hands all over you,” Riley argued.

“So? He was just saying hi, and it’s none of your business who I dance with or say hi to.” Jenna took a drink of her margarita and scowled at Riley.

Morgan sat back, looking amused. She frowned at him, too, for good measure. Logan was obviously uncomfortable since Tina was frowning at him.

Tina started to say something, but Logan cleared his throat and stood up.

“How about a dance, Tina?” he asked.

She smiled and stood up with him.

Morgan smirked at Riley. “I think I’ll scout out a pretty little lady to escort around the dance floor.” He stood up and walked off, as well.

Jenna was not happy to be left alone with Riley. She took another drink of her margarita and knew she was going to end up drunk if she wasn’t careful. She had only had time for a sandwich before getting ready to go out. She needed to watch herself, or it would all go to her head.

“When they get back, we can dance,” Riley said.

“I can dance with anyone I want to, so back off.”

“It’s not safe for you to dance with strangers.”

“I’m perfectly safe to dance with anyone I want to as long as I stay inside and have the three of you to look all mean and dangerous.”

Riley huffed out a breath. “Fine. Go dance. I’ll watch your drink.”

Chapter Two

Jenna stood up with as much grace as she could manage and walked toward the dance floor. She pushed her way through until she found Jack dancing with two women.

“Mind if I join you?” she asked.

Jack smiled but looked over her shoulder.

“He’s not coming. I explained that we were friends. He’s really sort of a friend of a friend, not mine.” She waited to see if Jack would be okay with it. He nodded his head and smiled.

“It’s good to have someone looking out for you. Don’t give him a hard time. I perfectly understood. Jenna sighed. She danced with Jack and the others for several songs. Then she headed back to the table. Tina and Logan were at the table with Riley. Morgan wasn’t anywhere in sight. Riley stood up when she approached and pulled out her chair.

Tina leaned forward once she had sat down. “Having fun?”

“Yes. Thanks for insisting that I come,” Jenna said. She finished her margarita.

Riley stood up, holding out his hand. “Let’s go.”

“Where?” she asked, confused.

“To dance.”

“You didn’t ask me,” Jenna complained.

“You said earlier you wanted to dance, so let’s dance.”

Jenna rolled her eyes at Tina and got up. That one drink must have gone to her head if she was going to willingly go out on the dance floor with Riley. He proved to be a good dancer. He kept her through the next song and pulled her closer when it turned slow and the floor

became crowded. She was shocked to find that he was aroused. His cock pressed against her abdomen. She stiffened in his arms.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I’m just not comfortable dancing with you.”

“I make you uncomfortable?” he asked.

She pulled back, and sure enough, he looked amused. “You’re laughing at me.”

“Just because I’m aroused, you’re acting like a sixteen-year-old virgin. What do you expect? You’re dressed provocatively with that low-cut blouse and those tight blue jeans. I’m holding you close. I’m going to be turned on.”

“Then don’t hold me so close,” she said and swallowed nervously.

“It’s too late now.” He smiled down at her. “I might as well enjoy it.”

“I’m not enjoying it.”

“Sure you are. Your nipples are poking out. I bet if I could manage to get my hand down those tight jeans, I would find you hot and wet.”

“Why are you trying to embarrass me? What have I done to piss you off?” she asked.

“You’re flirting with danger. You wonder why you end up with the assholes you do. You aren’t careful with who you latch on to.”

“That’s uncalled for. I’ve never asked your opinion on my personal life. Keep your nose out of it.” Jenna attempted to pull away from him.

“You’re not going anywhere. We’ll finish this dance.”

“Fine.” Jenna fumed inside. The very nerve of him.

They finished the dance in silence. As soon as it was over, she pulled out of his arms and headed to the table. She was relieved to find that Morgan was back and she had a fresh margarita. She needed it now more than ever. What had gotten into Riley anyway?

“Morgan, dance with me,” she said before she changed her mind.

Morgan smiled and stood up, holding out his hand. Riley glared at the man.

"I'd be glad to." He led her to the dance floor. He didn't pull her close as Riley had, but he did hold on to her as they danced.

"You're going to make Riley have a cow," Morgan commented. "Or is that the plan?"

"There is nothing going on between us. He's behaving like a jackass, if you ask me."

"He's behaving like he has a claim on you," Morgan countered.

"Well, he doesn't. No one does, and it's going to stay that way, too."

"You're too pretty a woman to go it alone. Just be careful who you choose."

They finished the dance, and Morgan escorted her back to the table. Riley was noticeably absent. Logan and Tina were discussing combining their houses. Tina spent all her time at Logan's now anyway. It was the logical thing for them to do. She wondered where Riley had gone. She scanned the dance floor and tried to convince herself she wasn't looking for him.

Several minutes later, he showed back up with a fresh beer. She noticed he didn't look at her when he sat down. Instead, he focused on the dance floor. She struck up a conversation with Morgan. An hour later, she started on her third margarita, and Riley scowled at her.

"Don't you think you've had enough?"

"I'm not driving. I think I can afford to have one more," she stated.

He got up and left.

"What is it with him anyway?" she asked no one in particular.

"He's getting antsy to be on the road," Morgan offered.

"Well, I'm not keeping him here. He doesn't have to take it out on me."

Two hours later, everyone agreed to call it a night. Jenna followed Tina and Logan, expecting to ride with them. Riley grabbed her by the wrist.

“You’re riding with me. They are going in the opposite direction. You’re on the way to my place.”

“No, I’m riding with them.”

“Why make them drive out of their way, nearly thirty minutes, when I’m going in your direction anyway?” Riley asked.

“They don’t mind, and I don’t particularly want to ride with you,” she answered.

She pulled away from him and headed toward where Tina and Logan had disappeared. Even as she stepped outside into the night, they passed by in the car. She waved frantically at them, and Tina waved back with a smile. Now she had no choice but to ride back with Riley. She was going to kill Tina when she saw her again.

“It looks like you’re stuck with me.” Riley led her toward his bike.

* * * *

He waited for her to climb on behind him then started the bike. She barely hung on to him at first, but once he pulled out of the parking lot, she had no choice but to hold on tighter. Evidently she was a bit tipsy as she held on tighter than she had on the ride over. He couldn’t help but notice how her breasts pushed against his back. Without his jacket on to cushion the feel of her, he noticed every move her body made along his back. Her heat seeped into him.

They pulled into her drive much too soon. He waited while she got off then cut the motor and climbed off himself. He unhooked the chin strap on her helmet and stowed it in the saddle bag. Then he took off his and hung it from the handle bar.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m walking you inside,” he said.

“There’s no need for you to do that. I can handle walking in my house all on my own, thank you very much.”

Riley grinned. He was right. She’d had a little much to drink and was tipsy.”

“I think I’ll just make sure you make it inside safe and sound.”

Jenna shrugged and walked through the carport to her back door. It took her a few seconds to fish her keys out of her little purse. Then it took two tries to get the key in the lock. She opened the door and stepped inside. She turned to face Riley, but he pushed in beside her.

“I’m checking your house to be sure there is no one here. We’ve been gone four hours.”

“Fine. Check the house.” She dropped her purse on the side table and crossed her arms.

He shut the door and walked through the house, checking each room and then the windows to make sure they were locked.

“It looks fine.” Riley walked toward the door.

Jenna turned a little too fast and lost her footing. Riley caught her before she fell. He held her close as she tried to regain her footing. The heel on one shoe broke, and she stumbled again into him.

“Whoa. I think you need to take those heels off before you break your neck.”

He tightened his hold on her. She looked up at him with her lips parted. He swallowed at the sensual picture she made. Suddenly he felt her breasts pressing against his chest. With a groan, he bent and took her lips. They were soft and willing. She didn’t resist as he took her by surprise and deepened the kiss, taking advantage of her open mouth. He licked along her tongue until she twined it with his.

He backed her up only to have her stumble again from the broken heel. He picked her up with his hands at her butt. She wrapped her legs around his waist. He pinned her to the wall and continued the kiss until they both needed air. He traveled around her jaw with his lips until he reached her ear lobe. He sucked on it then continued down her neck, encouraged by the whimpers she made. She ran her

hands over his head as he lightly bit her neck. Riley pulled back, and one hand fingered her buttons on the blouse she had on while looking her in the eyes. They were at half mast, and he'd barely started. She never took her eyes off his as he slipped one button out of the button hole, then another. She threw her head back and leaned it against the wall as he continued down the blouse until all the buttons were undone.

"Kick off your heels," Riley demanded.

He heard first one then the other hit the floor behind him. He spread her blouse with one hand. He needed both hands.

"Where is the bedroom," he rasped out.

"It's down the hall to the end. Door on the right," she answered in a breathy voice.

The hall seemed a mile long as he carried her. He turned right and found himself in a large bedroom decorated in burgundy. The hardwood floors gleamed, reflecting the warmth of the deep red colors. He lowered Jenna to her feet and nudged her blouse off her shoulders. His cock poked her abdomen as he bent her over one arm and devoured the smooth mounds of her breasts. He nipped at her nipples through the lace of her bra. She moaned and thrust them closer to his mouth. They stood up, pointing toward his mouth. He sucked first one then the other before straightening her and unclasping her bra. He pulled it down her arms then tightened it around her wrists.

Panic filled her eyes as he held her there for a brief few seconds. He released her hands, dropping the bra to the floor. He leaned forward and drew in a nipple. Nipping at it and then swirling his tongue over it to sooth the sting. He repeated it on the other nipple then pushed them together until he could take both nipples into his mouth at one time. He drew on them. Jenna grasped his head and held him there. Riley pulled away and began unfastening then unzipping her jeans.

Slowly, he shoved them down her hips and down her legs. She stepped out of them without being told. He backed her to the bed until the back of her knees hit the bed, and she sat down. He followed her down and pushed her back until she was lying down. He knelt before her and ran his hands up the outside of her legs until he reached her panties. Then he slid them beneath and rolled them down until he could pull them down her legs. They slid effortlessly along her smooth legs.

Riley nudged her legs apart and situated his shoulders between them. She had come to her elbows and was watching him. He kept eye contact as he lowered his mouth to her center. Once again she threw her head back and moaned.

“God, yes.”

He spread her labia to give him better access to her sweet juices. He licked her from top to bottom and back up again. She hissed. His tongue circled her clit but didn’t touch it. He would save that until later. Instead, he wanted to lap up her honey. She tasted like the finest wine. This might be wrong, but it felt right. The evidence of her arousal called to him. She grabbed at his head trying to direct him towards her clit.

“Please, I can’t stand it,” she rasped

His cock hardened even more at her pleading. He took a quick swipe over her clit, and she rocked her pelvis toward him with a whimper. He flattened his tongue and ran it over the bud until she began to trimmer. Then he drew it into his mouth and sucked while she came undone for him. She screamed as she came, grinding her pussy into his face. He relished it. Slowly, he brought her down then stood and unfastened his jeans, pushing them down as far as he could with his boots still on. He placed one knee on the bed then groaned.

“Condom.”

He cursed and fumbled through his wallet and pulled out a foil packet. The package didn’t last five seconds in his hands. He rolled the condom on and rubbed his throbbing cock head against her pussy

lips. Then he entered her as she whimpered, tossing her head back and forth. Riley pushed forward then pulled out. He continued until he had fully seated himself inside her. He paused to catch his breath. She was so fucking tight. He swallowed and began a slow rocking. He pulled almost all the way out and then pushed in again, only to repeat it until he could no longer stand the slow pace. He picked up her legs and began thrusting over and over. The motion pushed her farther up the bed. He followed her and soon was pounding into her with everything he had. She dug at the covers with her hands.

“Yes, yes, yes,” she chanted.

She tightened around him as she drew back with her coming climax. Riley reached between them and fingered her clit, sending her over in a scream. He followed her, shooting hard inside her. He held himself still within her for what felt like forever as he came. Then he collapsed against her. Their combined breathing was the only sound in the room. Riley rolled off her and onto his back, willing his heart to slow down. Dear God, what had he done?

He turned to check on her and found her fast asleep. Fuck. He shoved back the comforter and sheet. Then he turned her the right way in the bed and pulled the cover over both of them. He thought about leaving but couldn't do it. She deserved more than that. Hadn't he chastised Logan for doing that to Tina? No, he would face the music when she woke up in the morning and realized what they'd done.

He lay awake for a long time, pondering why he'd slept with her. He liked her. Neither of them had been drunk. No, he had been perfectly sober. He could have backed off. He hadn't wanted to. *Face it. You've wanted her since you met her at Logan's.*

Jenna moaned and rolled over to wrap herself around him. He settled her more comfortably on his shoulder and willed himself to sleep. Tomorrow would come soon enough. There would be time for recriminations then.

* * * *

Jenna swallowed. Her mouth felt like cotton balls resided in it. She drew in a deep breath, and her eyes flew open. That scent. She knew it. She rolled over to see the indentation on the pillow next to her. She lifted the covers and let them fall with a moan. She was stark naked. God, it hadn't been a dream. She'd slept with Riley. What the hell had she been thinking? *You weren't. You knew better than to drink that third margarita.*

What was she going to do now? The smell of coffee began to fill the room. He was still there. God, what was she going to say to him? How could she face him? Instead of facing the music right away, she opted for a shower. Checking the doorway and finding it empty, she jumped out of bed and ran for the bathroom. She closed and locked the door. Then she looked in the mirror. She looked thoroughly sexed. Mused hair, razor burn neck, and swollen lips.

She turned on the shower and pulled down a towel and bath cloth. After checking the water temperature, Jenna climbed into the shower and began bathing vigorously. She was so caught up in washing away the guilt and mortification she felt that when the shower curtain slid open, she screamed and covered her breast with one hand and her pussy with another.

"There's no need to be bashful. I've seen and tasted every part of you." Riley had no mercy on her.

"Get out. I locked the door for a reason."

"Is that any way to treat someone who brought coffee?" He held out a steaming cup.

She eyed him then took the cup and sipped at the life-sustaining liquid. Black, just the way she liked it first thing in the morning. The second cup she always put in milk. She took another sip and handed it back to Riley.

"Thanks," she reluctantly said.

"Do you mind if I join you? I need to shower, too."

“Yes, I mind. You can shower after I get out.”

“Saves on water and this way I am assured of hot water.” He pulled off his clothes before he slipped into the tub behind her. “Hand me the bath cloth, and I’ll scrub your back.”

“How can you act like nothing happened?” Jenna asked. She handed him the cloth and tried to relax.

The first swipe of the cloth on her back had her jumping forward. She slipped and only Riley grabbing her around the waist kept her from falling. She felt his cock harden at her back. She squeezed her eyes closed.

“Be careful,” was all he said as he steadied her.

He took a step back and began bathing her again. This time, she managed not to jump out of her skin. He continued until he reached her ass then stopped.

“Turn around, and I’ll get the rest of you.”

“Not on your life. Scoot back. I need to rinse now.” Jenna turned around and quickly let the water slush over her back.

Then she stepped out of the tub and snagged the towel to dry off. She hesitated about putting a towel out for him and decided that was petty. She grabbed another towel and left it for him. She left the bathroom and hurriedly dressed before he finished his shower and walked in on her. Picking up her coffee, she eased out of the bathroom again and headed to the kitchen.

Should she start breakfast or not? She really didn’t want him to stay any longer. She needed time to berate herself for her stupidity in having sex with him. Of all the stupid things she had done in her life, this was probably the dumbest. No, marrying her ex was the worse, but this ranked a close second. She groaned and buried her face in her hands.

“Are you okay?” Riley walked into the kitchen behind her.

“No, I slept with you.”

“It’s not the end of the world.”

“Easy for you to say. You are probably used to one-night stands.”

"Is that what this is?" he asked.

"You're leaving, so I think that qualifies this as a one-night stand."

"I guess you're right." He leaned against the cabinet and studied her.

"What?"

"I didn't think you were the one-night stand type."

"I'm not." She set down her coffee cup.

"So we'll have sex a couple more times, and it won't be a one night stand," he suggested.

"This isn't funny. Get out," she shouted.

He grinned and shook his head. "Not until I finish my coffee."

"Fine, finish your damn coffee then get out." She stomped into the living room

The nerve of the bastard. How dare he? She paced the room, waiting on him to finish his coffee and leave. She couldn't settle down until he did. He came into the room, holding his coffee, and watched her pace. She stopped and glared at him.

"Stop staring at me."

"There's nothing else interesting to look at." He took another sip of the coffee.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because you are so riled up about nothing."

"Nothing! You bastard. Forget the coffee and get out. Go buy some coffee." She pointed toward the door.

He pursed his lips then set the coffee down on an end table and unlocked the door. He opened it and stopped.

Without turning around, he said, "You need me for anything, ask Logan. He knows how to get in touch with me."

"Why would I ever need anything from you? Don't worry. I'd as soon call Attila the Hun as call you for anything." She stepped up and shut the door on him. Then she leaned against it and felt the first tear slide down her face.

She refused to cry over him. He said it meant nothing. Nothing! She swallowed past the lump in her throat and stomped into the kitchen to do something. Anything but think of Riley. The phone rang, and she grabbed it like a lifesaver.

“Hello.” Nothing.

“Hello?” She fumed. “Look, whoever this is, stop harassing me. I’m not impressed.” She slammed down the phone.

Seconds later, it rang again. She picked it up, intent on giving them a piece of her mind.

“I don’t know who you are, but if you don’t stop calling me, I’m going to call the police.”

“Jenna? Is that you?” Tina’s voice greeted her tirade.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I just got a prank phone call. I thought they were calling back.”

“Are you okay? You sound odd.”

“Yeah, just tired. I didn’t sleep well,” she said.

“You should have after having three margaritas,” Tina answered.

“What’s with everyone on what I had to drink? I wasn’t driving.”

“Hey. I’m not criticizing. I just thought you would have slept well. Who said anything about it?”

“Riley.”

“Well, to hell with Riley. He’s been in a weird mood for the last few days,” Tina said.

“Tell me about it. He’s done nothing but fuss at me.”

“Well, forget about him. Why don’t you come over, and we’ll watch a movie.”

“That sounds good to me. I’ll be over in an hour. I need to do some things first.”

“I’ll look through my movies and pick out a couple for us to decide on when you get here. Do you think a love story or a comedy?”

“Definitely a comedy. I’m not in the mood for a love story today.” That was an understatement, she thought.

“Comedy it is. I’ll see you in a little while.”

Chapter Three

“What do you mean you’re not ready to ride?” Morgan stood with his hands on his hips.

“I’m going to stick around for a few more days,” Riley said.

“What’s gotten into you lately? You’re the one that always wants to move on. I stick around, and you head out.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not ready.”

“It’s that Jenna broad, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?” Riley asked.

“You’re stuck on her. You’ve been acting weird around her ever since I got here.”

Riley wiped off the seat of his bike. “Naw. She rubs me the wrong way.”

“She rubs you all right. She’s got you by the balls if you ask me.”

“I’m not asking you.” Riley snapped.

“Fine.” Morgan held up his hands and backed away. “I’m out of here. Give me a call if you decide you want to meet up somewhere.”

“I’ll do that.” Riley continued running the towel over the chrome on the bike without looking at him.

Morgan walked over to his bike and climbed on. Riley peered at him over the seat of his bike as his friend started the engine and pulled away. So why was he hanging around anyway? He wasn’t sure. Something bugged him. Usually when that occurred, something bad happened. He wasn’t leaving until it manifested and he took care of it or the feeling went away. He just hoped it wouldn’t be long. His willpower wasn’t very strong where Jenna was concerned.

He had lain awake that night thinking about her soft body and the little mewish noises she made when he sucked her clit. His cock hardened. Groaning, he stood up and adjusted himself. The fabric over his cock chaffed. This was one of the times he regretted not wearing underwear under his jeans. Thoughts of Jenna filled his head again. Damn, he couldn't get her out of it. He jacked-off to thoughts of her. The memory of her wrapped around him pulled a groan from him.

Logan chose that moment to walk outside.

"You heading out? I thought you were going with Morgan."

"I decided to stick around for a little longer."

"You got a feeling, don't you?" Logan looked over his shoulder, probably to be sure Tina wasn't coming out the door.

"Yeah. Something doesn't feel right."

"Shit."

"Yeah," Riley said.

"Don't say anything to Tina. She's still having nightmares about her stalker and the attack."

"I won't," he said. "I don't suppose you could figure out a way to get Tina to invite Jenna over for a few days, can you?"

Logan looked hard at him. "I this about her?"

"I don't know." Riley dropped the towel over the seat of the bike.

"You fucked her, didn't you?" Logan let out a string of curses.

"That's none of your business."

"It concerns Tina then it is my business. This will upset her if she finds out. If you aren't sticking around, Tina is going to be upset."

"Stay the hell out of it," Riley said, looking Logan in the eyes.

"I will until it concerns Tina."

"Jenna won't talk to Tina about it."

"What makes you so sure? They share everything," Logan said.

"She's not happy about it. She's embarrassed about it. She won't share."

“I hope to hell you’re right. I don’t particularly want to be on the receiving end of Tina’s wrath. Since I introduced you to Jenna, it will be my fault you hurt her.”

“How do you know I hurt her? It could be the other way around,” Logan countered.

“I can’t see you hurting over a woman.”

“Yeah, well there’s a first time for everything.” Riley grabbed his helmet and put it on. “I’m out of here. I’ll talk to you later.”

He climbed on the bike and started it up. Without looking at Logan, Riley pulled out of the drive and headed out. He didn’t have a particular destination in mind but wasn’t surprised when he ended up cruising by Jenna’s house. Her car was home, so she would be inside. He wondered what she was doing. It didn’t matter. He was nothing to her but a mistake.

It shouldn’t have bothered him. He was a love ’em and leave ’em kind of guy. So why did it rankle that she had basically kicked him out? Maybe because he cared about her. He cared that someone had hurt her and that it could happen again. She had poor taste in men. But what could he do about that? She would make her own decisions even if he were to stick around. He slowed down the bike when he realized he was going close to a hundred. He was going to get himself killed obsessing over her. He turned back toward his hotel and cursed his cock for taking notice that he was thinking about Jenna again.

When he climbed off the bike, the first thing he did was adjust his cock. It had swelled until he’d have the imprint of his zipper on it when he pulled off his jeans. He carried his helmet inside and threw his jacket on the couch in disgust. He needed a beer. He opened the mini fridge and dug one out. Popping the top, Riley turned it up and let the ice-cold liquid run down his throat. It did nothing to cool off his libido. It would take more than one beer for that, and he had no intention of getting drunk.

He tried watching TV for awhile and finally gave up on that after switching channels for a few minutes. He’d never been much for TV

anyway. Cursing, he threw down the remote and stood up and paced. Nothing worked. He still had the hard-on from hell, and his mind was still full of thoughts of Jenna. The memory of how she'd felt tight around his cock, squeezing him even as he pounded into her. He rubbed his groin and huffed out a breath. Riley gave in and unfastened his jeans. He pulled out his cock and rubbed the pre-cum around the head. He pictured Jenna on her knees sucking him deep into her throat. She would run her tongue underneath the head and back down the shaft. He ran his hand down into his jeans and cupped his balls.

Long blond hair would fan out around her as she bobbed up and down on his cock, taking him to the back of her throat and swallowing. He groaned and pulled on his cock to the memory of how she had cried out as he sucked her clit. He loved those sounds she made. She would use the flat of her tongue to lick the underside of his cock from top to bottom then draw in just the head of him and suck long and hard. He sped up his pumping now. His other hand rolled his balls around in his hand, occasionally squeezing them.

Jenna's swollen lips would stretch wide to take all of him in her mouth. Then she would moan along his shaft, sending delicious vibrations straight to his balls. He felt the tingle start in his lower back and travel into his balls. He was close. He wanted her to swallow every bit of his cum. She sucked faster and harder, his groans louder and louder, until he shot his load into his hand, wishing it were her mouth. He swallowed hard and fought to control his breathing. Damn, he knew the real thing would be ten times better. Too bad he would never find out.

* * * *

Jenna paced the bedroom floor. She had to be at work in less than five hours and couldn't sleep. She wasn't going to lie to herself and say it wasn't because of Riley. He dominated her thoughts night and

day. Part of her longed to feel him deep inside her again, while part of her never wanted to see him again. What was she going to do?

She flopped down on the couch and huffed out a breath. Maybe she shouldn't have been so angry with him. It took two, and she. She had wanted him. When he kissed her, she was lost. She was still lost.

The phone rang, jarring her from her thoughts. She got up and went to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Jenna, baby. I'm so sorry for how I treated you." Todd's voice greeted her.

"What in the hell are you calling me for? I told you we're through. Didn't you get that when Riley broke your nose?"

"The bastard nearly broke my jaw. You think I was rough, you see him and he'll put you in the hospital," he said.

"It's none of your business who I see. Leave me alone, and don't call and hang up anymore," Jenna warned.

"What are you talking about? I haven't called you and hung up. I call, I got something to say."

"Right. Like I believe your lying ass. Stay away from me." Jenna slammed down the phone and felt good doing it.

What had she seen in him? *I saw what I wanted to see. Someone to love me. I just want someone to care.* Jenna had never felt like she belonged in her family. They were all brainiacs, smart enough to win scholarships and never having to study while doing it. She'd had to study to keep her grades up enough to pass. It wasn't until college that she'd finally hit her stride. She didn't make straight A's, but she had done well enough to capture a coveted job at the consulting company where she worked now. And, she'd met Tina, her best friend.

Still, she wanted to feel a part of something. Deep down, Jenna knew that having a man wasn't the answer. The answer was being confident in herself and being happy on her own. She had a good job, a nice house, and a good friend. She was rich in some minds. Just not in her own.

Then it hit her. How had Todd known she was awake at three in the morning unless he had been outside her house? The bastard was stalking her. Maybe she should have called the police. She could still call them. Obviously the restraining order didn't mean a thing to him. Well, next time she would call the police.

Frustrated to the point of tears, she finally settled back in bed with the hopes of getting at least a few hours of sleep. Thoughts of Riley drifted back to her as she closed her eyes. His strong arms and firm muscles invaded her dreams. He kissed her, and she was lost.

* * * *

"He called you at three in the morning? You're right. He had to have been outside watching you." Tina stabbed at her salad.

"I don't get it. I haven't heard from him in nearly a month, and now he shows back up."

"If he calls you again, call the police, and tell them he's bothering you. They need to make a report, so it will be on record," Tina reminded her.

"I know. I didn't think about it last night until he'd had time to leave," Jenna glanced at her watch. They still had twenty minutes left in their lunch hour.

"You never did say why you were up at that time of morning."

"I just couldn't sleep." Jenna avoided Tina's hard gaze.

"Uh huh. Tell that to someone who believes you. What's bothering you?" she asked.

"Really, nothing."

"Jenna, you know we can talk about anything with each other. Don't hold back if something has you upset enough that you are up all night worrying over it. That's what friends are for." Tina moved her salad aside and leaned in toward her.

"Riley."

"What about Riley?" she asked

Jenna swallowed. "I had sex with Riley the other night." There, she'd said it.

"Okay." Tina took a deep breath and let it whoosh out.

"That's all you are gonna say?"

"I'm not sure what to say. You're a grown woman. You can make your own decisions."

"But?" Jenna prompted.

"You know he isn't going to hang around, right?"

"I know. I just can't believe I did it. And," she began. "I enjoyed it. A lot."

"I'm not surprised. He's a hunk just like Logan." Tina laughed.

"Tina, it's not funny."

"I'm not laughing at you, hon." Tina patted her hand.

"What am I going to do? I want him again, but I know it isn't going to go anywhere."

"So, have a fling. Don't expect it to go anywhere, and enjoy yourself. Just don't get serious about him."

"I've never had a fling in my life. You know that. I don't know how." Jenna sighed. She looked at her watch and pushed her salad back. "It's time to get back to work."

"We'll talk more later. I bet Riley is going to show up at your place before then." Jenna scooted her chair back from the table.

"Why do you think that?" Jenna asked.

"Because he'd be a fool not to." Tina winked at her.

* * * *

An insistent pounding on her door woke Jenna. She rubbed her face. She must have fallen asleep reading. She stood up, a little unsteady and still groggy. The knocking started again followed by a demanding voice. She knew that voice.

"Open the door, Jenna."

If she wasn't awake before, she was now. She swallowed and unlocked the door. At the sound of the locks, the knocking stopped. She opened the door a couple of inches, but Riley shoved it the rest of the way open with his shoulder.

"What took you so damn long?" he asked.

"I was asleep on the couch." She ran one hand through her mussed hair. "What do you want anyway?"

"Todd." One word.

"What about him?"

"He called and has been watching you, and you didn't tell me." He took a step closer.

Jenna took a step back. "I didn't see where I needed to. If he calls back, I'm going to call the police."

"Next time you call me. I don't want you here by yourself with that nut case anywhere near you." Riley advanced on her.

She quickly ran out of room to back up. He continued to advance.

"I should turn you over my knee and spank that sweet ass of yours." He stopped less than a foot from her.

"You wouldn't dare," she said, her chin going up.

"Don't you get it? You can't play around with Todd. He's dangerous." He lifted her chin higher with two fingers so she was looking up into his eyes.

"I know better than you do, I think." She jerked her chin away from him.

He didn't say anything else. Instead, he ran his hand around beneath her hair to the nape of her neck and pulled her toward him until her mouth was inches from his. He grabbed her at the small of her back with the other one. He slowly lowered his mouth that last little bit and kissed her. It started off as a mere brush of lips against hers. She didn't allow him to back away. She wrapped her hands around his neck and pulled him closer.

His mouth pressed against hers. Her lips parted, and she nibbled at his lower lip until he opened for her. He let her lead the kiss for a few

seconds then took over and deepened it, eating at her mouth with his. His hands dropped to cup her ass in his big hands. She whimpered as he drew her up against him even tighter. The hard ridge of his erection brushed against her belly. It pleased her that he was as aroused as she was. Her lack of control had to be from just waking up from a dream about him. No way would she have been this wanton otherwise.

Jenna pressed against Riley, rubbing her abdomen against his hard cock. He responded by squeezing her ass with his hands.

“You better say no now if you don’t want this because I’m going to fuck you if you don’t.”

His blunt words turned her on even more. God, she wanted him. But...he would be leaving in a few days if not tomorrow. Could she have sex without any sort of relationship? She had essentially already done that.

When she didn’t answer, he took it as a yes and reached down and picked her up in his arms. He carried her into the bedroom and dropped her on the bed where she bounced. He didn’t say anything, just pulled his shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor. He raised his eyebrows at her.

“Strip.”

She came up on her elbows. “Just like that? Strip.”

“Just like that.” He paused with his hand on the button of his jeans. “Unless you’re saying no.”

Jenna licked her lips. Then she began unbuttoning her blouse. He watched her as one by one, each button came undone. He unzipped his jeans but didn’t pull them down. She slid first one shoulder then the other out of the blouse and let it fall to the bed. When she went to unclasp her bra, he stopped her.

“Wait. I’ll do that in a minute.”

She shrugged and unbuttoned her slacks then leaned back and began wiggling out of them. Once they got over her ass, Riley reached up and pulled them the rest of the way off her body. He took

her hands and pulled her back to a sitting position and effortlessly removed her bra. The cool air touched her nipples, causing them to snap to attention. He stood back and looked at them without touching them.

He looked down into her eyes. “You know what I want to do with you? I want to tie you up and take you hard and fast.” He touched her trembling lips with one finger. “But you can’t handle that, can you?”

Jenna didn’t answer him. She drew in one shaky breath after another. His declaration thrilled her and scared her all at the same time. The conflicting emotions must have shown on her face since he cocked his head and seemed to think of something. He reached for her again and rolled her thong down until he could pull it off as well.

“Get in the center of the bed. Put your hands over your head, and hold on to the headboard.” He pulled off his boots and then his jeans.

He stood before her gloriously naked, his thick cock standing out from his body. He fisted a hand around his cock and slowly stroked it. A drop of pre-cum leaked from the tip. She licked her lips, wanting to taste his salty essence. Slowly, she scooted up the center of the bed until she could grasp the headboard with her hands. She never took her eyes off his straining cock. He rolled a condom over the thick width of it.

“Now don’t move them no matter what. Do you understand?” He asked.

She nodded, watching as he crawled up on the bed between her legs. He leaned over her until his head was level with her breasts. His tongue flicked out and touched her nipple. Then he laved all around the torrid peak until she was thrusting her chest toward his mouth wanting—needing him to lick her nipple. Instead, he moved to the other breast and repeated the torturous journey. His sheathed cock rested lightly against her pussy. She raised her hips to rub against him. He arched away from her.

He licked his way down between her breasts until he reached her bellybutton. There he dipped his tongue inside then nipped at her

belly. She couldn't stop the whimper that escaped her mouth. He chuckled and continued his journey downward, licking and biting lightly along the way. He bypassed her wet folds and aching clit in favor of her legs. His lips kissed and his teeth grazed along the inside of her thighs to where he licked along the back of her knees.

Jenna squirmed, needing him to return to her burning center. There seemed to be no mercy in him at first. Finally, he eased back upward and blew against her wet folds. He used his fingers to spread her lips and blew against her again. The cool air tickled, deepening her arousal to her surprise. Just when she despaired that he would do anything, he ran the flat of his tongue over her clit. She cried out at the sudden attention and bowed toward him. He stopped and waited until she had settled down.

One of his fingers touched her opening, but he didn't enter. Instead, he licked her from top to bottom and back up again. He stiffened his tongue, probing until she rose from the bed to grab at his head. He stopped and growled at her.

"Put your hands back on the headboard. I told you not to move them."

Jenna immediately returned them to their previous position and waited for him to resume eating her pussy. She waited and began to worry that he wouldn't anymore. Finally, Riley lowered his head and licked along her folds. He lapped at her then ran his tongue around her clit over and over again until she was following him with her pelvis in an effort to get him to lick directly over the aching nub. After awhile, she whimpered and started begging.

"Please. Please."

He lifted his head to gaze up the line of her body at her. "Please what?"

"Please do something. I can't stand it."

"Yes, you can. You can handle a lot more."

Jenna moved her hands then jerked them back to the headboard at a hard stare from him.

“Please.”

He smiled and lowered his head. Thinking he would only tease her again, it totally surprised her when he ran the flat of his tongue over her clit once, twice, then drew it into his mouth and sucked. Jenna burned from the center of her body down to her pussy. He drew it farther into his mouth then latched onto it with his teeth, so he could run his tongue along it over and over. She bucked beneath him as she came, hard and fast. Her ears rang, and she held on to the headboard for dear life.

He brought her down slowly then flipped her over to all fours and pushed her down to the bed with one hand between her shoulder blades. His cock circled her opening, spreading her juices around, then plunged into her. He buried himself in her with a single thrust. She whimpered and tried to sit up, but his big hand held her down. He began to pump into her over and over. Jenna found herself pushing back to meet his hard thrusts. The friction began to build another climax deep within her.

He popped her ass first on one cheek then the other. The sting resonated to her pussy and created the burn that signaled her climax was close. She squeezed him inside her, and it was his turn to groan. He spanked her again, and she pushed back against him for more. He laughed and repeated the hard pats until she was groaning and lifting to his hand. Her climax inched closer and closer. What was happening to her? She was not only letting him spank her but reveling in it. This couldn't be her. He began pounding into her harder and faster until she exploded around him, squeezing him with her pelvic muscles. She was rewarded with his loud groan and shout as he came inside of her, filling the condom with his hot seed.

After a minute of breathing hard against her back, he pulled out and disappeared from the bed. She collapsed and panted, trying to regain her breath. A few seconds later, he returned and climbed back in the bed. She was surprised, expecting him to dress and leave now

that he had gotten what he wanted. He pulled the covers over them and then drew her back against his body.

“Sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.”

It didn’t take him long to fall asleep. She, on the other hand, stayed awake for long minutes later. She thought about how she’d let him order her to keep her hands above her head. He had restrained her using her own hands. Then he’d spanked her, and she’d enjoyed it. She had to admit that she did. What was going on with her? What had he done to her? Finally, she fell asleep.

Chapter Four

Sometime after midnight, Jenna awoke to a hand between her legs and a mouth at her breast. She smiled and hummed her appreciation when the hand began stroking her clit. Pleasure filled her even as a subtle pressure began to build inside of her. Riley's fingers found her opening and thrust inward. His thumb circled her clit once again. The fingers of his other hand plucked at her nipple. His teeth grazed over the other nipple. The hard length of him lay pulsing against her hip. He pressed against her in time with his fingers fucking inside of her.

She moaned and raised her hips to meet his thrusts. He nipped at her breast then soothed the sting with his tongue. The small pain set a new burning deep within her. The pressure continued to build. She held his head in her hands. His scent filled her nose—something clean with the hint of leather. It suited him. Nothing prepared her for the way her body reacted to his touch. He withdrew his fingers from her pussy and gently circled her clit using her juices.

"Mmm." She couldn't contain the sound.

She was going to come. In no time, he had her hot, burning, and all but begging for him to fuck her. His fingers pressed against her clit then he pinched it, and the painful pleasure sent her over the edge. She screamed as she exploded. Her eyes squeezed shut so tightly a rainbow of colors burst behind them. She bucked, but he threw one leg over hers to keep her still.

"That's it, come for me. Give me all that sweet honey you have." Riley kept the pressure going on then off until she was crying for him to stop.

"No more. I can't. Oh, God."

“That’s it, settle down now.” He pulled her back into his arms and ran a hand up and down her arm then caressed her belly until it stopped quivering.

After what seemed like hours later, though probably was only a few minutes, Jenna could breath normally again and realized Riley’s cock still pressed hard and thick against her.

“What about you?” she asked.

“Hmm?” He nuzzled the back of her neck beneath her hair.

“Don’t you want to come?”

“When you’ve recovered enough, I want you to suck my cock.”

His bluntness startled her, but she guessed it was to be expected of someone like him. Someone hard and used to getting their way about everything. She smiled to herself. She hadn’t gotten to taste him either time they’d had sex. She would enjoy it and drag out his climax like he had hers. Grinning mischievously, Jenna pulled out of his arms and scooted down the bed until she was eye level with his penis. She ran a hand down its length, marveling at the silky feel of the massive cock. It jerked against her hand. This would be so good.

She looked up the line of his body to watch him position a pillow behind his back so he could watch her. He rested his hands on either side of him on the bed. One brow went up as he waited for her to take him into her mouth. She licked her lower lip and watched his face as she lowered her mouth over him. His lids fell to half mast when her wet mouth slowly encased him as far as she could go. She sucked hard on the way back up and let him go with an audible pop. He smiled down at her. With one hand, she held him at the base of the stalk and the other slid down to his balls where she manipulated them carefully.

She licked with the flat of her tongue up to the crown of his mushroom-shaped head then licked around the underside of the cap. He groaned when she ran her tongue along the slit on top. He rewarded her with a drop of salty pre-cum. She rolled it around in her mouth, savoring it. Then she sucked just the top of him in her mouth

and pulled upward with the suction of her mouth. He groaned and wrapped her hair in one hand.

“Stop teasing me, and suck my cock.”

She hummed around him and swallowed him down until he hit the back of her throat. She swallowed again and then pulled upward. His hand tightened in her hair and pulled at it enough to sting her scalp. She swallowed him again and reveled in the grunting sound he made. She knew she was getting to him as he leaked cum now for her with each upward pull of her mouth. She gently squeezed his balls then raked her nails over them. Now he raised his hips to meet her when she went down on him.

“That’s it, baby. Your hot mouth has me so close. I’m going to fill your throat with my cum. I want you to drink it all.” Riley pulled on her hair again.

Faster and harder, Jenna sucked until she felt his balls draw up in her hand, and he held her head as he pumped into her mouth.

“I’m going to come. Suck me dry.”

He erupted into her mouth, and she fought to swallow all of him. He yelled out and pumped his seed into her mouth. She slowly brought him down and then licked the top of his cock. He sat up and ran a thumb over the corner of her mouth and held it up for her to suck a bit of his essence from it. He smiled at her.

“That was damn good, baby. How about a shower?”

Jenna stretched and looked over at the clock then groaned.

“It’s only two in the morning. How about we go back to sleep and take a shower in the morning?”

“Hmm, I can do that.”

She crawled up the bed on her hands and knees. Riley grabbed her and kissed her nose. Jenna rolled over to curl up on her side. He played with her hair and massaged her scalp until finally, she fell back asleep.

* * * *

Riley woke slowly with the weight of someone curled up around his body. Images of the night before filled his head. Jenna. He'd come over to confront her about not calling him about Todd. He'd told her to let him know if the bastard bothered her anymore. It didn't matter that they'd fought a few nights before. She still should have called him.

He leaned up a few inches and breathed in her scent, soft like summer rain. He ran his hand down her hair then pulled it aside so he could rub her back. She made an appreciatory sound that rumbled against his chest. Her breasts rubbed lightly over his chest. He was sure his chest hair rasped against her nipples. Her legs moved, and one knee lightly grazed his balls. He held his breath.

"Watch your knee. I rather like my balls just like they are, in working order."

"Mmm, sorry." She stretched out her leg and then rolled off him to stretch. He watched her and grew hard at the sight.

"I'm going to go start coffee. Then I want that shower you promised me." Jenna sat up on the edge of the bed and stretched again.

"You keep doing that and you're going to be flat on your back with me buried so deep, you taste me in the back of your throat." Riley growled.

"That's right, threaten me." She laughed and jumped up when he lunged toward her.

He watched her disappear through the bedroom door before he groaned and got out of bed. They needed to talk. He wasn't looking forward to it. She would not be happy. Perhaps the sex would make it easier. He heaved out a sigh. Not hardly.

She returned a few minutes later and started the shower. He followed her into the bathroom and watched as she set out towels. Then she reached in and checked the water temperature. She smiled up at him.

“Water’s ready. I’ll wash your back, and you can wash mine.”

They both stepped into the shower and let the water cascade over them. Then Riley scooted her to the back so he could shield most of the water from getting into her face. He scrubbed her back then ran it around in circles, soothing her skin before reaching around her to massage the soap into her breasts.

“Nope. No shower sex. I’m hungry for food right now. Hand me the cloth so I can finish bathing then I’ll leave the shower to you,” she said over her shoulder.

“Sorry, but I have other ideas.” He ran his soapy hands down her stomach and back up to play with her nipples.

Her moan caused him to smile. She aroused so damn easy. She reached around and took hold of his cock, and he stilled. So she wanted to play that way. He was game. He turned her around and shoved his hand between her legs searching for her clit with his soapy fingers. She grasped his cock in her hands and pumped her hand up and down it while caressing his balls. He located her clit and began gently petting it. She drew in a deep breath. Then she began pulling on him in an attempt to distract him, he was sure. It nearly worked. He bent down and took her mouth, keeping the fingers of one hand busy with her pussy while his other hand played with her breast. His mouth devoured hers. He sucked on her tongue then ran his tongue around the inside of her mouth. She moaned and lost her rhythm momentarily.

Still, it wasn’t long before he felt the signs of his eminent release. She was going to win this little game. Actually, they both would win. He smiled, barring his teeth. God, she was driving him crazy. He didn’t need to let her get under his skin. He would be leaving soon.

She ran her thumb around the underside of his cock then squeezed his balls, and his climax took him by surprise. He shouted out and braced himself on the tile on either side of her head. His cum coated her belly. She leaned her head against his chest, laughing.

“Men are so easy.”

“Watch out,” he said around pants.

He finally straightened up and turned her around to the shower, pulling her back enough to keep the water out of her face.

“Wash off then go fix me my breakfast, woman.”

“You owe me, Riley. I aim to collect, too.” She finished washing and stepped out of the shower to dry off.

Riley stuck his head out of the shower. “I’ll take care of you, don’t worry.” Then he returned to the dwindling hot water and hurriedly cleaned up.

By the time he had dried off and pulled on his jeans, she had the batter for pancakes whipped up and bacon in the oven. He smiled at her attire. She had on an oversized T-shirt and a pair of shorts. She looked like a little girl in it. When he entered the kitchen, her gaze drifted across his bare chest and down to where he hadn’t bothered to button his jeans.

“Like what you see?” he teased.

“Um hum.”

He watched as she checked the bacon. “We still need to talk.”

She answered him without looking up. “After we eat.”

Thirty minutes later, they had finished eating. He watched as she loaded the dishwasher then wiped her hands on a towel after washing them. When she turned around, he saw the resignation in her eyes. She expected this to be as difficult as he knew it would be. She walked into the living room and collapsed on the couch. He eyed the chair across the coffee table but chose to sit next to her instead.

“Why didn’t you tell me about Todd contacting you?” he asked.

“Because I didn’t think it was your business. I really thought you would already be gone anyway.”

“I’m not leaving until he gets the message that you are off limits.” Where in the hell had that come from?

“You’ve got to be kidding. You can’t just come in here and yell at me about something that’s not your concern then fuck me and leave again,” she yelled, standing up.

“Sit back down. You’re the only one yelling right now.” Riley stood up and towered over her.

“I have a right to yell. You’re butting into my business.”

“You made it my business when you let me in your bed.” He struggled to keep from raising his voice, too.

You seduced me into having sex with you,” she pushed.

“And you’re a grown woman who can say no. You didn’t want to say no.”

“I think it’s time you left.” She jammed her hands on her hips.

He nearly smiled. She looked ridiculous standing in that T-shirt with her hands on her hips. He advanced on her until she backed up. He reached out to pull her toward him, and she flinched. It stopped him. She actually thought he would hit her. It floored him. He had never hit a woman in his life. That she thought him capable shook him. He swallowed and drew in a deep breath. Then he turned and walked back to the bedroom to finish dressing. She was right. He needed to leave.

She was still standing in the same place but had her arms wrapped around herself. She didn’t say anything when he unlocked the door and opened it. He hesitated in the door way.

“I would never hurt you. I don’t hit women.” Then he walked out without shutting the door.

He heard it close and the locks engage as he walked out to his bike. He pulled on his helmet and threw his leg over the saddle. He sat there for few seconds before starting the bike and pulling out of her drive. He should pick up his things and head out right now, he thought to himself. No use sticking around. She didn’t need his help. He rode around for nearly an hour, thinking. Finally, he drove over to Logan’s. He needed to be sure someone watched out for her. God knew she wouldn’t ask for help.

* * * *

“I told you he would come over. No way would he stay away,” Tina said.

“Yeah, especially since you told him about Todd calling me. That was low,” Jenna admonished.

“He wanted to know. He cares about you. Can’t you see that?” she asked.

Jenna said nothing. She sipped the coffee she had ordered at the corner Starbucks. She had met Tina there at two that afternoon to talk. Her friend looked at her over her iced coffee. Jenna knew she could see right through her bravado.

“He acted really weird when he came over this morning to talk to Logan. They disappeared for a couple of hours. What happened?” Tina asked.

“We fought about Todd, and I flinched when he got close to me. It pissed him off I think.” Jenna felt bad about it now. “I couldn’t help it, Jenna. You know that.”

“I know. But you have to know he would never hurt you.”

“I know.”

“So did you tell him that?” Tina asked.

“No. He left, and I was too upset at the time.”

“I think he’s leaving now.”

“It’s my fault. I don’t know what I can do to make him stay. I don’t even know why I want him to stay.” Jenna leaned back in the chair.

“Go tell him how you feel. That you know he wouldn’t hurt you, but you can’t help that you’re like you are. You’ve been hit too many times not to flinch when anyone moves too fast. Tell him before he leaves,” Tina pleaded.

“He won’t listen to me now. Besides, he wants to go. He’s been here too long according to him.”

Tina sighed and shook her head. “Fine. I’m not going to say anything else. You can make your own decisions.”

She seemed to think for a few minutes then smiled.

“Let’s go shopping tomorrow. Kendall’s is having a sale, and I have had my eye on this cute dress for awhile now. I hope they still have my size.”

“That sounds like fun.” Jenna really didn’t feel like shopping, but Tina wanted to smooth things over.

“Great. I’ll pick you up at nine in the morning,” Tina said.

They finished up their coffee and talked about work. Tina hugged her, and they parted ways. Jenna did her grocery shopping then stopped by the post office for stamps. She was putting off going home. She admitted that to herself. She would just think about Riley and how he’d left. Yes, she felt guilty, and yes, she regretted not telling him she was sorry.

Resigned to the inevitable, Jenna finally headed home. She pulled into her drive and sat for a few minutes before she got out and began unloading groceries. She had just made the last trip when the phone rang. She figured Tina had forgotten to tell her something and answered on the third ring.

“Hello?”

Nothing. She didn’t have any patience left and slammed the phone down again. She glared at it then put away her groceries. It was only six thirty, but she was tired. A short nap sounded really nice to her. She avoided the bed. It would still smell of Riley. Maybe she needed to change the sheets. She dismissed that idea and chose the couch instead. She stretched on the couch and willed herself to sleep. It didn’t work. She tossed and turned for a long while, thinking about Riley and how his hands felt holding her, stroking her back.

Finally, she drifted off only to wake up groggy to someone knocking on the door. She sat up and rubbed her face with both hands. Who could it be? She glanced at her watch. She’d only been asleep for about an hour, so it wasn’t late. She shuffled over and unlocked the door. She should have looked before she opened the door. It was Todd. He pushed his way inside.

“I just want to talk, and then I’ll leave.”

“We have nothing to talk about. I’m going to call the police.” Jenna headed for the phone.

Todd grabbed her arm. “No you’re not. I want to talk to you. Just hear me out, okay?”

Jenna figured she didn’t have much choice anyway. He was inside, and he could easily overpower her if he wanted to.

“Fine. Start talking.”

“Let’s sit down, okay?” He shut the door then walked over to the chair across from the couch and took a seat.

“All right.” Jenna perched on the edge of the couch. “So start talking.”

“I’m really sorry for hurting you. I have no excuse.”

“You’re damn right you don’t have an excuse.” Jenna huffed out a breath.

“I’ve been going to an anger management group. I realized I have a problem.”

Jenna nodded at him. “Good. I’m happy for you.”

“I guess there isn’t any chance for us,” he said with a sad smile.

“No, I’m sorry, but you killed any chance we might have had when you hit me. I told you when we started dating that I wasn’t going through that again.”

“You did. I should have gotten the message then and realized that I needed help before I ever raised my hand against you.”

He swallowed and stood up. “I can tell you don’t feel anything for me. I wanted to tell you how sorry I am and see if you would forgive me.” He shoved his hands into his pockets.

“I can forgive you, Todd. I just can’t forget it. I’m sorry, but I don’t feel anything for you anymore. It’s over. Please don’t bother me anymore. No more phone calls,” Jenna said.

“I haven’t called you except for that one time.”

“Yes, you have. You call and don’t say anything,” she insisted.

“I promise. I haven’t called you.” He took a step closer to her.

Jenna backed away.

He stopped and shook his head. "You're scared I'm going to hurt you. I promise I would never raise my hand to you again."

"You need to leave now, Todd." Jenna walked around the couch toward the door.

Todd followed her to the door and stepped outside before he turned around. He seemed like he wanted to say something else. Jenna shook her head.

"Good bye, Todd." Then she closed the door and set the locks.

The entire thing left her feeling empty inside. She was glad Todd was getting help, but it didn't matter. He had broken her trust. She wouldn't give him another chance. She'd made that mistake with her ex-husband. Each time she went back because he swore he wouldn't hit her again. But he hadn't changed. When she finally got a divorce, he'd become even more abusive until he had nearly killed her.

Jenna shuddered. There was no reason to dwell on that. It was over with. He was in prison and still had a couple of years to go. Todd wouldn't be back. She was pretty sure of that. Neither would Riley. She sighed. She might as well go to bed. Tina would walk her to death tomorrow. She would need her strength. After pouring a glass of water, she took it to the bedroom with her. First she changed to her gown, and then she straightened the bed. She climbed into bed and groaned. Riley's scent overwhelmed her. It curled around her. She buried her nose in his pillow, and the first tear fell followed by many more before she fell asleep.

Hours later, she woke to the knowledge that someone was in her bedroom. She held her breath, hoping that whoever it was would think she was asleep and take whatever he wanted and leave. When he didn't make any noise like he was searching through her things, Jenna knew he was there for her. Her heart beat hard in her chest, and she found it nearly impossible to breathe.

"I know you're awake. I told you I had changed, but you didn't believe me. It wasn't my fault I hurt you. You remember that now. It's all your fault."

A hand grabbed her by the hair and pulled her from the bed. She gasped, trying to follow to keep him from pulling her hair out. It stung to the point of tears. She couldn't believe she thought she was safe from him. She should have known better. If she lived through this, she would never feel safe again.

Chapter Five

“Where is she?” Riley demanded as he stomped into the house.

Tina wrung her hands. “In the bathroom.”

“How bad is she?”

“She needs to go to the hospital,” she said.

“She’ll go.”

Riley twisted the door knob to the bathroom. It was locked.

“Let me in, Jenna.”

“No, I’m not dressed.” Her voice, though muffled by the door, didn’t sound right.

“Let me the fuck in, or I’ll break this fucking door down.” He heard a noise like a sob then a shuffling sound.

The lock clicked. He steeled himself for what he would see. Riley opened the door and slipped inside. It didn’t help.

Jenna sat on the toilet lid with a blood-soaked bath cloth held to her forehead. She didn’t look up when he entered the room. She held a blanket around her. As far as he could tell, she didn’t have on any clothes. Bruises marred her arms, and blood stained her blond hair around her face. She still didn’t look up. Riley knelt in front of her and carefully lifted her chin with two fingers.

“Ah damn, baby.” Riley heaved out a breath and held the cloth away from her face.

Both of her eyes were blackened with the left eye swollen nearly shut. Dried blood caked her nose and her lips. The cut high up on her forehead was still seeping and would need stitches. He wasn’t sure about the cut by her mouth. A red haze filled his vision.

"I'll kill him. Todd won't live to see the inside of a jail cell." He growled.

"It wasn't Todd." Jenna winced.

He stilled. "What do you mean it wasn't Todd?"

She seemed to draw into herself. "It was Gregg, my ex-husband. He got out of prison early. No one bothered to let me know."

Riley struggled to keep in control. He wanted to hit something.

"We need to talk, but first, I'm taking you to the hospital," he said.

"I don't want to go to the hospital." She tried looking up at him but groaned when she moved her head.

"Too bad. You don't get a say in it. You need stitches in your head and God knows what else. You've probably got a concussion, and I'm betting that when I take that blanket off you there will be bruises on your ribs from the way you're hunched over."

"I'll be with you, and you know Tina isn't going to leave you." Riley took the bloody cloth from her hands and rinsed it out in the sink before handing it back to her.

"You need ice for your face," Riley said. "Don't move. I'll be right back."

He slipped out the door and closed it behind him. He didn't want her to overhear him talking to Tina.

"She needs ice. I'm taking her to the hospital provided she's stable enough to go by car. I'll need your car." Riley followed Tina to the kitchen where she found a Ziploc plastic bag and filled it with ice from the freezer.

"I'm going with you," Tina said.

"Where's Logan?" Riley asked.

"He's at the base. He had to review his training manual with them."

"You didn't call him, did you?"

"No, I figured it would take him an hour or so to get here provided he didn't kill himself trying. I knew you were closer." Tina handed

the bag of ice wrapped in a dish towel to him. "I'm so glad you answered your cell phone. I don't know what I would have done. She refused to go to the hospital."

Riley walked back into the bedroom and noticed for the first time the state of the room. The floor was littered with everything from her dresser and the top of her chest of drawers. Her bedside table was overturned, and the lamp lay broken on the floor. A thin trail of blood marred the wall next to the bed. Blood stained the pillow lying at the foot of the bed. He ground his teeth and drew in a deep breath. He turned to Tina.

"Get her something easy for her to put on. I'll clean her up and help her dress."

Tina stopped him from opening the bathroom door with a hand on his arm.

"Riley, maybe you should let me help her. She's already so nervous around you."

"She's going to have to get un-nervous because as long as her ex-husband is around, I'm sticking to her." Riley opened the door and slipped back inside.

Jenna looked back down when he walked in. He could tell she had been crying again. It tore him up to see her like this. She acted not just beaten but defeated, as well. He wanted to snap the bastard's neck for that alone. He moved slowly so as not to alarm her. He handed her the ice pack.

"Put this on your face. I'm going to help you clean up. Tina is getting you something to put on."

"I can do it myself. Please leave me alone, Riley. I don't need your help." She continued to stare down at her lap.

"No, I'm going to make sure you don't have anything broken. I don't want to risk making it worse if I drive you to the hospital myself." He squatted down in front of her. "I'll call an ambulance if you'd rather not go in the car."

“No!” She jerked her head up then winced, and a tear fell from one eye.

“Careful,” he admonished. “Don’t make it any worse than it already is, baby.”

He stood back up and ran warm water in the sink. Then he pulled down a towel and several bath cloths which he soaked in the warm water.

“I’m going to check you over, so be still.”

With one of the warm, wet bath cloths, Riley began carefully cleaning the right side of her face. He kept rinsing the cloth and finally had that side of her face and neck clear of blood. He started in on the left side, cleaning around the ice bag. More blood caked her on this side because of the head wound. He didn’t bother trying to get the blood out of her hair. That would come later.

He uncurled her hand from around the blanket and cleaned the blood from between her fingers as well. Then he slowly lowered the blanket until her chest was bare. He squeezed out the water from another cloth and began to clean the dried blood between her breasts and her upper chest. Bruises marred the skin around her ribs on the left side. He cursed under his breath and swallowed down the bile that suddenly filled his throat.

“I need you to stand up if you can.” He held out his arms for her to grasp. “Use me to pull up on if you need to.”

He watched her stand. She favored her left side. The blanket fell the rest of the way off. Relief flooded him to see that she still had on panties. It was a good sign that the bastard hadn’t raped her.

“Jenna?” Tina called through the door. “Can I come in? I have something for you to wear.”

“Come in.” Jenna had a towel around her chest, holding it up under her arms.

Tina walked in holding a pair of sweat pants and an overlarge T-shirt.

"I figured this would go over your head easy. It's one of your sleep shirts." Tina held the items tightly to her chest. "You look a lot better now that the blood is cleaned off."

"I feel better. Tell Riley I don't need to go to the hospital," Jenna pleaded.

"Nope. I agree with him." Tina shook her head

"Traitor."

He needed to check her ribs to be sure they were stationary. He was going to hurt her checking, but it had to be done.

"I need to check those ribs. It's not going to feel good."

Jenna looked dubious. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to feel of them to be sure they aren't moveable."

"They're fine. I've had broken ribs before, and it doesn't feel like that." Jenna held the towel tighter and took a step to the side—away from him.

"Too bad. I'm checking."

Riley stood in front of her and placed one hand under the towel to touch the skin over her ribs. He checked them for movement. He watched her face as he did. She ground her teeth and winced, but she didn't make a sound.

"Sorry, but they feel stationary. Are you hurt anywhere else?" He asked.

"No."

"Tina?" He turned to her.

"I don't think so. You can see the bruises on her arms," she said.

"Steady her while I help her step into the sweat pants." He knelt and held his hand up for Tina to hand them to him.

She dropped them into his outstretched hand and let Jenna hold on to her shoulders. Jenna lifted first one foot then the other and stepped into the sweats. He pulled them up her legs and over her hips. He noticed another bruise on her hip. Once he had the waist band settled, he took the T-shirt from Tina and helped Jenna get into it. He held it as low as he could to keep from putting added pressure on her ribs.

She managed to get into it without crying out. A good sign, he figured. Maybe she wasn't hurt as badly as she looked.

"I'll put her socks and shoes on while you move my car up closer to the door. The keys are on the bar in the kitchen." Tina knelt in front of Jenna and began rolling a sock on her foot.

"Don't let her move till I get back."

Riley grabbed the keys from the counter and walked outside to move Tina's car as close to the kitchen door as he could get and still open the car doors. Then he hurried back inside. He knew how stubborn Jenna could be. But she was subdued now. The bastard had beaten it into her. He couldn't wait to get his hands on the son of a bitch. He wanted to pick her up so she didn't have to walk, but he knew that would hurt her worse. Instead, he stood aside and let her walk out of the bathroom on her own two feet. She moved gingerly through the bedroom and into the kitchen. By the time she reached the kitchen door, she was panting.

"Tina, you better call Logan and let him know where you are." Riley helped Jenna climb into the backseat.

"I'll call him once we get to the hospital. He should be on his way home by then," Tina said.

"I'm going to let you sit in the back with her. Let her put her head in your lap. I'll drive so I can get us there as fast as possible without throwing her around." He climbed into the driver's seat once Tina was inside the car with Jenna's head safely in her lap.

He kept checking his rearview mirror to see Jenna lying in the backseat.

"How are you doing back there, baby?"

"I'm fine," she said through gritted teeth.

He turned his attention back to the road and concentrated on getting them there fast but without jarring her. He pulled into the emergency room entrance, and after throwing it in park, jumped out of the car to open the door. Tina eased out from under Jenna's head.

Riley moved her aside and helped Jenna to sit up and ease out of the car. He let her hold on to him as she stood up.

A nurse rolled a wheel chair out to the car, and Riley helped Jenna sit in it.

“What happened?” the nurse asked as she wheeled her into the emergency room entrance.

“Her ex-husband beat her up,” Riley answered.

“How long ago?”

Riley looked at Tina to answer that.

“I’m not sure. I found her about forty-five minutes ago.” Tina looked at Jenna.

Jenna swallowed and said, “About six or seven hours ago.”

Riley closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath through his nose. She’d been hurting all that time and hadn’t called a soul. He wanted to shake her for not calling him.

“Why the hell did you wait so long to call somebody?” Riley demanded.

“She didn’t call at all. I found her when I came to pick her up to go shopping,” Tina said.

Riley followed behind the nurse pushing the wheelchair.

“Sir, we need her information at the check-in desk,” the nurse said.

“Tina, you know more about her than I do. You answer their questions. I’m going with her.”

“Sir, you can’t go back there with her until they finish the exam. I’ll come get you when they finish.”

Riley stopped the wheelchair and looked down at Jenna.

“You tell them everything. Do you understand? Let them do their job. If that means staying here, you’re staying.”

Jenna nodded her head and looked down. Riley cursed under his breath and stood up to let the nurse continue to the back. He stood there with his hands on his hips and worked to regain control of his temper. Knowing that she hadn’t trusted him enough to call him for

help both hurt and angered him at the same time. He wasn't mad at her but mad at himself for acting like an ass toward her. Finally, he returned to where Tina was giving the clerk the information they needed. He only half listened.

"Okay, that's everything for now. We do need a copy of her insurance card and driver's license when you can get them to us."

"I'll get them to you as soon as I know what they plan to do with her," Tina promised. She stood up from the chair and followed him to the waiting room.

Her skin appeared pale, and it was obvious she was worried about Jenna.

"Better call Logan and let him know where you are and what's going on."

"You're right. I'm going to step outside where I can hear better to call him. Come and get me if they come out and are going to let us back to see her."

He watched her walk through the sliding doors. All he could do now was wait. Normally he was a patient man, but this was not one of those times.

* * * *

Jenna let the nurse help her undress and slip on the ugly green hospital gown. Then she stepped up to sit on the stretcher. Every movement aggravated the pain in her side and hip. She didn't think Riley had noticed her hip, thank goodness. She figured it was black and blue, as well. She looked around the room. It looked like every other emergency room she had been in over the years. The last three times had been here.

The events of the night before came flooding back to her. Somehow her ex had gotten inside her house. It had to have been through the front door since Tina had come in that way. He'd pulled her out of bed by her hair, yelling at her almost incoherently. Then the

beating had started. Her head must have hit the corner of the night stand when it turned over to put the cut on her forehead. She had finally managed to curl up into a ball, trying to protect her belly and head. The return of her neighbor from his night shift interrupted him. Jenna had screamed the best she could for help. Even though he hadn't heard her, Gregg didn't stick around to find out. She lay there for hours, too scared to move. Finally, she'd gotten to the bathroom and held a cloth to her head until Tina had found her.

The return of the nurse cut into her musing. She had her lie down on the stretcher, but she raised the head of it until she was in a semi-reclining position. She took her information of what had happened.

"Did he rape you?" she asked.

"No."

"I'm going to take you to get an X-ray. Any chance you're pregnant?"

Jenna shook her head then wished she hadn't. The pounding got worse. The nurse unlocked the wheels on the stretcher and wheeled her through the double doors and through the emergency room toward the back. They turned a couple of corners then entered the radiology suite. For the next thirty minutes, they moved her around, taking X-rays of her head, neck, chest, and hips until she was crying. Finally, a radiology technician wheeled her back around to the emergency room and into her room.

Sometime later, a doctor arrived to examine her.

"Looks like you need something for pain. Let me check your X-rays." He left the room but returned a few minutes later.

"Well, you have a slight concussion. I'll let you have some Tylenol but nothing stronger. I don't want to mask the symptoms of a possibly more serious problem. I'm sorry I can't give you anything stronger right now. I'll give you something to help decrease the swelling, and that will help with the pain, as well."

The nurse flitted around, setting up a tray. The doctor sewed her head up, putting in three stitches. Then the nurse applied a bandage.

“You’ve also got two cracked ribs. They don’t look too bad, but you’re going to hurt for a while. Your hip is fine, just bruised.” He checked his chart and then looked back at her. “Are you sure we don’t need to do a rape kit?”

“I’m sure. He didn’t rape me. He was more interested in hitting me.” Jenna touched her head gingerly. “When can I go home?”

“I noticed you have some friends out there waiting to see you. I’m going to allow you to go home in about two hours. I want to watch you for a little while longer. You need to be woken up every two hours to be sure you’re okay.”

“I know the drill,” Jenna said.

“I expect you do. I saw the old breaks on your X-rays. I’m going to refer you to a counselor for domestic abuse.”

“He’s my ex-husband. I’ve already been through them,” she said.

“Okay then. Stitches come out in seven days. You can come here or go to your personal physician. If you have any of the symptoms on the paper the nurse is going to give you, come back immediately.”

“Okay.”

“The police are out there to speak with you. I’m going to let them in then your friends can come back.”

He left, and two policemen walked through the swinging doors. One stood maybe five feet six inches and had black hair. The other one was a good four or five inches taller. His hair looked a dark shade of brown. Jenna spent the next thirty minutes going over the details of her attack. They listened and wrote notes in their little notebooks.

“So he is out of prison now. You need a restraining order on him,” the shorter one said.

“I plan to. I don’t understand why someone didn’t warn me he was up for parole and then that he got out.”

“I don’t know, either, but we’ll be taking him back for assault. They should send him back for violating his parole,” the taller one promised.

“You don’t need to be alone until we catch him.”

“Don’t worry, she won’t be.” Riley walked in.

Jenna closed her eyes and counted to ten. Tina walked in followed by Logan. Between Riley and Logan, she didn’t stand a chance at going home. Fine, she would stay with Tina.

“You are?” the shorter one asked.

“Riley. I’m a friend.”

Logan strode forward and held out his hand. “I’m Logan, and this is my fiancée, Tina. We will be sure she is taken care of.”

The taller one said, “She needs to file for a restraining order against him.”

“I’ll see to it,” Riley said.

He never took his eyes off of Jenna. It made her uncomfortable. His eyes looked so intense. He was so different from when she had first met him. He seemed almost jovial and flirted with her. Now he acted serious all the time and quiet except where she was concerned. It scared her sometimes.

“Okay. We have everything we need right now. We’ll contact you when we apprehend him.”

“She’ll be staying with us.” Logan gave him their number.

Jenna breathed a sigh of relief. She had been scared that Riley would have insisted on staying with her. A nurse came in and handed her several sheets of paper.

“Here are your discharge papers and instructions. You are familiar with them you said.” She turned toward the others. “Make sure you wake her up every two hours. She has to be able to answer the simple questions on the list.” She pointed to the papers in Jenna’s hands. Then she handed her a prescription.

“That’s an antibiotic. Take it twice a day until it’s all gone.” She left through the swinging doors.

Riley took the papers from Jenna’s hands and began reading them. She sighed and turned to Tina.

“Are you sure it’s all right for me to stay with you? I don’t want to cause any trouble. I mean, Gregg could come back and look for me at your place,” Jenna said.

“Nonsense. Of course you’re staying with us. We handled Todd. We can handle Gregg,” Logan said.

Jenna drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly, remembering her ribs. It was good to have friends. She wanted to go home but knew that was out of the question. She needed her things, so they would have to go by and pick them up, but she wouldn’t be staying. Then it hit her. Logan had said “we.” Surely Riley wasn’t going to stick around just to babysit her. Who was she kidding? No way would he leave Logan to deal with her mess all alone. She closed her eyes and leaned back against the stretcher.

“Jenna? Are you okay? Do I need to get the nurse?” Tina asked.

She opened her eyes. Riley stood right there next to her, staring down at her. Those dark eyes missed nothing.

“I’m fine. My head hurts is all.”

Tina started toward the door. “I’ll get the nurse. They need to give you something for the pain.”

Logan caught her at the door with an arm around her waist. “They can’t, honey. She has a concussion. You can’t have anything that might sedate you when you have one.”

“But she can’t just lie there hurting,” Tina fussed.

“Tina, I’m fine. They gave me some Tylenol. It helps.”

Tina leaned against Logan. “I hate to see you hurting.”

Riley moved a strand of hair away from her face. “The best thing for her is sleep right now. We’ll have to wake her up every two hours, but she’ll feel a lot better with some rest.”

“How long till they release you?” Logan asked.

“They said two hours. That was about an hour ago.” Jenna closed her eyes again.

“Tina and I will go gather up your stuff and meet you and Riley at the house,” Logan said.

“Anything in particular you want, Jenna?” Tina asked.

“No, I can’t think of anything.” Jenna swallowed and tried to relax against the stretcher. It wasn’t easy with Riley staring so intently at her.

“Why didn’t you call someone to help you?”

“I’ve had worse and handled it. I would have been fine.”

“Fine my ass!” Riley growled. “He could have killed you. Hell, he almost did.”

“He didn’t. The police will pick him up, and he’ll go back to prison,” Jenna said.

“When are you going to let someone in?”

“Who am I going to let in? Who? Tina has had enough trouble in her life. She doesn’t deserve my problems, too. Who do you think I can trust to care?” Jenna couldn’t help the tears that poured from her eyes.

She stared at Riley. “I’ve always dealt with my life my own way. Why would I change now?”

Chapter Six

“Because I care,” Riley said. “I care what happens to you.”

He watched as Jenna struggled to accept what he said as fact. He knew the minute she did. Her face crumpled, and she began to cry in earnest. He went to her and smoothed the tears from her cheeks. Then he bent down and kissed her gently on the lips.

“Don’t cry, baby. It’s going to be okay. I’ll take care of everything.” Where the words came from, he didn’t know.

He only knew that he meant every one of them. He wouldn’t let her deal with her ex on her own. He’d be there to keep her safe and shore up her defenses. There was no way he would let that son of a bitch anywhere near her again.

“Why would you care about me? I’m a basket case with nothing but trouble following me around.”

“Don’t worry about it so much. Just accept my help and leave it at that.” He turned back to the swinging doors when they opened.

The nurse walked back in with another paper for her to sign. “This is your discharge paper. Just sign there on the line and you can go.”

Jenna signed the form and looked around for where her clothes were. The nurse picked up a bag and handed it to her.

“Looking for your clothes?” she asked, smiling. “Do you need help getting back into them?”

“I’ll help her.” Riley didn’t hesitate to let her know right away he was in charge.

The nurse nodded and walked back out. Riley took the bag from Jenna and opened it up. He pulled out the T-shirt first. Jenna looked dubious at his helping her.

“Okay, let’s get you out of this ugly ass gown.” He proceeded to untie the strings.

“I can dress myself,” she protested.

“You’ll only hurt yourself. I’ll help you, and we’ll get through twice as fast with less pain.”

She growled at him, and he smiled.

She slipped the gown down from her arms but kept it lodged firmly under her arms. He rolled the shirt up so she could slip her arms in then slide her head through the neck of the shirt. Next came the sweat pants. He rolled them up her legs and had her lift her pelvis for him to pull them up the rest of the way. Her face turned a cute shade of pink when his fingers brushed against her pussy.

“Okay, I’m going to go pull the car up to the door. You wait here for the nurse and the wheelchair. I’m serious. You don’t wait and I’ll turn your ass a pretty shade of red when you’re healed up.”

She nodded, so he left her and told the nurse what he was doing. He expected she would be bringing Jenna out in the wheelchair about the time he made it to the loading ramp.

Riley took a few seconds in the car to get control of himself. He didn’t want Jenna picking up on his strong emotions. She needed to stay calm and rest. It was all he could do to keep the rage inside of him when all he wanted to do was hit something. Finally, he was satisfied he could present a calm façade. When he pulled up the ramp, the nurse wheeled Jenna out and opened the passenger side door. Riley ran around the front of the car to help get Jenna in the car. Once he had her settled, he backed down the ramp and drove toward Logan’s house.

“Thanks, Riley.”

“For what?” he asked.

“For helping me. For helping Tina deal with me.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just concentrate on resting and getting better.” He couldn’t keep the gruffness out of his voice.

She didn't say anything else the rest of the trip. Riley was thankful for the silence. He needed to plan. He and Logan would need to figure out how best to protect the women. As long as Jenna was there, Tina would be at risk, as well. He was glad he could depend on Logan's help. But then, they had always had each other's back when they were in the same unit.

He risked a look over to where Jenna lay back against the seat with her eyes closed. It was all it took to strengthen his resolve again to kill the man responsible for putting those bruises on her. He swallowed and reminded himself that she was off limits. He would keep her safe, but that was all. He couldn't let his heart into the equation because she deserved better than the likes of him. Every time he thought about tying her up, tying her down, his cock got hard and his heart grew heavy. No, she didn't need someone like him. His kinks ran even harsher than Logan's did.

He turned into Logan's drive and pulled up behind the truck. Jenna didn't even stir. He climbed down and walked around to help her out. When he opened the door, he found her staring at him with tears in her eyes.

"Aw, baby. What's wrong?" He reached up and wiped away a tear with his thumb.

"It hurts so bad." Another tear rolled down her face.

Riley reached in and pulled her out into his arms. He couldn't stand to see her hurting like this. He felt so helpless. There was nothing he could do to take away the pain.

Tina had the door open by the time he reached the carport. He slid in sideways, careful not to jar Jenna, and carried her to the bedroom that had been his. Logan would have known where to put her. The sheets on the bed were freshly turned down and a suitcase sat at the foot of the bed. He gently laid Jenna down in the bed and pulled the sheets over her.

"I'm going to talk to Logan. You try and sleep."

She didn't reply, just lay in the bed with her eyes closed and another tear sliding down her cheek. He gritted his teeth and turned to leave. Tina stood just outside the doorway.

"How is she?" she whispered.

"Hurting and there isn't a damn thing we can do about it."

"Logan is in the office. I'll sit with her in case she needs anything."

Riley started to walk off, but Tina grasped his arm. He turned back to look at her.

"Thanks for taking care of her. I didn't know what to do."

"Yeah." He headed toward the office and something he could actually do to help Jenna. Make plans to put an end to her ex.

He found Logan talking on the phone when he walked in the room. He paused in the doorway and leaned against it as Logan argued with someone.

"I don't care what you haven't done. I want to know what you're planning on doing." Logan looked up and nodded at Riley.

"Yeah, she's staying here where we can keep her safe until you catch that son of a bitch. We're not letting her out of our sight." He slammed down the phone.

"I take it they don't have a clue where the asshole is." Riley fumed.

"Nope, and they actually had the gall to want to use her as bait to set him up."

Riley pushed off the door facing with his hands curled into fists. "Over my dead body!"

"Yeah, that's what I told them. They aren't happy and want to talk to Jenna. I told them she wasn't any in condition to talk to anyone right now." Logan ran a hand over his face and leaned back in the chair. "They're going to try and talk her into it, you know."

"Like I said, no way in hell will I let them use her." Riley ground his teeth to keep from cursing.

“Let’s do this the same way we did with Tina. It worked before. You can keep an eye on her, and I’ll set up outside.”

“We need help. I’m calling Morgan. I wish Tyler was closer. It’ll take him a good two days to get here.” Riley dropped into the seat across the desk from Logan.

“Call him anyway. The more the merrier. We still have Tina’s house, so there’s plenty of room for everyone.”

Riley pulled out his phone and dialed Morgan’s number first. The man was going to be three shades of pissed. It almost brought a smile to his face.

“Yeah, what the hell do you want?” Morgan asked, a scowl in his voice.

“We need your ass back here ASAP.”

“What’s up?” Morgan dropped the pissed attitude, sensing something was up.

“Jenna’s ex beat the hell out of her. We need help getting this guy out of her life.”

“I’m up at Tyler’s. Want me to bring him?”

“I was calling him next anyway. Tell his ugly ass we could use his help.” Riley closed the phone, knowing Morgan would have cut him off if he gave him the chance.

“Morgan was at Tyler’s anyway, so that worked out,” Riley explained.

“I expect her ex will look for her at Tina’s house, so I’m thinking we’ll bunk Tyler and Morgan over there to ambush him. We’ll have to have the women go in and out of there throughout the day to make it look good. She will have the cover she needs with us. The police won’t spare enough people to keep her safe.” Logan laid out his plan.

“She isn’t going to be doing anything for a day or two. She’s in a lot of fucking pain right now. Did you get her prescriptions filled?” Riley asked.

“Yeah. Tina has them in the kitchen.”

"I'm giving her a pain pill as soon as it's safe. I can't stand to see her cry."

"You're a little more hung up on her than you're admitting to, aren't you, Riley?"

"Hell, I can't stand to see anyone cry."

"Uh huh." Logan stood up and stretched. "Think I'll grab Tina and take a nap. It's going to be a long few days till this is over. Better get you some rest, as well."

"I'll watch Jenna." Riley stood up and followed Logan back to the bedroom that was now Jenna's.

Tina sat in a chair just inside the room. The lights were out, and the curtain drawn. She looked up when he and Logan walked into the room.

"Shhh. She's finally sleeping. The light was bothering her, so keep the lights off." Tina stood up and went to Logan,

Logan wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head. Riley felt a moment of envy then squashed it and walked closer to the bed where Jenna lay on her side. Her face seemed paler in the dull light.

"Come on, Tina. Let's take a nap. Morgan and Tyler are coming down in the next day. I figured I'd put them at your house..." Logan's voice faded away as he led his fiancée down the hall toward their bedroom.

"Tina?" Jenna's voice sounded so forlorn.

"It's Riley. What do you need, baby?"

"A drink of water."

He walked over and took the glass from the nightstand and sat on the edge of the bed to help her sit up. He was mindful of her ribs and tried to keep from hurting her, but she still winced when he held her. A knife sliced through him at the knowledge that what he was doing hurt. How could any man stand to hurt a woman, much less their wife?

"Thanks." She lay back down with his help.

“Don’t leave me. I don’t want to be alone.” She looked up at him through her good eye. The other one was still almost swollen shut. “I’m not going anywhere. I’ll be right here.” He pulled the chair closer to the bed.

“Please hold me. I need you to hold me, Riley.”

He swallowed hard around the lump that suddenly appeared in his throat. It didn’t matter that it would kill him to hold her, knowing that is all he would ever be able to do with her. He’d made a mistake in thinking he could fuck her and get her out of his system, made the mistake of thinking that he could be satisfied with *normal* sex with her. He wanted it all. He’d settle with holding her while she slept.

Riley pulled off his boots and carefully climbed in the bed beside her, slipping under the covers to spoon her body with his. She sighed and relaxed against him. He was careful to keep his arm off her sore spots and buried his face in her hair. He drew in her scent and held it. It felt like coming home to have her in his arms. How in the hell would he ever be able to leave her once this was all over?

Nearly an hour had passed, and he felt Jenna trembling in his arms. She moaned, and he instantly knew she was in pain.

“Hold on, Jenna. I’m going to go get you something for pain. Damn the time.” He rolled out of the bed on the opposite side and hurried down the hall to the kitchen.

He located the medicine and poured out two of the pain pills. She already had water by the bed, so he returned to the bedroom and helped her back up to swallow the pills. She coughed, and he worried he’d choked her with the water. Damn, coughing would make her headache worse. She seemed to get over it and indicated she wanted to lie back down. Once she was settled again, he kissed her cheek and pulled the chair up to hold her hand while he watched over her from the chair.

When her hand no longer gripped his, Riley knew she’d finally fallen back to sleep. Sleep was the best thing for her, too. He tucked her hand under the covers and went to see if Logan was back up or

not. He left the door open so he could hear her if she called out. He needed to be doing something besides sitting on his ass watching her. It was killing him to see her in so much pain.

He found Logan in his office, working on the computer. The other man looked like he'd just had a round of good sex. And he probably had.

"Is Tina still asleep?" Riley asked.

"Yeah. What about Jenna?" Logan turned from the computer.

"Finally. I gave her something for pain. I couldn't stand it any longer. She needs the rest."

"You can't be still, can you?" Logan grinned.

"Why the grin, asshole?" Riley was sure he didn't want an answer to that question.

"Because you're all knotted up over her, and I can laugh about it now."

"Don't bet on it. Nothing has changed how it has to be. I'll be leaving once this bastard is out of her life."

Logan frowned. "You're just going to fuck her and leave? Just like that."

"Stay out of it, Logan. She's been through too much to get involved with someone like me."

"That's what you and I both said about Tina. You see how that worked out."

"Yeah, well. Who knew she was as kinky as you are?" Riley growled.

"Riley, all I'm saying is give it a chance. Don't run off the minute she's safe."

"What? And make it even harder for the both of us when that time comes? Because it is going to come." Riley nearly shouted but caught himself.

"Damn it man, you love her. You can't just give up 'cause you think you're too rough for her. You're branding her a coward, and she is most definitely not a coward," Logan said through clenched teeth.

Riley drew in a deep breath through his nose and tried to calm down. Morgan was only trying to help, but he wasn't doing him any favors by pushing him. He knew what his limits were, and they went way past where Jenna needed them to go. No, he had to keep his head about this. No more messing around with Jenna. She would only get hurt in the long run. Never mind that he would be, too.

* * * *

Light seeped in around the edges of the curtains and woke Jenna from a sound sleep. Her head felt better, only a dull throb now. Her body was an entirely different story. She ached all over, and her ribs were really sore. She turned over gingerly and found Riley sitting back in a chair with his socked feet resting on the bedrail. He looked to be asleep, but when she turned the rest of the way over, his head snapped up.

"You need something? More pain medicine?" he asked. He sat straighter in the chair now and leaned toward her.

"No. I'm fine. Well, better than I was anyway. I need to get up." She desperately needed the bathroom.

"You don't need to get out of bed too soon. Let's wait until later in the day." Riley stood up, hovering over her.

"No. I *need* to get up now. I have to go to the bathroom, Riley."

"Oh." He looked slightly uncomfortable. She would have grinned if it didn't hurt so much.

Jenna pulled back the covers and attempted to sit up on her own. She couldn't help the slight cry that escaped when she put pressure on her ribs and her hip. Riley was instantly there, helping her to sit the rest of the way up. It sure made it a lot easier to have help. She wasn't sure her friend would have been able to deal with it. Riley was doing okay, she thought.

"Thanks, I need to stand up now."

"I don't think that's a good idea. I'll carry you." He didn't give her time to protest.

Suddenly she found herself in his arms, being carried down the hall to the bathroom. He opened the door with one hand and walked inside where he carefully put her down on the lid of the toilet.

"I can handle it from here," she assured him.

"I'll be right outside if you need help. You call me to come get you when you're finished," he admonished her.

Jenna took care of her needs and washed her hands at the sink. She looked into the mirror and grimaced then moaned at the pain that it caused. At least she could see out of her swollen eye now. It was actually a lot better than she thought it would be. She raised her shirt to look at the bruises on her ribs. They were a colorful combination of all the off colors of the rainbow, leaning heavily on the purples. She let the shirt drop and leaned against the sink with her head down. What was she going to do about Riley?

She knew in her heart she loved him. She had no doubt that he didn't feel the same way. After all, he had been leaving when she got hurt. He had told her she couldn't handle someone like him. Why not? What was there to handle? Why did she get the feeling he wasn't being entirely honest with her? She sighed and turned around to open the door. She was surprised he hadn't already knocked on the door.

Just as she opened the door, he had his hand up to knock. She would have laughed except he scowled at her.

"I told you to let me know when you were ready and I'd get you." He swept her up in his arms before she had time to protest.

"I can walk, you know."

"You're not until you've had time to rest more."

"Can I go to the living room and sit up for awhile? I'm sore from lying in bed so long."

Riley seemed to think about it, pausing in mid stride. He nodded and turned toward the living room and settled her on the couch.

"I'll go find a blanket or something to put over your feet. That is if Logan even has anything like that around here." Riley left her sitting on the couch and disappeared into the kitchen.

Tina walked into the room and with a squeal, sat in a chair across from her.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay. I'm not hurting as much now."

"I'm surprised Riley let you out of bed," Tina said.

"I thought I was going to have to beg him, but he relented," Jenna admitted.

"How about something to eat?" she asked.

"That would be wonderful. I'm actually hungry." Jenna's stomach growled, and both women dissolved into laughter.

Jenna had to hold her hand across her ribs to keep from crying.

"What's wrong?" Riley rushed over to the couch with a towel in his hands.

"Nothing. I was laughing, and it hurt."

"Well, don't laugh anymore. There's nothing funny to laugh at right now anyway." He settled the towel over her feet.

Tina looked at her, and she looked back. They both started laughing again at the sight of the towel around her feet. She had to give it to him. He'd found something to use.

"I'm going to fix her something to eat. Logan was talking to Morgan a minute ago on the phone. Why don't you see what's going on? I'll see about Jenna." Tina pushed at the big man to leave the room.

"If she needs me, you call."

"Yeah, yeah. I'll call you." Tina rolled her lips inside her mouth and bit them.

Jenna fought to keep from smiling at the sight. She knew her friend had just gotten rid of him so he wouldn't hover. He cared. She didn't doubt that now, but she wished it went deeper than just caring.

"So, what would you like to eat?" Tina asked.

“Something easy. Maybe scrambled eggs since I wouldn’t have to chew a lot for that.”

“Oh, honey. I know it hurts. I’ll scramble them soft for you.” She walked out to the kitchen.

Jenna found herself nodding with her head back against the couch when Tina brought in a plate full of delicious-looking scrambled eggs.

“I put cheese in them, too,” she said. “I know how you like cheese and crackers. I hope that’s okay.”

“That’s perfect.” Jenna took the plate and balanced it on her lap.

“Oh, and here is your antibiotic. Take two now, and then you’ll take one every eight hours.” Tina dropped two pills in her hand and sat a glass of OJ on the table next to her.

“Thanks. I really appreciate you guys letting me stay here.” She swallowed the pills with the OJ and then took a bite of the eggs.

“No problem. I would have stayed with you, and that means Logan would have stayed and then Riley. Your place isn’t big enough for all of us. Now with Morgan and Tyler coming—”

Jenna cut her off. “What?”

“Morgan is bringing Tyler, another of their friends, to help with catching Gregg,” Tina explained.

“You’re kidding. He’s called for help? I need to leave, Tina. He is worried something is going to happen to you because of me.” Jenna sat the plate of eggs on the couch next to her and tried to get up.

“No you don’t. He’s bringing in help to keep you safe, you idiot. Riley insisted on it,” she explained. “If you don’t sit back down, I’m going to call for Riley, too.”

Jenna dropped back on the couch with a grunt. “I can’t believe this. I’m causing so much trouble.”

“No you’re not. Gregg is the problem. Let them catch him so he’ll never be a problem again. If they put him away this time, surely he’ll be gone a long time.”

“I don’t know what to believe about the law anymore. They weren’t a lot of help when he was out of prison before.” Jenna picked the plate back up and began eating again.

“I know. This time, though, you’ve got friends to help. Riley will make sure no one hurts you again,” Tina said.

Jenna only nodded and finished her eggs. She didn’t know what Riley could do about Gregg. Once he had his mind set on something, he didn’t give up. She held little doubt that Riley was the same way. He would die before he let anything happen to her again. She believed that in her heart.

Tina took her empty plate back to the kitchen, and she settled back against the couch to rest. Her aches and pains were annoying now. She couldn’t get comfortable anyway she moved. About the time she finally settled on the best of the worst positions, the door bell rang. Both Logan and Riley barreled out of the office toward the front door, cutting Tina off.

“I told you not to answer the damn door, Tina.” Logan growled.

“I was going to ask who it was first.”

“As long as Gregg is out there, you don’t answer the door. End of discussion.”

Riley made it to the door before Logan. Logan drew aside the curtain on the window next to the door and growled. “It’s the cops.”

Riley opened the door. The two officers who had been at the hospital earlier stood on the other side of the threshold.

“Officers.” Riley greeted them.

“We would like to speak with Ms. Randal,” the taller one said.

“She isn’t feeling well enough for anymore questions,” Riley said.

“We just have a couple of questions. We really need to talk with her so we can catch her ex-husband.”

Jenna figured the best way to put a stop to Riley’s over protectiveness was to get the questioning out of the way. She stood up and hobbled unsteadily toward the entrance hall.

“What did you need to know?” she asked from behind the men.

Riley grabbed hold of her arm to keep her from falling over. “I told you not to get up.”

“They need answers to catch Gregg. I want him caught. Let me help.”

Riley gritted his teeth, working his jaw until she thought she heard teeth crack. “Fine, but do it in the living room. You’re putting your feet back up.”

Jenna let him guide her back to the couch and help her back to a somewhat comfortable position. Then he leaned against the arm with one hand on her shoulder.

“Now what can I tell you?” Jenna asked.

“We need you to go back to your house. We want to lure your ex-husband out so we can catch him.”

Chapter Seven

“Not no, but hell no!” Riley yelled, standing up straight now.

There was no way he would ever trust the police to keep her safe. They would fuck up a sure thing on a date. He realized he was squeezing Jenna’s shoulder and relaxed his grip.

“We’ll have plenty of men surrounding the house and inside of it. We have it planned out already,” the shorter of the two said.

“Jenna, don’t do it. We can take care of you here.” Logan took a step closer to the couch, still holding Tina’s hand.

“I want this over with. If it would help make that happen faster, then I want to do it.” Jenna looked over at Tina.

“You’re not doing it, Jenna. I’m not letting you.” Riley walked around to stare into her eyes.

He could see her resolve though and knew she’d do it anyway. Hell, how could he keep her safe if she was going to trust the damn police? He knew they wouldn’t have the man power to keep her safe.

“Jenna, listen to Riley and Logan. They can keep you safe. They took care of me,” Tina pleaded.

“Tina, I have to do this. He’s never going to stop coming after me unless he’s in prison for good.”

“And what happens to you when they don’t make it to you in time? He planned to kill you, Jenna. You know he did.” Riley clenched his hands by his sides. He wanted to hit one of the cops for asking her to do it in the first place.

“I’ll be fine, Riley. Please understand. I want this over with. I don’t want anything to happen to any of you because of me. He’ll hurt you. Logan, how would you feel if he hurt Tina because of me?” She

looked over at the two policemen. “I’ll move back tomorrow. I really need one more day to rest if I’m going to be able to do this.”

“We’ll have everyone in place. What time do you want to do it?”

“After lunch.”

Riley walked off into the other room, a string of creative expletives in his wake.

He paced in the kitchen, listening to them go over their plans with her. It sounded simple, but he knew better than anyone that things could go FUBAR, fucked up beyond all repair, in a second. How many times had he and Logan gotten stuck in situations that were supposed to be a simple in-and-out operation?

He watched through the doorway as Logan led the policemen out of the room. He could hear the front door open then a few seconds later close.

“I hope you know what you’re doing.” Tina’s voice shook.

“I just know I can’t live with the possibility that one of you might get hurt. I could never forgive myself if something bad happened. It’s my problem. I’ll handle it.” Jenna sighed.

Hell, she was hurting again. He could tell by the way her voice shook. She needed a pain pill. He grabbed some water from the fridge and shook out one of the little pain pills into his palm. She didn’t look up at first when he walked back in. Instead, she looked down at her hands. He sighed and held out his hand with the pain pill. She finally reached out and picked it up then took the water from him to swallow the pill.

“It’s no different than what you guys were planning on doing,” she finally said.

“Hell yeah it is. You were going to be over there in Tina’s house, so you would have been safe. This way, you’re right in the line of fire.” Riley walked away from her then returned, angry steps eating up the distance. “If one hair on your head gets hurt, I’m going to take it out on them. Do you hear me?”

“No you’re not. You’re going to get on your bike when your friends get here, and you’re all going to leave. Go wherever the hell you go. You are. Not. Responsible. For. Me!” she bit out.

“So just like that. I’m supposed to not care what happens to you?” Riley asked, shaking his head.

“I’m no one to you, Riley. I know you care, but I’m just a friend of Logan’s fiancée. That’s all. I’m not someone for you to risk getting hurt over. At least I’m not willing to take that risk.”

“You don’t trust us to take care of you,” Riley said.

“That’s not true. I do trust you. I just don’t trust that nothing will happen to one of you. I can’t live with myself knowing one of you got hurt because of me and my bad choices.”

“You feel guilty for marrying him?”

“Yeah. I knew better when I did it. I thought I could change him. A fat lot of good that did. He wasn’t about to change. I was just too stupid to know better.” Jenna swallowed then drew in a deep breath through her nose.

She was hurting in her heart as well as her body, Riley realized. Did she still love the bastard? Despite everything he had done to her, did she still have feelings for him? That thought more than any other turned his stomach.

“Don’t you get it? I can’t trust my own judgment anymore. I keep choosing bastards. How do I know I’m making the right decision on anything when I can’t even see someone who might hurt me standing right in front of me?”

“And you’re going to let the police use you as bait. I’d say that was a pretty stupid choice right there,” Riley threw out. He wished it back the moment he said it.

“Yeah, well. It’s my choice to make, isn’t it?” She pushed herself up from the couch and stood up. “I’m going to go lie down for awhile.”

Riley moved to help her, but she pulled her arm away from him. He let her go. He watched her until she disappeared down the hall. He'd fucked that up royally.

"What are we going to do? You know they'll let her get hurt if she does this." Logan leaned over and placed both hands on the back of the couch.

"I don't have a fucking clue what to do. She isn't going to trust us."

"I don't think it is a matter of her not trusting us, Riley. She doesn't want to see one of us hurt. She's right. There's a good chance one of us could get hurt. The man is crazy."

"He's not any crazier than the bastard that was after Tina. We managed just fine on that one." Riley blew out a breath in exasperation.

"I say we act as backup to the police. We pick our own spots to wait and see what happens. That way if they screw it up and let the bastard get away, we can grab him," Logan suggested.

"Oh, I plan on being there all right. I'm not letting her go through with it without me being there."

"Have you told her?" Logan asked.

"Told her what?" Riley stared at his friend.

"That you love her."

"Fuck that. I don't love her. I care about her. Don't go putting emotions in something that isn't there. Just because you're all happy and mushy doesn't mean everyone is."

"I think you're protesting too much," Logan said with a smile.

"I'm going to knock that smile off your face if you don't shut up." Riley turned and walked toward the sliding glass door. He needed some air.

The muggy air outside did little to cool off his boiling temper. Breathing in took effort with the moist heat. He stalked over to one of the chairs and straddled it to sit down. He'd been here at Logan's for nearly a month now. He hadn't stayed in one place that long since his

army days. Usually he was so antsy to move he couldn't stand a place longer than a week at the most. So what was the difference here?

Jenna.

Man, I am all screwed up inside. He did care about her. Too much. Was it enough to want to settle down for good? Hell, he didn't know. He wasn't willing to take a chance right now. Not unless he knew for sure. It would only hurt both of them. He sat with his arms on his elbows and dropped his head.

Who was he kidding? Even if he was ready to settle down, it couldn't be with Jenna. He's tastes ran to a Dom's lifestyle. He didn't want a slave. He did want someone who would submit to him though, and Jenna had been through too much abuse to ever be comfortable in that type of lifestyle.

No, he needed to break it off with her quick and thorough. Just as soon as she was safe, he'd ride out. Maybe he would team up with Morgan or Tyler for awhile. Tyler seemed to like his place in Tennessee, might be a good change of pace for him. Or, he could always go up to Stillwater, Oklahoma. Maybe.

He looked up at the deep green of the trees. It wouldn't be long till they began to turn brown. Winter would be there before he knew it, which meant somewhere warmer, Florida maybe.

The more he thought about leaving, the more he hated the idea. Just the thought of leaving Jenna behind sat wrong with him. Somewhere along the way, she'd gotten under his skin. He didn't know when it had happened, but he wanted her, wanted her to belong to him. He wanted her to want him and only him. Where did that leave him?

* * * *

Jenna swallowed around the knot that had formed in her throat the minute she realized Riley was gone. He would be there to watch out for her when she went home. Somehow she thought with him there

she could handle it. Now that he wasn't, she felt lost and unsure of her decision.

"Did he say anything when he left?" she asked.

"No. Just that he was going to catch up with Morgan and Tyler before they got here." Tina hugged her lightly. "I'm sure he'll be back."

"It doesn't matter anyway. I just thought he would want to say good-bye. I don't think he'll be coming back, Tina." Jenna squeezed her friend's hand as they waited for the police to call and give her the sign to return home.

They were setting up in the house and around the neighborhood. Tina and Logan were going to take her home and drop her off. Tina balked at the idea. She thought they should at least stick around a little while to get her ready, but she figured they wouldn't leave if they got inside, so she vetoed it.

Instead, they would pull into her driveway, and Logan would carry her suitcase into the house for her. She and Tina would hug and say good-bye outside. That way if Gregg had followed them there, he would see that she was staying alone. In theory, it should work. Jenna hoped it would work. She wanted her life back. She wanted to be able to come and go without worrying someone was going to get her all the time. She'd made up her mind. No more men. If she got horny enough, she had a vibrator that didn't beat her up.

"Are you sure this is what you want to do?" Tina had only asked that same question a hundred times now.

"I'm sure. It's better to get it over with."

"I'm going to be a nervous wreck until he's caught," Tina complained.

"You and me both. I'm going to do something about it."

The sudden ringing of the phone jarred both women. Jenna groaned when her ribs protested the sudden move. Logan answered and then hung up.

“They’re ready whenever you are.” He looked at Jenna. “For one last time. Please don’t do this.”

“I’ve got to, Logan. It’s the only way to catch him and no one else to get hurt.” Jenna stood up and waited on them to follow her.

Logan carried her bag out to the truck then came back for them. He wasn’t letting them take any chances that Gregg might be out there waiting on her. He helped her into the backseat and then checked on Tina in the front. When he walked around to the driver’s side, Jenna almost changed her mind. Instead, she set her jaw and readied herself to handle whatever happened. Maybe nothing would. Then what? The police would eventually give up. They couldn’t watch her house forever. Gregg might wait until there was no one around.

She fussed at herself for over thinking again. She would cross that bridge if and when she had to. Right now, she had to get through the next twenty-four hours. She could do it.

They arrived at her house much too soon. Logan walked around and helped her out of the truck then pulled out her suitcase and escorted her up to the house. She unlocked the door and let Logan set her suitcase in the hall.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“I’m sure,” she answered with as much conviction as she could put into her words.

“Okay. If you change your mind, just call, and I’ll come get you. Okay?” Logan asked.

“Okay. Thanks, Logan. Tell Tina I’ll call her tonight.”

She felt almost as if it were the end when she closed the door. Maybe it was the end of a lifetime of poor judgment and bad choices. She was doing something about it now. If only Riley hadn’t left. She would have felt better about it all knowing he was out there somewhere. She shook it off. She couldn’t depend on anyone but herself. If she hadn’t learned anything from all of this, it should have been that.

Jenna tried picking up her suitcase but couldn't handle it with her ribs. Instead, she pushed it down the hall to her bedroom. By the time she made it there, she was worn out. She decided a nap might help. At least if she slept for awhile, she wouldn't be worrying. Right now, that as about all she would do. She started to pull off her shirt then remembered that there was supposed to be someone in the house, as well. With a grimace, she toed off her shoes and climbed up on the bed without taking off her clothes. She wouldn't be as comfortable, but since she didn't know who or where they were, she wasn't going to flash them.

* * * *

Several hours later, Jenna woke with a crick in her neck and feeling groggy. She hadn't planned to sleep more than an hour or so. She glanced at the clock and groaned. It was nearly six. She'd be up all night now. Sunlight still streamed in around the curtains, but in another hour, it would be dimming. The quiet of the house worried her. She'd never noticed before how quiet it could be when you lived alone. Why did it bother her now?

She shrugged it away and got up. It was time to figure out something for dinner. She needed something in her stomach to take her antibiotic. Maybe something light like cheese and crackers would be good. She smiled. Tina's crack about how she loved them reminded her they were together in Logan's house. She wondered where Riley was now. Had he caught up with Morgan and Tyler? Was he going to stick with them? Would she ever see him again? The thought crossed her mind that she shouldn't care. But she did.

She flipped on the lights in the kitchen and searched the fridge for cheese. She found half a block of sharp cheddar and located a sleeve of crackers left in a box. The meal looked sparse, but she enjoyed it. It was one of her favorite things to eat. She swallowed the medicine and decided to wait until she was ready to go to bed to take another pain

pill. Instead, she took two Ibuprofens and poured a diet cola. She would sit and watch TV for awhile.

Flipping through channels should be a sport, she decided thirty minutes later. There was nothing on, and she was tired of looking. She pulled out a book and tried to concentrate on that but to no avail. Finally, she'd had enough and took the pain pill and headed for her bedroom. She'd take a nice, relaxing bath then go to bed.

Once the water was how she wanted it, Jenna climbed into the tub and gently lowered herself in the water. It felt wonderful to her sore muscles. Between the warm water soak and the pain pill, Jenna fell into a light doze, waking up when the water cooled around her. She climbed out of the tub and dried off.

Once again, she wondered where the person inside the house was. She pulled on underwear and the large T-shirt she slept in. Stepping out into the bedroom took all her courage. She didn't know if someone could see her or not. She climbed under the covers and switched off her bedside table. The dark greeted her with all sorts of nasty images in her head. She resisted the urge to leave the light on. That was childish, and she wasn't a child any longer. Instead, she gritted her teeth and willed herself to sleep.

* * * *

Nothing happened over the next two days. The police were getting antsy, and she was worn out from worry. She talked with Tina every day, several times a day, but it didn't keep her from dwelling on the helplessness she felt being at the mercy of her fear. The police warned her that they would only be here one more night, and then she would have to call if she needed them. The phone rang.

"How are you doing?" Tina's voice was always a welcomed one.

"I'm fine. I'm tired of wondering and waiting. I've got to go to the grocery store. Do you want to meet me at the coffee shop?" Jenna

hoped her friend would do that. She missed her and needed someone to talk to without it being over the phone.

“Sounds great to me. I’ll meet you in thirty minutes,” Tina said.

“I’ll see you then.” Jenna hung up and smiled for the first time in days.

She made it to the coffee shop before Tina and snagged them a table in the back. Even though she knew the police would follow her wherever she went, she wished she could see one of them. It would make her feel a lot better. In fact, she had yet to see any of them at all since she had been back at her house.

Tina walked into the room and grinned when she caught site of Jenna. She hurried over to the table and plopped down in the opposite seat after giving her a big hug.

“I know you are happy to get out for awhile,” Tina said.

“You know it. I’m going stir crazy. The doctor will let me go back to work next week. I’m actually looking forward to it.” She waved her hand to get the attention of a waitress. “Did you have any trouble getting an early lunch?”

“Not a problem. I just told the boss I was meeting you to see how you were doing.”

“Tell him I’ll be back next week after I see the doctor on Monday.”

The waitress walked over and took their lunch orders.

“Logan’s still pissed at Riley for leaving like he did.”

“I told him to leave. He shouldn’t hold it against him.” Jenna hated that she’d caused a rift between the two men.

“He’ll get over it. They’re men. They’ll cuss each other out and then forget about it.”

“So, what’s going on at work that I’m missing?” Jenna asked.

They discussed work for the next half hour as they ate their lunch. Tina caught her up on the office gossip. By the time they had finished their meal, it was nearly time for Tina to go back to work.

“Why don’t you come over for dinner tonight?” Tina asked.

“Thanks, but let’s make it over the weekend unless you have other plans. The police won’t be watching me anymore then. I’d rather not drag them around anymore than I have to.”

“How about Friday night then. We’ll cook steaks out on the grill. How about that?” Tina said.

“It sounds like a plan. I’m going to the grocery next. I’ll call you tonight,” Jenna said.

They parted ways, and Jenna walked to her car a block down. The back of her neck tingled as if someone where watching her. Good. The police really were there. She was beginning to wonder.

She climbed into her car and drove to the store. She spent the next hour shopping. After checking out, she loaded her groceries into her car and started across the parking lot to return the buggy to the buggy rack. Out of nowhere, a car barreled toward her. She turned to run and twisted her ankle in the process. She tried to take a step, but it gave in, and she fell to the hard concrete ground. Someone grabbed her and lifted her, dragging her across the lot to the safety of a row of cars. The car sped by, hitting the grocery cart in the process. It flew through the air and landed on a car hood.

“Fuck! Are you okay?”

Jenna looked up into the worried eyes of Riley. Where had he come from?

“I don’t think so. I twisted my ankle.” She still couldn’t get past the fact that Riley had saved her.

He knelt beside her and checked her ankle. She winced when he squeezed it.

“It’s not broken, but it’s a bad sprain. What about your legs? I drug you part of the way. I’m sorry, baby. I wasn’t in a good position to pick you up.” Riley checked her legs, pulling her pants legs up to check.

Seconds later, one of the policemen in regular clothes ran up.

“Is she okay?”

“No thanks to you, asshole.” He stood up and advanced on the man.

“Riley. Don’t start. I need help to stand up.” She knew he would end up in jail if he hit the man.

“Did you get him?” He bent over and picked her up in his arms.

“One of the others is following him now. We’ll get him.”

“She’s got company from now on whether you are there or not.” Riley didn’t wait around for the cop to answer him.

“Let’s get you home so I can check your legs and that ankle. You need ice on it.” He carried her over to her car and opened the passenger side door.

“Hand me your keys.” Riley held out his hand.

She reached in her pocket and gave them to him. She was in no condition to drive anyway. Where had he come from? Had he been watching her all this time? Why had he let her believe that he had left? The questions kept circling in her head as he drove them to her house.

“Stay here. I’m going to check your house then I’ll help you inside.” His tone brooked no argument.

Jenna stayed where he left her.

When he returned, he picked her up and carried her into the living room. Once he had her settled on the couch, he took the pillows and lifted her ankle on top of them.

“I’ll bring you some ice for it then I’ll get the groceries out of the car.” He disappeared for a few seconds then returned with a Ziploc bag full of ice and a dish cloth.

Riley wrapped the bag of ice in the cloth and laid it gently across her ankle. Jenna tried not to make a sound, but her swift intake of breath let him know she was hurting.

“Sorry, baby. I know it hurts. I’ll be back once I get the groceries inside. Don’t move.”

Jenna wasn’t planning on moving. She ached all over. Damn. She’d just begun to get over the last bruises. Now she would have an

entire new set of them. She listened as Riley carried in the groceries. He must have put them away, as well, since it took him a little while to show back up.

"I called Logan. He will be over in a few minutes. You're not staying alone anymore."

"He can't help. He has Tina to take care of," Jenna reminded him.

"No but Morgan and Tyler can. They've been helping me keep an eye on you. We didn't do such a good job today." He checked her ankle again and then began pulling on her pants leg to check her legs again.

"Stop, I'm fine." She struggled to keep her pants legs down.

"Stop it. I want to check. I dragged you on them. If you don't be still, I'm going to strip your pants off you." He glared at her.

Jenna bit her lower lip and suffered through his checking her all over. She did have some scrapes on her knees and her left elbow. Nothing major, but Riley frowned at them.

"I'll clean them up after we settle what we are going to do about the mess you're in. Did you know that they've only had two men on you for the last three days? Not enough to keep you safe from a damn gnat."

"He said there were four of them with one in the house. Tonight was supposed to be the last night." Jenna swallowed at the thought that they had lied to her.

"Yeah, well. You can't trust the police, baby. They are only after their man. They never cared about you at all."

He was right, but it hurt to realize that. She had risked her safety and all for nothing. It wasn't lost on her that Riley had been there all along—watching out for her. Yeah, he cared. She had been a fool not to believe him. She frowned. Had Tina known and not told her? Surely her best friend wouldn't have done that to her. She'd find out.

Riley returned with a glass of water and held out the bottle with her pain medicine in it.

“It looks like we are going to need to get a refill of these if you keep getting hurt.” He attempted to smile but failed miserably.

“Hopefully this is the last time. I’m tired of being sore all over.”

The door bell rang. Riley quickly moved to the door and checked the peep hole. He let in Logan, Morgan, and someone she hadn’t met. It must be Tyler, she thought to herself. He was as tall as the other three men. He had short, light-brown hair and blue eyes. He was also the most muscular of the men. He smiled a cocky grin and crossed the room with his hand out.

“I’m Tyler. It’s great to finally meet you in person. I’ve heard nothing but talk of you for the last four days.” He shook her hand, holding it just a few seconds longer than was necessary.

“You can let go of her hand now, Tyler.” Riley growled.

“You didn’t say what a lovely woman she was. Shame on you.” Tyler winked at her.

Jenna liked him right off. He was a shameless flirt.

“Cut it out, man. I’ll bust your mouth if you lay any of your shit on her.”

Tyler died out laughing and threw his hands up to ward off a blow when Riley turned on him. Jenna liked seeing the playful side of the men. They had been so serious every time she had been around them.

“So, what is the plan?” Morgan asked.

“The same one we had with Tina, only I’ll be in here with Jenna. Tyler and Morgan can take the night shift, and you will take the day shift. That way you can be home with Tina at night, Logan.” Riley turned to Tyler “Did Morgan fill you in on everything?”

“Yep. The whole sordid story. Even the part about how you’re—”

Riley interrupted him with a slap upside his head. “That’s enough.”

Tyler rubbed his stomach and frowned. “Morgan, you didn’t say he was sensitive about it.”

“Yeah, well.”

“You’re next, asshole. Shut up,” Riley said.

“You two haven’t been helping Riley all this time?” Jenna asked.

“No, we got detained and just made it in last night,” Morgan said, looking pointedly at Tyler.

She looked at Riley but kept her mouth shut. She’d say something to him later about working on his own. Right now, she needed to concentrate on what their plans were. What did Riley mean he’d be inside with her? Her couch was too small for him, and she only had one other room, and it was her office.

Tyler stretched. “I better find my spot to watch. I’ll see you later, little lady.”

“Over my dead body.” Riley took a step toward Tyler.

“Play nice boys,” Morgan said.

Logan just shook his head and grabbed Riley. “Come on. I’m going to go get Tina and follow her home.”

“I’m going to scout out my spot, too. I’ll see you in the morning. Tell Tina I said hi.” Morgan said he was going to look around the house and leave out the back door.

“Talk to you later, Riley.” Logan bumped fists with his friend and left, as well.

“Let’s check your ankle. How’s the pain?” Riley asked.

“Good. It’s not bad.” She winced when he took the ice pack off.

“Swelling isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. That’s good. We need to keep it elevated over the next twenty-four hours. I’ll set up your bed for it. Be right back.”

Jenna sighed. She was stuck with him for the next few days, she guessed. It wouldn’t be a hardship until he decided to leave again. She couldn’t keep getting used to him only to have him disappear. It was too hard on her. The fact he hadn’t really left wasn’t lost on her. She still couldn’t believe it. Why had he kept his presence a secret? She might never know because she had made up her mind not to fall for him.

“Okay, I have your room ready.”

“I’m not going to bed this early.”

“You need to be in bed resting. You’re going to be sore tomorrow.” Riley jammed his hands on his hips.

“I’m sore now. If I stay in the bed, I’m going to get where I can’t do anything.”

Riley huffed out a breath. “Okay, fine. You can stay up until after dinner.”

“Gee, thanks, Dad,” she said, sarcasm in her voice.

He left her alone to start dinner. She reached over to the coffee table for her book and started on it again. It still didn’t hold her interest. She refused to flip through channels again. Finally, boredom got the best of her, and she called into the kitchen.

“Why did you let me think you had left?”

Silence.

“How long have you been watching me?”

Silence.

Had he left again? Maybe he stepped outside to talk to one of the others. She removed the nearly thawed ice bag from her ankle and swung it off the pile of pillows to the floor. She attempted to put pressure on it, but it was having none of that. She grimaced and stood up on her good leg. It didn’t buckle under her weight, but it wasn’t exactly happy to be holding her up. She eased along the room, putting as little pressure as she could on her bad ankle. She had just about made it to the kitchen when Riley came out. He glowered at her and swept her up in his arms.

“What in the hell are you doing up? Are you trying to ruin that ankle?”

“You didn’t answer me, so I was coming to see where you were.”

“I’ll answer you now. Let’s get you back on the couch,” he said with a sigh. “I didn’t think it was a good idea to holler back at you.”

“Oh.” Jenna didn’t have anything to say to that.

“I didn’t tell you because I wanted to catch the bastard, and you knowing I was around might have tipped him off. You would have

been looking to see me like you were those cops. I saw you looking for them.”

“I guess Gregg could tell, too. That’s the reason he hasn’t tried anything, isn’t it?”

“Probably. That’s why we are going to pretend no one is here but you. So, at night, I’ll be in one place so my shadow doesn’t show up moving around.”

“Doesn’t he realize they will eventually catch him? He’s going back to prison.”

“He’s crazy, Jenna. I don’t think he realizes how deep a hole he’s dug for himself. Once I get my hands on him, I’m going—”

Jenna interrupted him. “Nothing. You’re going to turn him over to the police is what you’re going to do.”

“After I teach him not to beat up on women.” Riley looked at her with a smile. “I’m going to check on dinner. I’ll be right back. No getting up again. You need to stay on the couch with your leg up.”

She grumbled at him but didn’t plan to try that again. Her ankle hurt worse now. Of course she wouldn’t let him know it. He’d just tell her he told her so.

Chapter Eight

“You’re what? I don’t think so. I can get in the tub by myself.” Jenna shook her head no at his suggestion that he help her in and out of the tub.

“You can’t stand on your ankle. How in the hell do you think you can get in the tub?” he demanded.

“I’ll figure out a way.”

“Face it. You’re stuck with my help. Now shuck those clothes.” He crossed his arms and waited.

“I’m not doing a strip tease with you in the room.” Jenna couldn’t believe she was in this predicament.

Why hadn’t it registered with her that she was completely at his mercy before now? How had she expected to get in and out of the tub on her own, much less up to the bathroom? That idea had heat rushing to her cheeks.

“I’ll wait outside, but if you dare and try to make it to the bathroom on your own, I’ll redden that bottom of yours in a New York minute.” With that, he walked out the door but left it cracked.

“This is humiliating,” she groused.

She slowly pulled off her blouse then unhooked her bra but left it on. She struggled with her pants but finally managed to wiggle out of them. She hesitated at her panties. How could she do this? He’d already seen her buck naked, but she’d been hurt. *Well, you’re hurt again. It’s nothing to him.* Yeah, right. He’d still see her. Hell, she couldn’t pretend that they hadn’t had sex.

“Are you done in there?”

“Just a minute.” She huffed out a breath and slipped her panties off her butt and let them pool at her feet.

“Okay.”

Riley walked in and picked her up as if it was nothing to have a naked woman in his arms, and perhaps it wasn't. He probably was used to the situation. Well, she wasn't. He lowered her into the bath water he'd already run for her. He'd even put some of her bath salts in it. Funny how thoughtful he could be sometimes.

“I'll be waiting outside in your bedroom. Just call when you're ready to get out.” He closed the door most of the way and left her alone.

Jenna sighed and took the bath cloth to begin bathing. After she was finished, she leaned back and soaked for awhile. It felt good to relax in the water. All too soon, it began to cool.

“You okay in there?” Riley's voice called through the door.

She reached and pulled the plug on the tub. “I'm ready to get out.”

He walked in the door and leaned over the tub to help her out. She stood up with his help. He snagged the towel and wrapped it around her before picking her up out of the tub. He stood her on one leg and began drying her off. He was impersonal at first, but his resolve must have wavered when he went to his knees to dry her legs. It put him face to face with her pelvis and pussy. He leaned in and inhaled. She knew she was wet. Just having his hands on her body turned her on despite her attempt at resisting the need coursing through her body.

A groan escaped his lips as he leaned in and kissed her belly. He placed open-mouthed kisses over her abdomen downward until he reached her pussy. He licked and nipped at her. Then he drew in a deep breath and stood up.

“Let's get you in bed.” He picked her up again and carried her into the bedroom.

Darkness greeted her in the bedroom. He didn't hand her anything to put on. Instead, he pulled the covers over her and stripped down to

his boxers. He climbed into bed next to her and drew her into the circle of his arms.

“Get some sleep,” he said.

Jenna doubted she was going to sleep with him that close and her without clothes on. What had he been thinking? There was no way she could go to sleep like this. But she was wrong and, in no time, did.

* * * *

Riley lay awake for a long time thinking about her and how he had nearly lost her again. Never mind the fact that she wasn't his to lose. Now he was torturing himself by holding her without clothes to separate them. It didn't matter that he had his boxers on. He still felt her skin next to his. Her sweet ass nestled against his hard cock. In her sleep, she ground against him suggestively. It had him gritting his teeth with need. He had to be a glutton for punishment.

He would keep her safe. No way would he let that asshole hurt her again. He'd purposely left the lights off so he wouldn't be able to tell that there was someone else in the room with her. Everything hinged on him thinking she was by herself. As long as he kept hidden, he would take the opportunity at some point to attack her again. When that happened, they would spring the trap.

If he got hurt in the process, well, all the better. He hoped the asshole fought him. He would take great pleasure in beating the crap out of him. In fact, if no one stopped him, he would likely kill the bastard. He knew Logan and Tyler wouldn't let him if they were there. Morgan, on the other hand, just might. He would agree with him that the bastard deserved death.

There wasn't much he could do until the man played out his hand. They were waiting on him to make a move. He just hoped it would be soon. Jenna had lost weight, and she was obviously not getting a lot of rest. She seemed to be sleeping soundly now. Maybe she did trust him

to keep her safe. She didn't realize that her safety meant more to him than breathing. His entire reason for living had shifted to taking care of her at some point. Maybe it had always been that way, or maybe when he thought he would lose her it had happened. Either way, he knew she was the one for him. He just had to figure out how to make it work.

Riley fell asleep to that thought.

Early the next morning, he woke to the soft sounds of snoring. He smiled. So she snored. That was cute, he decided. He would enjoy informing her of that bit of news. She had also turned over in the night and rested her hand on his chest and her head on his shoulder. His arm was asleep, but he didn't mind. The feel of her nipples against the side of his chest more than made up for it.

She stirred, and he held his breath, hoping she wouldn't wake up just yet. When she did, she would turn away from him in embarrassment. He had her figured out to some extent. Well, as much as you could figure out a woman anyway. His cock was fully awake and aching at the thought of her pussy not five inches away. What would she do if he woke her up with his dick inside of her? It was a fantasy he had in his head now. He groaned. She stirred. He held his breath. She settled back down, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He wanted a few more minutes of enjoyment before she drew away from him.

Her soft skin felt like heaven against his roughened skin. Her silky hair smelled wonderful against his nose. He longed to feel her pussy and taste its sweet nectar. Maybe once this was all over, he could indulge himself. He couldn't afford to get hooked on her. He wasn't planning on settling down and definitely not with her. She couldn't handle his lifestyle.

She stirred again, and he found himself looking into startled eyes.

"Good morning." He held her when she would have turned away.

"Hi. Um, I need to get up." She averted her eyes and tried to pull away.

“Did you know you snored?” he asked.

“No I don’t,” she huffed out.

“Yes, you do. It’s cute.”

“Don’t call me cute.” She pushed against his chest with her hand.

Riley let go of her and let her roll away from him. It was only temporary anyway. She couldn’t walk to the bathroom. He would need to carry her, and there she would be, back in his arms once again. *Where she belonged*. No. He frowned and rolled out of bed on his side. She didn’t belong to him. He needed to get that thought out of his head.

A soft groan reached his ears. He stood up and walked around the bed to find that Jenna was trying to put weight on her ankle.

“What are you doing? You need to stay off of it.” He picked her up and carried her to the bathroom. He sat her on the toilet. “Call me when you get through. I’ll be right outside the door.”

Several minutes later, he heard the water in the lavatory running and figured she would be ready in a minute. When she didn’t say anything after the water turned off, he knocked on the door.

“Jenna?”

“Just a minute.”

He pulled on his jeans and left them unbuttoned at the top. He waited until she finally announced she was ready. He opened the door and found her standing on her good foot waiting by the sink. Her face had a rosy glow as if she’d just washed it. Maybe that was what she was doing that took so long. He picked her up again and walked the few feet to the bed and sat down with her in his lap.

Jenna’s arms were twined around his neck, but when he sat down, they loosened until they were resting on his shoulders. The feel of soft hands against his skin burned through him. His breath came in short bursts as he realized he was going to kiss her. There was nothing he could do about it, either. He had no control over his body in that moment. He bent down and brushed his lips against hers, soft kisses that had his cock aching to get out. He nibbled at her lower lip until

she opened to him. His tongue delved inside her mouth to tease alongside hers. She tasted like sweet vanilla ice cream.

Riley groaned and deepened the kiss then drew her tongue into his mouth where he sucked until she moaned and drew away for air. They both panted, trying to catch their breath. Each looked into the other's eyes, searching for something. He couldn't get enough of her though.

He bent once more to kiss the corner of her mouth then lower until he could run his lips along her jaw to the shell of her ear. He licked there then sucked on her earlobe, making her squirm in his lap. His cock jerked at the friction, demanding to be released from his prison. He had no intention of letting him free. Jenna was hurt and didn't need him rutting on her like this.

It didn't stop him from teasing her with his lips and tongue. He nibbled again at her ear and slowly worked his way down the side of her neck to the spot where neck met shoulder. He stopped to nip the skin there then sooth it with his tongue. She shivered in reaction. It thrilled the man in him to know he could affect her that way. He wanted to make her scream her release. He wanted to bury himself so deep inside her she wouldn't know where to go to get away from him. But, he wouldn't let her out of his sight. She would be his in every sense of the word, his to care for, his to protect, his to cherish. She would be his to love.

Love? Where had that come from? He didn't love her. Lust yes, but not love. He couldn't love her. She deserved a lover who could treat her like the queen she was. He would want things from her that might break her. He wouldn't be responsible for that.

His eyes focused on her, and he found her looking at him with a look of wonder in her eyes. Wonder at what, he thought. She gave him a tentative smile then reached a hand up to cup the side of his face. He couldn't help rubbing his face into her open palm. The caress felt magical to him.

"Riley?" Her voice held the hint of a tremor. "Kiss me again."

He groaned and took her mouth in an almost savage kiss full of his need. When he finished, he raised his head and noticed the beard burn on the side of her face and her kiss-swollen lips. He wanted more of her, so much more. He wanted to lay her down on the bed and ravish her. He wanted to tie her hands and bring her to brink of pleasure over and over until she begged to come. Seeing her face when she did would be the ultimate rush.

Her startled expression woke him up from his fantasy. Had something shown on his face? What had she seen in his eyes to give her an expression of worry?

“How about coffee?” he asked.

She nodded, and he let her sit on the edge of the bed. She grabbed at the sheets to cover up. The move angered him for some reason, and he stopped her from covering up. She raised startled eyes to him.

“Don’t cover yourself. We slept with each other. I’ve seen and felt you all over. I’ve been inside of you. Don’t.” Riley jerked on his shirt.

“I can’t stay like this. One of the others might see me.”

He stared at her for a solid thirty seconds and sighed. “I’ll get you some clothes. Tell me where they are.”

Jenna directed him around her room where he gathered clothes for her to put on. She couldn’t stand on both legs, so he gave her support as she drew on her panties and pants. He left her to finish dressing while he put coffee on. He needed it, hoping it would take the trembling from his hands. Touching her bare skin and sleeping next to her in bed had been more than he could take and stay sane. He wanted her.

Once he had the coffee going, he returned to help her into the living room. Her slight weight was nothing in his arms.

“I’m going to take a shower as soon as the coffee is ready. Under no circumstances are you to get up. If someone knocks on the door or rings the doorbell, ignore it.”

Without waiting for an answer, he walked back into the kitchen and poured two cups of coffee. He added milk to hers and took it to

her. She smiled and took it with both hands, breathing in the aroma before taking a sip.

“Thanks, you remembered how I liked it.”

“I’ll fix something to eat when I get out of the shower. Stay off that foot.” Riley stared down into her eyes for a few seconds then walked away.

If he didn’t do something about his condition, he would be fucking her on the couch. He turned on the shower to regulate the water temperature and stripped out of his clothes. The sharp sting of the shower spray pelted his chest as he ran his head under the flow. He quickly washed then looked down at his rigid erection. He needed to get rid of it, or he’d do something he and Jenna would both regret.

He soaped up his hand and ran it over the shiny knob then down the shaft. He pumped it slow and tight until he felt the first twinges of release burn in his balls. He continued fisting his cock while his other hand fondled his balls. Rolling them around in his hand just the way he liked it. They tightened in his palm as he pumped his shaft fast and faster. The burn in his balls transformed into an all-out fire as the need gathered at the base of his spine, ready to explode. He fucked his own hand until cum spurted from him in long strings. He groaned as he spent his last.

After resting and catching his breath leaning against the tile, Riley rinsed off again and got out of the shower. He listened to see if he could hear anything out of the ordinary then dried off and dressed as quickly as he could. His cock already itched at the thought of Jenna sitting in the living room on the couch waiting for him. Would he never get her out of his system?

When he returned, she had finished her coffee and was flipping through a magazine. He watched her for several seconds before letting her know he was there. Her hair had that just-out-of-bed look, and she kept pushing it out of her face. He remembered the feel of it against his face. He drew in a deep breath and walked farther into the room.

“Craving anything in particular for breakfast?”

She started then smiled a slow smile. It left him breathless for several seconds.

"I'm not picky. Anything is fine. I usually just eat toast and jelly or scrambled eggs and toast." The smile lit up her entire face making her eyes sparkle like jewels.

"I'll scramble eggs and make toast then." He turned to return to the kitchen, but she stopped him.

"Riley, thanks."

"For what? Cooking? I have to eat, too."

"That's not what I meant, and you know it. Thanks for caring." Jenna held his gaze for a few seconds before he could break away.

He was not going to let her get to him.

* * * *

She'd upset him for some reason. The sound of a skillet hitting the stove just a little too hard and the clink of glasses shoved together a little too quickly reached her ears. Why would her telling him thank you upset him? She sighed. There was no understanding a man's thoughts. They truly were a separate species. Most of what they did or thought didn't make sense half the time.

Flashbacks of his mouth on hers speared her vision. She closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath, trying to ward them away. Instead, her mind latched onto them and dragged them out into the open. She could almost feel the press of his lips against hers. The way his tongue licked at her ear then drew on it. The nips at her neck, the tiny bites against her jaw. They all sent fire racing to her womb. Jenna had to work at keeping a moan from ripping free of her mouth.

These memories soon triggered another set of memories of a different time. They left her wet and hot and wanting. With Riley in the other room and her vibrator in the bedroom, she was stuck in the middle and horny. She squeezed her legs together in hopes of alleviating some of her misery, but it didn't work. Instead, she only

ratcheted up the heat burning out of control at her center. She glanced at the doorway to the kitchen and risked pinching her nipples through her T-shirt. The pleasure-pain drew her breath in, and she bit her lip to keep the pleasure to herself. The more she pinched, the higher her arousal spiraled. Nothing helped.

Just when she thought she might make it, Riley walked into the room carrying a plate of eggs and toast. He sat it on the coffee table. When he stood up, his eyes had darkened and slid lower. His nostrils flared. Heat suffused her face as she realized he could smell her arousal.

"If you were in need, you should have said something," he rasped out.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she managed to get out in a breathy voice.

"Your face is flushed, and your sweet pussy smells of sex. Tell me, did you get yourself off? Who did you think about while you did?"

She closed her eyes and willed the flush to cool down. By now, her entire body was on fire. There was nothing she could do about it, either.

"No, I didn't get myself off, as you say." She pressed her lips together and glared at him in humiliation. "Did you jack off in the shower?"

"Yeah, I did. I thought about you the entire time. I thought about your lovely breasts and how your nipples poke at me in the chest. How they bead when I run my tongue across them." He lowered himself to the edge of the couch and stared deep into her eyes.

"I thought about sucking them into tight peaks then nipping at them while I mounded them with my hands. I imagined my cock so deep inside of you I could feel your throat around me. Do you have any idea of how much I want to sink inside of you and fuck you till you scream?"

Jenna couldn't stand it. She moaned, and her hands involuntarily went to her breasts. She flicked her nipples and froze when Riley growled at her.

"That's right, play with your breasts for me." His eyelids fell to half mast as she tweaked her nipples.

The thought of his mouth there made her whimper in need. He sensed her plight and pulled her T-shirt up under her arms. He released the front closure of her bra and peeled back the cups of her bra. The cool, air-conditioned air puckered her nipples into tight peaks. He flicked them with his first fingers. It tingled with just the right amount of discomfort to leave her wanting more.

"I love the dusky pink they get when you're aroused," he said.

He leaned down and drew one into his mouth as far as he could suck it then backed off and nipped at it. He soothed the sharp pain with his tongue then repeated the process on the other breast. His hands smoothed over her stomach to bracket her ribcage. He was gentle with her still-bruised ribs. His hands held her down as she tried to shove more of her breasts into his mouth. He chuckled around them, and the vibrations drove her further up the arousal pole.

He left her breasts to lick his way down her chest and to her bellybutton. He nipped at her belly and laved it with his tongue until her stomach was a series of reddened marks. He sat up and stared deep into her eyes as he slowly began unbuttoning and unzipping her jeans. He watched her as he slowly pulled them down her legs.

Jenna lifted her hips so help him remove them. She wanted this with everything inside of her. It didn't matter that he might be gone tomorrow. All that mattered was that he was there right then, and she wanted him. God, did she want him. Her entire body was on fire with the need to have him deep inside her.

Riley pulled her jeans off her legs and dropped them to the floor by the couch. He stared down at her pale blue panties as if they were the most important thing in the world right then. She arched her back, thrusting her pelvis up toward him in silent demand. He reached down

and traced a finger along the waistband from side to side. It fanned the flames but did little to put them out.

When he did the same thing at the legs of the panties, she nearly screamed in frustration. He slipped a finger between the material and her flesh and gently brushed across her sopping wet folds. She groaned. He chuckled and petted her through the material before running that finger across her pussy again and again. She couldn't stop her thrusts toward the offending finger. She needed him to touch her in that one spot. Just one touch and she was sure she would detonate instantly. He avoided that spot as if it had the plague. She growled at him and reached with her own hand, but he slapped it and captured her wrists in his hand. He pulled them above her head.

"You will leave them right where I put them. Don't move them for anything. Do you understand me?"

His voice sent chills down her spine. The authority in it made her breathless to obey him. She nodded her head with a whimper.

He shoved his hands beneath her ass and grabbed her panties and tore them away from her. She gasped at the suddenness of it. A thrill of worry traveled down her spine to be lost in the first brush of his mouth against the inside of her thigh.

"Oh, God!"

He ran his open mouth up and down her thighs until she wrapped her legs around his back and pulled him toward her. He chuckled and caught himself with his hands on either side of her hips.

"Patience, baby. You'll get yours—eventually." He smiled down at her.

Jenna growled and started to move her hands down when he cocked his head at her. She grimaced and shoved them back over her head again.

Riley lowered his head once again and blew across cunt. First his warm breath then a cool stream of air rippled across her pussy. She moaned and lifted her hips toward his mouth. He backed away.

"Uh, uh, uh." He shook his finger at her. "None of that."

He leaned down and kissed the wet lips of her pussy. It was a struggle, but she managed to remain still. He rewarded her with a quick lick over her pussy lips. She couldn't help but follow his mouth. The feel of his tongue against her sensitive pussy lips gave her clit something to stand up for. He ran a finger down her center then spread her intimate lips and settled in to tease and feast on her. Jenna nearly came unglued the first time he touched her clit. Then he avoided it and concentrated his attentions on her entrance where he fucked her with his stiffened tongue. She was almost mindless with pleasure now.

"Please! Please do something. Fuck me," she begged.

He teased her clit again, rubbing his tongue over it until she thought she would come, but he backed off once again. She screamed in frustration. It did nothing to sway him. He continued teasing her clit until she bucked and pulled with her legs enough that he smiled, an amused expression on his face. Finally, he unhitched her legs from around him and stood up. Jenna thought he was going to leave her like that, but his hands went to the button on his jeans and undid it. Then he slowly unzipped his pants, keeping her eyes captive with his.

When he pulled them down to his knees, she nearly died of relief. He reached down and pulled out a condom. He tore it open with his teeth then rolled it down over his stiff cock.

"Get on all fours, but watch your ankle."

She hurried to obey him. His sex-roughened voice pulled at her center. She would do almost anything he asked at this point.

He rubbed his thick erection up and down her slit, spreading her pussy juices around and over the covered head of his penis. He pushed forward, and in one hard shove, was completely inside her. She screamed at the sudden invasion. It felt so damn good. She squeezed her vaginal muscles tight to let him know how good it felt. He cursed above her and pulled back. Her hips followed him, not wanting to lose the thick cock. When he shoved forward again, she met him with a backward thrust of her own. He reached the end of her

womb and bumped her cervix. The sudden jolt of pain sent splinters of pleasure through to her clit. She loved it.

The faster he drove into her, the harder she pushed back against him. She forgot about her injuries. Her ankle didn't bother her. Nothing registered except his cock inside of her. He spanked her ass, and she moaned. The sharp slap sent sparks deep within her. He slapped the other side and then repeated it over and over until her ass felt like it was on fire. Nothing had ever felt so good before.

Over and over, he rammed into her. His thick cock stretched her endlessly. He growled, and his rhythm began to falter. He was going to come. She whimpered and went to find her clit with her hand, but he was already there. He pinched it, and she came so hard she thought she might pass out. She heard his shout above her, and then they were both falling to the couch.

Chapter Nine

The sharp knock on the door startled them. Riley groaned and moved off of Jenna. He helped her turn over. Panic-stricken eyes met his. He grabbed their clothes then picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. He shoved his legs into his jeans.

“Stay here and I’ll get rid of them. I’m sure it’s either Morgan or Tyler wanting to let me know what they did or didn’t see.” Riley closed the door and walked back into the living room.

It smelled of eggs, toast, and sex, but there was no reason for Jenna to realize that. He smiled and checked the door before he let Morgan inside. The other man walked in and then frowned.

“There better be coffee.”

“There’s coffee.” Riley walked ahead of him into the kitchen.

“So while I’ve been out in the heat with the damn mosquitoes, you’ve been in the cool air-conditioning making nice with Jenna. Now where is the justice in that, I ask you?” Morgan grabbed a cup off the drainer and poured a cup of coffee.

“Where’s Tyler?” Riley asked.

“Talking with Logan out back.”

“Did anything happen last night out there?”

Logan sipped his coffee. “Not really. One of the neighbors down the street had a fight at two a.m. over meat loaf.” He waved his hand in the air. “Don’t ask me. I don’t know why they would fight about that at two in the morning.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nope.” Morgan sat his coffee cup on the bar and stretched to his full height.

"I better go so they can come in. I don't want too many people inside at one time. I doubt there is anyone out there right now, but you never know." Morgan rinsed out his cup and walked over to the kitchen door. "I'll check in with you tonight when I get ready to come over."

"Thanks, man." Riley bumped knuckles with him before he left.

Jenna walked into the kitchen and headed for the coffee without looking at Riley. He sighed. She was back to being uncomfortable around him. He decided to take the bull by the horns. He walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her.

"You smell good enough to eat."

She scrunched up her neck when he moved her hair over to kiss the back of her neck.

"Don't do that," she squealed.

"Don't do what?" He kissed her shoulder. "This?"

"Let me drink my coffee." She edged farther down the counter from him.

He smiled when she turned around. Her hair was mussed even though she'd made an effort to brush it into some semblance of order. Her lips were swollen from his kisses. She'd managed to get her clothes on straight, so he figured he would keep the rest to himself.

Someone knocked at the door. Jenna jumped, but she didn't turn and run. Riley crossed the room to open the door. Logan walked in.

"Where is Tyler?" he asked.

"I sent him on to the house to get some sleep. There wasn't anything to report anyway."

"There's coffee if you want some," Jenna offered.

"Thanks, I had plenty at home. How are you doing today?"

"I'm fine, but ready for all of this to be over with though."

"I know you are. He'll show his hand soon, and when he does, we'll be ready for him." Logan nodded his head at Riley.

Riley walked over and put his arm around Jenna's shoulders. She stiffened at first. Slowly, she relaxed into his embrace. God, he

wanted her in his life, but his life was no place for someone like her. She was everything he wasn't, sweet, calm, innocent in so many ways, but he was the opposite. He'd never been innocent in his life. He held in a chuckle at the thought.

"I think you two should go out for a little while and let him see you. Then come back and keep the curtains open for awhile," Logan suggested.

"I don't want her exposed like that. I don't trust this guy." Riley wasn't happy with the plan.

"He's going to want to get his hands on her. You know that, Riley. He isn't going to try to shoot her. It's personal for him."

"Yeah, I know you're right. I don't like it."

"I want this over with. I say we do it." Jenna pushed out of Riley's hold and turned to face him. "If it will flush him out sooner, I'm all for it."

"Baby, I just don't want to take a chance that you get hurt again."

"I'll be following you, as well. If he comes out in the open, I'll have him." Logan crossed his arms over his chest.

"Fine. When do you want to do this?" Riley asked. He still wasn't happy about it.

"After lunch. Give me an idea where you're planning to go so I can anticipate your route."

Riley glanced at Jenna. "You know the town better than I do."

Jenna decided on a route and the stops they would make. Logan nodded and left them alone once again.

"It will be okay, Riley."

"I know. I have to worry. That's what you have me around for." The minute he said it, he was sorry he had.

He didn't want her to think the only reason he was there was as her bodyguard. The sex was just a fringe benefit for him. It wasn't like that at all. *So what if she does? You're not planning to stick around anyway.* No, but it did matter what she thought of him. He could admit that to himself.

"I'm going to take a shower." Jenna turned to go back to the bedroom.

Riley stopped her with a hand on her arm. He backed her up against the refrigerator. She looked up with big eyes. He smiled and dipped his head to claim her lips. She resisted at first then relaxed into him and opened her mouth. He swooped in and took possession of it. She twined her tongue around his.

When he finally released her, she swayed on her feet. He smiled and steadied her. Then he pushed her toward the bedroom.

"Go shower before I join you and we get side-tracked."

"I wouldn't mind if you did," she said shyly.

He groaned and shook his head. "Don't tempt me like that."

Her smile faltered, and she rushed out of the room. He blew out a breath but didn't follow her. He really needed to check on some things without her in the room. He pulled out his cell phone and dialed Tyler's number. The other man picked up on the second ring.

"Yeah?"

"What did you find out about Gregg?"

"He's a badass wannabe. He got out early because they are overcrowded. I guess they figured he wasn't dangerous to society." Tyler's sarcasm wasn't lost on Riley.

"Yeah, just to Jenna."

"He isn't going to stop till he kills her. He complained about everything being her fault while he was inside."

Riley ran a hand over his face. He was afraid of that. The man was a classic example of a wife beater. Everything was the woman's fault. If she would just act right, not mess up, everything would be fine.

"So, are you planning on eliminating him or what?" Tyler asked.

"I plan to do whatever it takes to keep him from hurting Jenna again," Riley said.

"I got you." Tyler hung up.

* * * *

Jenna climbed out of the shower and dried off. Even after washing off, she could still feel Riley's touch against her skin, his hands caressing her, his cock deep inside of her. What was she going to do when he was gone? She knew he would leave. He wasn't the settling-down type of man. Even though she knew it, she still hoped deep inside that he would change his mind. *Not going to happen. Men don't change who they are, especially not for a woman.*

The blow dryer made short work of drying her hair. She brushed it out then fastened it back out of her face. She wanted to be able to see in case Gregg was around and tried something. She didn't want to be a burden to Riley. She chose a pair of loose fitting jeans and a T-shirt the color of spring grass. She had trouble putting on her shoes and finally gave up. She carried them with her into the living room and held them up for Riley to see.

"I can't bend over to get them on and tie them. Do you mind?" she asked.

"Sure, have a seat."

He slipped them on her feet and tied the laces without saying a word. Then he stood up and pulled her to her feet only to crush his mouth to hers. He kissed her as if he hadn't just fucked her less than two hours before. His tongue wove around hers in an intimate dance. She moaned and ran her hands up his chest to tangle in his hair. All too soon, it was over, and Riley pulled back.

"After lunch, we're going shopping."

"Shopping? Are you kidding?" Jenna wasn't sure she heard him right.

"Yeah, we'll go out and walk around some. You know, window shop or something. We'll do whatever you women do when you go shopping." Riley actually looked uncomfortable.

Jenna smirked. He had no idea what women did when they shopped. She would enjoy showing him. Then it hit her.

"Do you think us shopping will draw him out?"

“Just seeing us together will bring him out. I want this over with.”

“So you can get on with your life, right? Are you ready to move on already?” she asked bitterly.

“No, I want you safe. The longer he’s out there, the less chance we have of catching him. He could wait weeks or even months before he comes after you again. The best thing to do is make him angry enough he comes after you now and trips up. When he does, we’ll get him.”

“What if one of you gets hurt because of this? I couldn’t stand knowing it’s my fault.”

“We’re good at this, Jenna. Have some faith in us.” He growled.

Jenna worried her lower lip. As scared as she was of her ex, she would face him in a minute if it would keep Riley safe. He was much too important to her for something to happen to him. Yes, she knew once it was all over he would take off on his bike and she would likely never see him again. Still, she was better off having known him and the passion he instilled in her than to have never experienced the magic of being in his embrace. If only...

“What are you thinking about? You are awfully quiet.” Riley lifted her chin with two fingers and looked into her eyes.

“Just worrying about Gregg and when he’ll show back up,” She hedged.

“Stop it then. Let me do the worrying. You concentrate on healing.”

Lunch was comprised of turkey sandwiches and Fritos. She fidgeted all during the meal. Once they had cleaned up the kitchen, Riley urged her to rest for awhile before they left. She tried, but she couldn’t settle her nerves down. Finally, she told him she was ready to go. She couldn’t relax with the shopping trip looming over her.

Riley started the car, having her wait inside until he had the air-conditioning going. Then he came, and she locked up the house up behind them. He led her with a hand to her back and helped her in the car. He closed the door and looked around as he walked around the

car and climbed in. She appreciated the fact that he was so diligent in watching out for her. Once they were on their way, Riley asked her where she wanted to go first and laid down some rules she was to follow while they were out in public.

“You stay close to me at all times. You don’t go walking off by yourself,” he began. “If I tell you to hit the ground, you do it, no questions. Got it?”

“Okay. I’ll follow your instructions and keep close to you.”

“Good girl.” He turned onto Main Street and found a parking spot in front of a ladies’ boutique. “Let’s start here.”

He walked around the car and opened her door, helping her out. Jenna stuck close to him as he led her toward the little store. She looked into the windows and grinned.

“I want to go in here. That dress looks perfect for work.”

Riley frowned but followed her into the store. Once inside, she browsed and gathered several items to try on. She walked to the back of the building and started to slip into the dressing room. Riley stopped her.

“Wait, I’m going to look in there first.” He dragged her with him as he checked out the dressing room.

She tried to stop him from going in, but he was persistent and not even the store clerk managed to stop him. Jenna could only pray there was no one else in there. Her prayers were answered, and the room was empty of customers. He nodded and stepped outside so she could try the clothes on. Maybe she wouldn’t do a lot of shopping after all, not if he was going to insist on checking out every dressing room in every store she entered.

She didn’t even want to try on the stupid clothes anymore after that but figured she’d already endured the humiliation, so she might as well see if any of them fit. After trying them all on, she settled on the dress from the window display and a pair of navy blue capris.

Riley took her bags from her and stowed them in the trunk of the car before leading her on to the next store. She skipped the next two

but dragged Riley into the third one. Shoes were a passion of hers. You could never have too many shoes, she thought with a smile. He grimaced but settled into a chair and crossed his ankle over his knee to wait on her. She spent well over an hour trying on shoe after shoe. He only grunted when she asked if he liked any of them. She took that as a “whatever” and picked out a pair of black pumps and a pair of strappy sandals that would look great with the new capris.

After several more stores, Riley called it quits. He led her back to the car.

“You’ve just about closed all the stores down. It’s time to go home.”

It wasn’t lost on Jenna that he had referred to her house as home. It was just a figure of speech, but it thrilled her. If only he really meant it.

“Do you think he was watching?” Jenna asked as they headed back to the house.

“I hope so. I felt like someone was watching us, but it could have been me picking up on the guys. They were out there watching, too.” Riley pulled into her drive and shut off the engine.

He opened the door and climbed out, looking around before opening her door for her. Once she was standing next to the car, he closed the door and stepped to the back to pull out her bags. She followed him into the house and locked the door behind them as he headed for her room with her new things. She grinned. He made a nice pack mule for carrying packages. Then she frowned. He wasn’t sticking around though. She had to get that through her thick skull.

The minute she stepped into the bedroom to put away her purchases, Riley grabbed her and pushed her against the wall by the door. He leaned in and took her mouth in a kiss. His lips pressed hard against hers until they opened and he could dip his tongue inside her mouth and devour it. She moaned, relishing the taste of him against her tongue.

"I've needed to touch you ever since you walked out of the dressing room in that damn dress." He nibbled at the corner of her mouth and down to her jawline.

"I couldn't tell you cared one way or the other."

"Oh, I cared all right. Feel how much I cared." He grabbed her hand and brought it down to the bulge in his pants.

"Oh," was all she could think to say at the hard proof of his arousal.

Jenna drew in a deep breath when he licked, sucked, and nipped his way down her neck to the curve that met her shoulder. One hand maneuvered its way beneath the hemline of her shirt and found her breast through the lacy material of her bra. His fingers teased at her nipple, pinching and rubbing until she squirmed in his arms.

Riley's other hand cupped the back of her neck, holding her head still for his continued assault on her mouth. His tongue danced with hers, mimicking what she hoped they would be doing soon. Her pussy cried for his hard cock to claim her. As if reading her thoughts, his hand left her nipple to snake its way down her jeans until he could unzip and then unsnap them. Fingers found their way into her panties, and soon she writhed against him for another reason.

* * * *

He pushed one finger through her slit until he could bury it between her thighs inside of her. God, she was hot and wet. Her juices soaked her panties and now dripped down his hand as he forced another finger into her hot channel. He couldn't stop a growl escaping his mouth as he ground his groin into her soft belly. He wanted inside of her. Now.

Riley withdrew his hand and pulled her around until her back now faced the bed. He backed her toward it, kissing her as if he couldn't get enough of her. He couldn't. He needed the taste of her in his mouth all the time now. She was an addiction he didn't want to kick.

Instead of pushing her back on the bed to undress her, he stepped back.

“Take off your clothes, baby. I want to watch you get naked for me.”

Jenna’s eyes grew wide then dropped with arousal. She kicked off her shoes and slowly unbuttoned her shirt from the bottom up. Inch by inch, her creamy belly was exposed to his eager eyes. By the time she had reached the top button, he wanted to rip the damn shirt off of her. He looked deep into her eyes when she slowly removed the shirt, letting it slide down her arms to the floor.

“You’re pushing it, Jenna,” he said with a low growl.

“I’m just doing what you told me to.” Her husky voice tightened his groin even more if that was possible.

Next, she slipped her hands around behind her, pushing her breasts outward as she unhooked her bra. He had to fist his hands to keep from reaching out to touch them. They were perfect to him. They weren’t too large, but not small either, just enough to overflow his hands.

The silky material loosened and began to slide down her shoulders. The cups kept it from falling all the way off. She reached up with one hand to remove it, but he stopped her. Instead, he leaned down and grasped the bra with his teeth and pulled it off her body without touching her anywhere else. He let the discarded material drop. His eyes didn’t follow it as it hit the floor. They were glued to the beauties standing before him.

Rounded globes with dusky pink nipples made his mouth water to taste them. They were firm but swayed when she was bent over or on all fours. He loved feeling the full weight of them in his hands when she was like that. Once again, he leaned down, but this time he swiped his tongue over one of the pretty tips. She moaned and swayed closer to him. He nipped at the other one then stepped back before he lost his tight rein on his libido and tore her jeans off so he could bury himself between her warm thighs.

“Take off your jeans.” His hands opened and closed to the rhythm of the blood flowing in his tortured cock.

She smiled coyly at him and finished unzipping before turning around to bend over and push her jeans down her thighs then to her knees and finally all the way down to her ankles. He nearly lost it. Her sweet ass swayed before him as she stepped out of her jeans but remained bent over. She was wearing a thong. If he had known that earlier, they might not have ever made it out of the house to go shopping.

Riley couldn’t take it anymore. He pulled her back against his body until his cock rested in the top of the crack of her ass. He reached down and grabbed her by the hair and hauled her up against him.

“I’m going to fuck you in that sweet ass of yours one of these days, but right now, I want that wet pussy instead.”

“Fuck me, Riley. Fast and hard,” she begged him.

He turned her around and picked her up in his arms. She tried to protest, but he wasn’t having any part of it. He wanted to throw her down on the bed and attack her breasts with his mouth, but instead, he gently laid her down and watched her with his eyes half closed. With trembling hands, he slowly undid the buttons on his jeans and pushed them down his legs, stepping out of them as soon as they hit the floor. He didn’t wear underwear, so he was hanging heavy with need. His balls were already tight in their sacs, eager for the action to come.

She whimpered and reached for him, licking her lips. He smiled tightly and climbed on the bed, positioning his cock at her mouth. She nuzzled it and reached up to hold him in her hands, but he stopped her.

“No. No hands. I’m going to fuck your hot mouth. Trust me, baby.” He waited to see if she would let him, fully expecting her to balk.

He was pushing too hard, he knew, but he couldn’t help it. She needed to see how he was so that when he left, she wouldn’t care. He

tensed for a second. Not care, that really wasn't what he wanted, but it was for the best. He couldn't stick around. He'd hurt her eventually, and to see her tears because of him would surely kill him.

Jenna dropped her hands by her sides and opened her mouth for him. *Yes!* He couldn't believe she was going to trust him. After everything she'd been through, and she was going to let him fuck her mouth, trusting he wouldn't hurt her.

"There you go, baby. Open wide."

He slowly fed his cock to her until he felt the back of her throat. Then he pulled nearly all the way out and did it again, a little faster this time. He stopped each time he met resistance and pulled out. He slowly picked up speed but never gave her more than she could handle. Once, when he held it deep for a few seconds, she swallowed, and he nearly shot his load right then.

Over and over again, he pumped his cock deep into her mouth. She hummed, and he nearly lost it. Then her hands came up, and he nearly stopped what he was doing when they took hold of her breasts and began massaging them.

"God, that looks so hot. Pinch your nipples for me," he said.

She complied and was soon pulling and pinching them as she groaned around his cock in her mouth. As she twisted them, he pumped into her mouth over and over. He was so close. He wanted to be inside her though when he came. He suddenly pulled back, gasping for breath. She whimpered and reached for him.

"I want inside you. I can smell how hot you are from here."

He reached down to his jeans and extracted a condom. He sheathed his cock and positioned it at her opening. Hips rose to meet him, and he plunged in to the hilt. His balls slapped against her ass, and he groaned at the pure pleasure of being inside her. He waited until he was sure she had adjusted to his girth and began to slowly screw her until she bucked against him, urging him to go faster.

"I want to take it slow, baby. I love being inside you like this." Riley bent down and kissed her. Slow, deep, and wet.

Jenna's eyes rolled back in her head when his cock found that sweet spot inside of her. He made sure to hit it over and over again until she bucked beneath him and screamed his name. Her climax triggered his, and he swore he saw stars as he came.

Chapter Ten

Riley left Jenna in the bed sleeping. He used the guest shower so as not to wake her and dressed again. It was nearly seven, and he knew the guys would call soon to talk about the day. He sighed as he watched her sleep. Her innocence and trust in him was humbling considering what all she'd lived through. How could she trust him like she did?

He shook his head and backed out of the bedroom, shutting the door behind him after he double-checked the windows. Less than ten steps toward the kitchen and his cell phone rang.

"Hey, Logan, what did you see?" Riley asked as he stepped into the kitchen.

"I'm not sure, but I think you were followed back from town. I caught sight of a dark blue Ford truck that followed you all the way to the turnoff to her street, but it went straight when you turned. My gut says that was our guy. I followed him down one more street, and then I turned and don't know where he went after that."

"Once you were in place again, did you see anything?" Riley asked him.

"Nope, not a thing, but you've got some dense shrubbery around the house. Does Jenna know you left the blinds open in the bedroom?"

"No, and she isn't going to, pervert." Riley growled.

Logan laughed into the phone. "I paid more attention to what was going on around you than to you."

"When Tyler and Morgan show up, have them call me." Riley snapped his phone back into its holder and set about making coffee.

Once he had that going, he dug around in the freezer and found something to make for dinner. She would be waking up soon, and he didn't want her worrying over cooking. He was a pretty good cook since he spent so much time in the army.

Thirty minutes later, he had the chicken breasts and rice casserole in the oven and a pot of green beans on the stove simmering. His phone rang again. On checking caller ID, he found it to be Morgan.

"Did Logan fill you in?" he asked.

"Yep. We'll be on the lookout for a dark blue Ford truck. Do think he will make a move tonight?"

"Good possibility," Riley said.

"Tyler is going to be on the north side. I'm going to stick to the back. I'll ease over to the south side now and then check things out."

"Later," Riley said and hung up.

"Who were you talking to?"

Riley swung around to find Jenna leaning against the kitchen doorway, wearing a long T-shirt and what looked like nothing else. He was sure she had on underwear though. She wasn't that daring.

"Morgan. He and Tyler are watching the house tonight." He walked over to where she stood. "I've got dinner cooking in the oven. Do you want something to drink?"

"Yeah, I'll take a wine cooler." Jenna smiled and held her hand out when he fished one out of the fridge.

There wasn't anything more beautiful than watching Jenna walk across the kitchen to the living room in nothing but a T-shirt and maybe that thong she'd had on earlier. His cock grew hard. Riley closed his eyes for a moment to regain some control. He wanted her again. He knew deep inside that he would want her over and over for the rest of his life if he stayed anywhere near her. For her sake, he was going to have to leave once this was all over. He was no good for her.

The phone rang, and Jenna grabbed it before he could. By the sound of it, though, it was probably Tina. He heard her laugh and

relaxed. She needed something to distract her from everything. He would let them girl talk while he checked the house again.

* * * *

“So, how are you and Riley doing?” Tina asked over the phone.

“We’re doing fine. Did Logan tell you we went shopping?” Jenna asked.

“Yeah. I can’t believe you got him to take you.”

“Oh, it was his idea. They are trying to draw Gregg out into the open.”

Tina’s intake of breath could be heard over the phone.

“I know, but I feel the same way. I want this over with.”

“I don’t like it. Something could happen to you if they push him. You and I know what he is capable of,” Tina said.

“I trust Riley to keep me safe.”

“You’ve got it bad for him, don’t you?” Tina asked.

“I can’t help it. I know he’s going to leave when this is all over. He hasn’t made any promises, but still I want him.”

Tina’s sigh could be heard over the phone. “I can’t believe he will leave you. I know he cares about you as much as you do about him.”

“I do care for him.”

“Do you love him?” Tina asked softly.

“I...I don’t know.”

“I think you do. I think you have from almost the beginning. Otherwise, you would never have trusted him enough to let him sleep with you.”

“Jenna? Are you still there?”

“Yeah. Just thinking.”

“Don’t think too much about it. Let whatever happens happen. I can tell you from experience, love is worth every bit of the heartache,” Tina said.

“You should see the dress and shoes I bought today.” Jenna changed the subject.

They continued talking for another fifteen minutes until Logan started harassing Tina, and the other woman hung up. Jenna smiled. They truly loved each other. They would be happy together. She was sure of it. Logan had been the best thing to ever happen to her friend. She refused to believe that she was making a mistake by letting Riley so close to her heart.

The phone rang again. She figured it was Tina and grabbed it.

“That sure was a quickie,” she said.

“Bitch! You belong to me. I’m going to teach you once and for all whose whore you are.”

“I don’t belong to you! I’ll never belong to you. I’d rather be dead than have you touch me again,” she yelled into the phone.

Suddenly, the phone was jerked out of her hand.

Riley growled into the phone. “Gregg, you’re going to pay for touching her. Do you understand me?”

Jenna couldn’t hear what Gregg said, but she could tell by the fury on Riley’s face it wasn’t good. When he slammed the phone down, she jumped.

“What did he say?” It came out almost as a whisper.

“Nothing,” he said and turned away.

She grabbed his arm and stopped him. “What did he say?”

“Nothing that need concern you, Jenna. The chicken should be ready now.” He sighed and looked at her.

“Why won’t you tell me what he said? Is it that bad?”

“It’s just more of his bullshit, and there’s no need for you to have to hear any more of it.”

Jenna closed her eyes and shook her head. She let go of his arm and followed him into the kitchen. Suddenly, she wasn’t as hungry anymore.

He opened the stove and pulled out the casserole. He took off the top and set it aside then turned the beans back on to warm up. He shoved a pan of rolls into the oven and closed the door with a snap.

“Fuck!” He huffed out a breath and then turned around to face Jenna.

“He said he would make sure you knew what he intended to do to you. He wanted you scared, baby. I don’t want you scared. I’ll take care of you.”

“I know you will, Riley.” She stepped closer and put her hands on his chest. “I trust you.”

Riley wrapped his arms around her and kissed her gently before stepping back and brushing a stray hair from her face. She wished she could read his thoughts. He looked worried for a second then he looked like he always did, hard and in control. Even Riley was human. She knew there was still a chance that Gregg would get to her despite Riley’s promises. She trusted him to do the best he could to take care of her, but she was a realist, and Gregg was crazy.

* * * *

Riley waited until after dinner, while Jenna was in the shower, to call Logan and fill him in on the phone conversation with Gregg. He didn’t want her overhearing him.

“He said he was going to use one of her friends to show her what he planned to do to her. Watch out close for Tina. I don’t know what he will try to do or to whom. I’m going to send Tyler back over there to watch. Morgan can handle here.”

“I’ll be on the look out here.”

Riley hung up and then called Tyler and had the other man go back to Logan’s house to watch them. Tyler didn’t ask questions. He just said okay and hung up. Morgan, on the other hand, asked plenty of them.

“You think he is serious about hurting someone she knows?”

"I don't know what to think. I don't know him well enough to make guesses. I do know he nearly killed Jenna. That's all that matters to me."

"What did she say about it?" Morgan asked.

"I didn't tell her the entire thing. I only told her enough to satisfy her. She's already on edge now as it is after talking to him," Riley said.

"I wouldn't let her answer the phone anymore in case he has someone call her while he hurts them."

Riley hadn't thought of that and nearly groaned out loud. He would have to make sure she didn't answer the phone for sure now. If she knew he had someone she knew in his grasp, she would lose it.

"I'll talk to you in the morning. Watch your back." Riley hung up.

He walked back into the bedroom and heard the shower shut off as he slipped off his shoes. He removed his shirt and opened the bathroom door to find Jenna surrounded by steam as she bent over, rubbing her hair dry with a towel. He grabbed another towel and wrapped it around her body. Their eyes met in the mirror. He pulled her up against him and began to dry her front with the towel. She wound the towel around her hair and reached back with one hand to wrap around his neck.

"You look good enough to eat," Riley said against her ear.

"I wouldn't say no to that," she teased.

"Let's get you dry and into bed." Riley ran the towel up and down her sides.

With her hand around the back of his neck, her breasts were pushed out proud and standing out. He dropped the towel and focused his attention on them. He cupped them in his hands and ran his thumbs over the tips. She drew in a deep breath. He groaned. He wanted her again. He didn't think he would ever not want her.

"I have to dry my hair, or it will be a massive knot later," she finally said.

He kissed along her neck then stepped back and popped her on the ass.

“I’ll handle the hairdryer while you brush.” He picked up the hairdryer from the counter and stared at her in the mirror.

Their eyes met, and for an instant, he couldn’t breathe. She literally took his breath away. She smiled, and the moment was gone. He turned on the dryer and aimed it at her hair. She laughed and turned his wrist at an angle so it didn’t blow directly on her scalp. For the next fifteen minutes, he manned the dryer while she brushed out her hair until it lay soft and dry against her shoulders.

He could already see the droop to her eyelids. She was about to fall asleep on her feet. He smiled and steered her toward the bed. He pulled back the covers and had her climb in then he covered her up.

“I’m going to check the house good again, and I’ll be right back. Don’t move.”

She smiled and curled up in the bed. After checking the windows in the bedroom first, Riley made the rounds in the house, checking all the windows and doors to be sure they were secure. Then he stood in the middle of the living room just thinking. What was it about Jenna that called to him? Why was he so attracted to her? Enough so that he really thought about sticking around for awhile.

He didn’t want to answer that question. Something tight inside his chest already knew the answer. It was something he refused to acknowledge. Besides, he didn’t have time to think about it now. Jenna’s ex-husband was still out there and planning to hurt someone close to her. He would have to deal with her when it became known who he had targeted.

After shutting off the lights, Riley returned to the bedroom to find her sound asleep. He smiled and removed his clothes. Then he slipped beneath the covers and pulled her back into his arms. She fit perfectly against his body. It felt right to have her there.

He steered his thoughts away from her and how well she fit him and back to her ex. He needed to be ready for anything. Logan would

take care of Tina, so he could focus everything on keeping Jenna safe. The sickening feeling that things weren't going to improve gnawed at his gut. Something bad was going to happen and soon. He only hoped it wouldn't upset Jenna any more than she already was.

Riley closed his eyes and willed himself to sleep. He needed to be rested for whatever happened tomorrow.

* * * *

The doorbell ringing woke Riley and then Jenna. He squinted at the bedside alarm clock and found it was only six in the morning. He growled at being wakened so early then stiffened at what that could mean. Something was wrong.

"Jenna, honey, stay here in bed until I get back. I don't want you near the door." Riley stood up pulling his jeans on as he did.

"It's my house. I should answer the door," she began.

"No, Jenna. Not as long as your ex is out there causing trouble. I'll handle it."

He didn't bother with a shirt. Instead, he closed the bedroom door behind him and tucked his gun in the small of his back. He peered through the living room curtains to see who was at the door and cursed. Two policemen stood outside. He ditched the gun in a drawer in the end table and unlocked the door.

"Officers? What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Sir, is Ms. Randle here? We need to talk to her," the shorter of the two men said.

His name tag read Smith. His partner's name tag read Hudson.

Riley knew he couldn't refuse to let her talk with them. He just hoped like hell it wouldn't end up hurting her.

"She's still in bed. Do you want to wait for her to dress or come back later?" He hoped they would return later.

"We'll wait," Hudson said.

“Well, make yourself at home. I’ll go wake her and get her up.” He hesitated then sighed. “Is this going to upset her?”

The two cops looked at each other and shrugged. The taller man seemed to think about it before answering.

“Yeah, it probably will.”

“Well, hell.” He turned and walked back toward the bedroom.

He opened the door and found her already getting dressed.

“It’s the police. They want to talk to you.” Riley watched as she pulled the T-shirt over her head and smoothed it down.

“Okay, do you know what about?” she asked.

“No. They didn’t say.”

“Okay, I’m ready.” She held out her hand.

Riley took her hand and led her out to the living room. The two cops were still standing in front of the living room door. They pulled off their hats when she walked into the room.

“Ms. Randle?” Hudson asked.

“Yes? What can I do for you?” she asked.

Riley felt her hand tremble in his. She was nervous.

“Perhaps we should sit down,” Riley interrupted.

“Good idea,” Smith agreed.

Riley led Jenna to the couch and sat next to her. She let him keep her hand in his. The two officers took the chairs across from the couch and leaned forward.

“Ma’am, I understand you know a man by the name of Todd Crenshaw,” Smith said.

“Yes, I do. Why?” she asked.

Jenna looked up at Riley with a question in her eyes. He shrugged. He didn’t know, either.

“Ma’am—”

“Call me Jenna.”

“Jenna, where were you between nine and midnight last night?” Hudson asked.

“Excuse me?” Jenna frowned.

“She was here with me. We were in bed around that time and haven’t been up until you rang the doorbell.” Riley didn’t like where this was leading.

“Todd Crenshaw was found dead this morning. Someone called the police about an apparent break-in, and Mr. Crenshaw was found dead at the scene by the police.”

“Todd is dead?” Jenna’s voice broke. “Oh, God.”

Riley pulled Jenna into his shoulder. It would be a shock to her no matter how the man had treated her. As far as Riley was concerned, it was no loss.

“I understand you had a restraining order on him,” Smith began.

“Yeah. He hit me.”

“I also understand your ex-husband is out on parole and attacked you a few days ago,” he continued.

“I don’t understand. What has that got to do with Todd?” She looked from one to the other.

“There was a note left at the scene of Todd’s murder.” Hudson pulled out a notepad and began to read.

“Tell that bitch that no one touches what’s mine. I’ll kill anyone who dares to fuck with what I own. Then I’ll take care of you.”

By the time he’d finished reading from his pad, Jenna’s hands weren’t the only thing trembling. Her entire body shook in his arms.

“Easy, baby.” He glared at the two officers. “Don’t you think that was a little harsh?”

“Murder is harsh.” Hudson obviously wasn’t worried about upsetting her and continued. “Can you tell me where you were between the hours of one a.m. and four a.m. this morning?”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” Riley growled. “She was with me the entire night.”

“As in the same room with you?” Hudson probed.

“Yes, in the same room, in the same bed. The damn note is directed at her.”

“True, but that could be to throw us off the trail,” Smith said.

“Why would the killer target you?” Hudson demanded.

“Because he’s my ex-husband, and he’s crazy,” Jenna managed to get out between chattering teeth.

“Sounds like he has it bad for you,” Smith said. “You need to be very careful.”

“I think it’s her lover here who needs to be careful,” Hudson sneered. “Her ex seems to be targeting men she’s been with. Are there very many?”

“That’s it. You’re out of here.” Riley stood up and pointed toward the door. “Get out.”

Smith nodded and stood up. “If you hear anything from him or think he is around, call us.”

“Don’t count on it,” Riley said.

He walked over to the door and opened it for them to leave.

Hudson stopped in the doorway and looked back at Jenna. “You sure your lover was in bed all night? Maybe he went and did your ex-boyfriend while you were asleep.”

Jenna stood up and crossed to Riley, putting her arms around his waist. “I know he was with me all night.”

Riley was pleased that she didn’t drop her eyes under Hudson’s stare. Instead, she glared at him standing in the doorway.

The other man finally turned and followed his partner outside toward their police car.

“You okay, baby?” Riley asked. He pulled her around to face him and brushed a tear from her cheek.

“I’m scared for you. What if he comes after you now?”

“Don’t worry about me. I can handle myself. I’m more worried about you. He’s fixated on you. That’s not good.”

A knock at the door startled Jenna, and she jumped in his arms. He squeezed her for reassurance and checked the window to see who it was although he was sure he already knew. Sure enough, it was Logan.

“It’s just Logan.” He opened the door and let him in.

“What were the police doing here?” Logan asked as he crossed the room to the kitchen. “What? No coffee?”

“I’ll fix it while Riley fills you in.” Jenna began filling the coffee pot with water, her hands still shaky.

“What’s up?” Logan asked.

Riley filled him in on Todd’s death and the note.

“That’s not good. He probably knows we’re watching the house.” Logan sat down at the kitchen table and steepled his fingers. “We need a plan.”

Riley nodded, drawing a deep breath in through his nose. “We’ve got to keep Jenna safe, but we also need to lure him out into the open to catch him.”

“We can use his need to get rid of her ex-lovers and put you out there as bait.”

“That’s along the same line I’ve been thinking about, too.”

Jenna’s eyes grew wide with shock. She crossed her arms and glared at the two men from where she was leaning back on the counter.

“Absolutely not! You will not put yourself out there as a target.”

Riley stood up and squeezed her against him. He looked down into her pleading eyes. “I’m going to take this bastard down one way or another. He’s not getting close to you again.”

She pushed away from him with her hands against his chest.

“That doesn’t mean you have to be the bait to catch him. He’ll try here again soon. Just wait for now.” Tears welled up in her eyes.

Logan agreed with Riley. “It’s the best plan, Jenna. We’ve got to catch him, or he’ll just sit out there until we aren’t as vigilant looking for him. That’s when he’ll strike, and someone is going to get hurt, or worse.”

Logan stood up and got a coffee cup down before pouring coffee into it. He took a sip and looked back at Riley.

“I think we should start tonight. You can go for a ride, and we’ll set up some sites along the way where you can stop and stretch.”

“Tyler can watch Jenna while Morgan and I go with you,” Logan said.

Jena walked across the room toward the door. “If you’re that desperate to end this so you can get back on the road, then just leave now,” Jenna said. “I don’t want you here if you don’t want to be here.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying, baby. You’re upset. I understand.” Riley started to cross to her.

“Oh, I know exactly what I’m saying.” She held up her hand to stop him from getting any closer. “Leave now. I don’t want you anywhere around me. Get your stuff and get out.”

Jenna stomped out of the kitchen to the bathroom. Riley heard the bathroom door slam. Riley looked at Logan. The other man shook his head and took another sip of his coffee. Riley ran his hand over his head. Then he turned and headed to the bedroom.

It didn’t take him long to pack his backpack. He didn’t have much. You didn’t when you lived on the road. He’d gotten too cozy here. He huffed out a breath and walked over to the bathroom door to try and reason with her. He lifted his hand to knock then let it fall back to his side. It would be better this way. He would eventually be leaving anyway, and if she was the one mad and kicking him out, maybe she wouldn’t hurt so badly later. He told himself that, but it didn’t really help much. He wanted a few more days in her bed—a few more days near her. Instead, he hefted his pack and walked out to see Logan shaking his head.

“Man, you’re stupid. Can’t you see she’s pushing you away to keep your ass safe?”

“Yeah, but it’s for the best. I’m leaving anyway once I know she’s safe. It would only be putting off the inevitable.” Riley shifted his pack to his shoulder.

“If you say so.” Logan shook his head again.

Riley tied his pack on the back of his bike then climbed on and took off. He rode around for a few hours, pondering why nothing felt

right. Riding usually helped clear his head, but it wasn't working this time. He cared for Jenna more than he'd ever cared for another person. What was it about her that got to him? He couldn't put his finger on it. He supposed it was just her being her that had him so twisted up inside.

Finally, he turned around and headed for Logan's place. Tina met him at the door and let him in.

"Logan is still at Jenna's watching until Tyler relieves him," she said. "Do you want something for lunch? I just finished making sandwiches for the guys. I'll make a few more for you."

"Thanks, Tina. I don't want to be any trouble." He dropped his pack by the back door.

Tina eyed it but didn't say anything. No doubt she was already making plans to call Jenna to see what was going on. It would be good for Jenna to have Tina to talk to.

Tyler and Morgan sat in the living room, watching TV and eating their lunch. They greeted him as he walked in and collapsed on the opposite end of the couch from Morgan.

"What's up, man?" Tyler asked.

"We've got a plan." Riley proceeded to fill them in on the visit by the police and their plan to lure Gregg out into the open so they could catch him.

The other two men nodded their head in agreement. They would have to wait for Tyler to relieve Logan to map out a route for the night. None of them knew anything about the city to do it. With Tyler watching Jenna, Morgan and Logan would be free to help with setting Gregg up to fall. Riley worried that her ex might use his absence to attack Jenna. He was torn between staying to watch out for Jenna and pulling off the bait-and-trap plan. Ultimately, he decided the best thing for her in the long run was to get Gregg out of her life once and for all. Riley figured he's just the man to do it, too, because it wouldn't bother his conscience one bit.

Chapter Eleven

Jenna heard Riley in the bedroom gathering up his stuff. It hurt so much to know he was leaving. It's what she wanted. He would be out of danger if he left now. Besides, if he left then he never really cared about her in the first place. It hurt. It hurt a lot.

She jerked at the slam of the front door. It meant that both Logan and Riley were gone. She slipped out of the bathroom and eased through the house to be sure. Nope, no one but her was left in the house. She swallowed down the tears that threatened to escape and poured a cup of coffee. Seeing the empty cups in the sink drew a strangled sob from her, but she refused to break down and cry, maybe later but not now. Now, she needed to be strong. Her ex was out there somewhere. Jenna knew he would be back to finish what he had started.

Determination had her lifting her chin. She wasn't going to go down without a fight, and she wasn't going to let Riley's absence pull her down. The house needed cleaning, and there were clothes to wash. Jenna got busy. As long as she was busy, she wouldn't think too much. At least, that was the plan.

Several hours later, the phone rang. Jenna picked it up on the third ring after checking the caller ID. It was Tina. She could really use her friend right now.

"Hey. Are you okay over there?" Tina's voice sounded concerned.

"I'm okay. I told Riley to leave."

There was silence on the other end. Jenna could hear Tina's mind whirl from across the phone lines.

“Let’s go out for awhile. I haven’t had lunch yet. I fed the guys, but I was going to see if you wanted to go to The Bistro with me. I need some distance from all this testosterone for awhile.”

“Thanks, Tina. That sounds good to me,” Jenna admitted.

They made plans to meet at The Bistro in thirty minutes. Jenna hung up and hurried to change clothes into something suitable for going out in public. Tina was waiting for her when she arrived only a few minutes late.

“Sorry, I had to take a quick shower and change clothes. I had been cleaning house,” she explained.

“No problem. I just got here myself. I’m having a half of a roast beef sandwich. What about you?” Tina asked.

“I’m thinking about the ham and cheese. I’m not real hungry, but I need to eat. I didn’t have breakfast this morning.”

“I heard you had visitors early this morning. Poor Todd. He wasn’t that bad of a guy except for his temper. I mean, he didn’t deserve to die,” Tina said.

“No, he didn’t.”

“Okay, now tell me about Riley. What’s going on between you two?”

Jenna was so glad she had Tina to talk to. She’d known he might leave eventually, but still, she’d fallen in love. Now what was she going to do about it? Nothing. There was nothing she could do.

“I can’t let him get hurt because of me. He has this stupid idea that he can lure Gregg out by acting as bait. I don’t want him doing that. He’ll get hurt or worse, Gregg might kill him. He’s crazy.” Jenna swallowed hard to hold back the tears.

Her friend looked thoughtful for a few seconds then sighed. Jenna wondered what she was thinking. Did she know that Jenna had fallen in love with Riley? Would she tell Logan? Logan would talk to Riley, she was sure. She didn’t want anyone to know.

“Let’s go shopping and forget everything for a little while,” Tina finally said.

Jenna could have hugged her friend for not pushing it. They paid their bill and left to browse the shops around The Bistro. She didn't buy anything, but Tina did, so it wasn't a wasted trip for her friend. They parted company at The Bistro as it began to get late.

"Be careful going home," Tina said. "Lock all the doors and double check the windows, too."

"I will." She hugged Tina and climbed into her SUV.

The sun had just about disappeared from the sky when she drove up into her driveway. Dusk was a living thing as she darted into the house. She frantically locked all the locks then checked each window and the front door to be sure everything was secure. Riley would have done all that for her had he been there. She gritted her teeth and reminded herself that someone was out there watching her. Probably Tyler tonight, she figured. It wouldn't be Riley. He was gone.

The knowledge finally drew tears from her. Jenna collapsed on the bed and cried until there was nothing left inside of her. It hurt so much to know he would never be back. She finally dragged her beaten body to the bathroom and got ready for bed. When she crawled into the empty bed, she curled up on his side to be near his scent. It enveloped her and gave her some measure of peace. She fell asleep thinking about Riley and how much she wished things could have been different. Still, without Gregg coming after her, she would never have had the time with him they'd shared.

* * * *

Riley woke up from the nap he'd forced himself to take so he would be at the top of his game. The first thought in his head was of Jenna and how much he hated hearing the defeat in her voice. She hadn't said the words, but he was sure she loved him. He also knew that a part of him loved her, but was it enough to stick around? What was there to say that several months down the road he wouldn't want to leave again? It was no way to treat her. If she had to worry all the

time that he would up and leave one day, she wouldn't be happy. No, it was for the best that things ended like this.

The guys were waiting on him in the living room when he jogged downstairs, fresh from the shower. They went over the plans again, making sure everyone knew their part. Riley realized he was too preoccupied with thoughts of Jenna when Morgan called him on not paying attention.

"Get your head in the game, Riley, or you're going to end up dead," Morgan grouched.

"I'm fine. We need to get on the road."

The other two men looked at him and shook their heads. All three of them stood up to leave. Tina grabbed Riley's arm.

"I hope you realize you're breaking Jenna's heart. She loves you."

"I'm not the sticking around sort, Tina. It's better that it ends like this rather than later when she is depending on me. I'm not dependable." Riley leaned down and kissed Tina on the top of her head.

"I think you're wrong, Riley. I think you're very dependable," Tina admonished.

He shook his head and walked out the door. He checked his watch, nearly ten. He needed to be out there and available to Jenna's ex so they could stop him. He nodded at the others and climbed on his bike to head for the first stop on their route.

They made the circle twice without any sign of Gregg. Frustration began to grate on Riley's nerves. Gregg had had plenty of opportunities to attack him without anyone being the wiser. It didn't make sense. Riley rubbed his hand over his face put his helmet back on. Then it hit him. The bastard was going after Jenna tonight. He had probably used Todd to throw them off the trail. *Fuck!*

He turned his bike around and sped toward Jenna's place. He knew the others would follow without having to call them. He didn't want to waste the time. *God, let me be on time.*

Why hadn't Tyler called them if the ex had shown up? He had to be down. Gregg probably took him out. Damn, he didn't want to think about what he could be doing to Jenna right then.

Twenty minutes later, Riley skidded into Jenna's drive and was off the bike and at the kitchen door in an instant. He tried the door, but it was locked of course. He huffed out a breath then ran around the back of the house. The bedroom windows were on the back. The others had pulled into the drive by the sound of it. The bastard was going to know they were on their way. That thought spurred him into action.

He found her bedroom window open, but he couldn't see anything inside. Darkness hung like a shroud around the room. With the window open and no sounds coming through it, Riley crawled through, landing on the floor only to roll silently to his feet. The room was a total mess of broken glass and disheveled furniture. She had put up a fight. She wasn't anywhere in the bedroom. He struggled to keep his breathing steady and listened. He could hear voices in the living area.

Riley crawled out into the hall and hit behind the wall as he listened to what was going on in the living room.

"Bitch, you belong to me, and you've been screwing anything that moves. Don't worry. I'll take care of lover boy next. You're going to learn you belong to me before I kill you. I'll make sure you know who is boss this time."

"You're not going to hurt Riley. He's gone. We had a fight, and he left. He won't be back." Jenna's voice carried to him without a problem. She had remained strong despite being in the presence of Gregg.

"Oh, he's had a taste of you. He'll be back." Gregg laughed maniacally.

"You don't understand. He doesn't love me, much less care about me. I was just an easy lay. He isn't a sticking around kind of guy. He lives on the road."

“It doesn’t matter. I have you now. That’s all that should matter to you anyway. You need to think about what I’m going to do to you.”

Riley couldn’t stand it. He peeked around the corner, and his heart sank. Gregg had her by the hair on the floor in front of the couch. Her mouth and nose were bleeding. She wasn’t whimpering, but she was crying. The bruises on her face had to hurt. It fueled his anger. Grim determination had him looking for a way to get Gregg away from her.

A noise behind him had him rolling to defend himself if he had to. Morgan lay on the floor on his belly with his hands up. They looked at each other and nodded. They would get Jenna out of this.

“Get on your feet, whore, and take that shirt off. I want to see some titty.”

“Fuck you!”

Riley saw her throw her hands up to ward off the blow. Gregg jerked her hair, pulling her closer to him. He reached for her breast and grabbed in a bruising grip. Jenna’s whimper had Riley seeing red. He and Morgan took advantage of Gregg’s preoccupation with Jenna’s breast and launched their attack.

Riley had his hands around Gregg’s throat, pulling him off of Jenna. Morgan helped Jenna to her feet and told her to call the police while he concentrated on choking the life out of the bastard who’d dared to lay a hand on Jenna. He’d attacked her not once but twice in the last few weeks. Riley was beyond restraint now.

Gregg jerked something from his pants, and Riley registered the knife in barely enough time to jump back. It still caught him on the chest, but he didn’t feel it. Instead, he went hand to hand with Gregg, trying to keep the knife away from him. From the corner of his eye, he tracked Morgan’s progress in an attempt to sneak around behind the other man. Gregg must have noticed what the other man was up to. He managed to pull away from Riley and ran back through the bedroom and out the window.

Morgan lunged after him as he went through the window but missed him. Riley followed through the window and into the

neighbor's yard. He gained on him and managed to snag the back of his shirt, bringing him down in the process. They rolled around with Riley trying to take the knife away from the other man. He heard Morgan nearby but didn't risk a glance to see where he was. The distant wail of sirens registered dimly in the back of his mind, but Riley knew he had to get rid of the bastard there, or he would just get out and hurt Jenna when he wasn't around to protect her.

Gregg managed to get in a good jab with his fist in Riley's solar plexus, causing him to lose his edge. The other man rolled to his feet and started forward again. Riley tackled him from behind. When the other man didn't attempt to get back up, Riley rolled him over to see that he'd fallen on the knife. He gurgled, trying to talk. Riley got to his knees and stared at the man. He could twist the knife just a little more and take out his heart, but he hesitated. He had it in him, but was it the best thing?

What if he wanted a life with Jenna? If he killed the man, he would get away with it, he had no doubt. Morgan would never say a word and would agree that it was necessary to keep Jenna safe. But he would know and Jenna would know he'd killed a man in cold blood. He shook his head. He couldn't do it. Riley stood up and backed away. When the police got there, he put his hands up and backed further away. Morgan followed suit on the other side of him.

* * * *

Jenna's hands shook as she told the story over and over again to different people. Still, they pounded her with questions. Two of the policemen were from the other day. They kept trying to get her to admit that Riley said he was going to kill Gregg. Did that mean Gregg was dead? She didn't know since no one would tell her anything. She didn't even know if Riley and Morgan were okay or not. She couldn't even get them to tell her about Tyler. He'd been the one guarding her that night. He hadn't come to help her, so that meant he was either

unconscious or dead. God, she hoped he wasn't dead. She couldn't stand it if someone died because of her.

Finally, she managed to get away from the bevy of policemen as well as the paramedic treating her cuts and bruises.

"I'm fine. Nothing is broken, and I'm not bleeding anymore."

He shook his head and started putting away his tools.

Jenna pulled the robe tighter around her. Then she walked outside to find someone who could tell her more. After a couple of minutes searching the sea of unfamiliar faces, she latched on to Logan's. He was talking to someone wearing slacks and a tie. She rushed to him, and he pulled her into his arms and hugged her.

"Jenna, this is Detective Brunson. He's handling the case."

Jenna nodded. "What about Tyler? Is he okay? No one will tell me anything."

"He's fine. He has a hell of a knot on his head, but he will be just fine." Logan squeezed her arm.

Jenna sighed, relieved to know he wasn't dead.

"Why don't you tell Detective Brunson what happened. I need to go check on Riley."

Logan started to pull away from her, but she latched on to him.

"Riley? Is he okay?" she demanded.

"He's fine. He's got a few cuts and bruises, but he's fine."

"I told him to leave, that I didn't want him around me anymore, but he stayed," Jenna whispered.

"He wasn't leaving you unprotected. He cares too much about you to trust your safety to any of us."

"Not enough though."

Logan sighed but didn't say anything. Jenna knew she was right, but when Logan didn't protest, it told her a lot. It told her she needed to get rid of that little seed of hope that Riley really did care about her as more than a friend. She nodded and turned around to return to the house. She would sit in the kitchen until they finished with her house. She felt numb all over, empty inside. There wasn't any pain. She

figured it would come later, but right now she couldn't feel a damn thing.

"Ma'am?" The detective stopped her before she had made more than a couple of steps.

Jenna turned around and faced the man. It didn't register at first that he was speaking to her until she heard the word "dead." That caught her interest.

"What?"

"I need to talk to you about what happened. Your ex-husband is in bad shape. He might die," the detective said.

"I hope he does. He killed Todd and made my life a living hell." She hugged herself. "Can we go sit down?"

"Sure. The kitchen is clear." He held out his hand to indicate she should lead the way.

Jenna immediately went to the coffee pot and began making coffee. She needed a cup to clear her head. Everything felt so surreal. Nothing felt real anymore. It was if her entire life had been put in a blender and turned on high.

"I understand your ex-husband used to beat you. He nearly killed you a few weeks back." The detective took out a little notepad and began to write.

"Yes, he's crazy. He just got out of prison a few weeks ago. No one even bothered to tell me."

"How well do you know Riley?"

Jenna bristled over the mention of Riley. "Long enough to know he is a good man."

The detective sighed. "Ma'am, he may have killed Gregg. I'm not saying the man didn't deserve what he got, but you can't take matters into your own hands." He leaned back in the chair he'd taken at the kitchen table.

Jenna crossed her arms and leaned against the cabinet as she waited for the coffee to brew. How dare he insinuate that Riley had purposely killed her ex-husband? What if he had? The thought peeked

inside her brain. So, what if he had? Like the detective said, the bastard had deserved it. It wouldn't matter to her if he had.

"I don't think he would do that. He was in the army for a long time. He abides by rules, and the rule is you don't kill someone unless it's in self-defense." Jenna turned and pulled down a cup. Her hands weren't as shaky as earlier.

"So he never said he planned to kill him when he got the chance?" the detective asked.

"No, he never said that."

"So you don't think he might have done it?"

"No. I don't believe he would." But Jenna knew he could and probably had.

The detective sighed and closed his book. Then he put it away inside his shirt pocket and stood up.

"If you think of anything later, be sure and let me know." He handed her a card with his name and phone numbers on it.

"I will."

* * * *

"I tackled him, and he fell on the knife. I've told you this at least a hundred times already." Riley was getting pissed all over again.

He wanted to know how Jenna was. No one would tell him anything. He and Morgan had been separated almost from the beginning. He knew it was to get separate statements and compare them. It didn't matter to him. He was telling the truth. The fact that he hadn't twisted the knife still amazed him. He had the chance to kill the man responsible for nearly beating the life from Jenna, and he hadn't taken it. Why? Because he hoped somehow he could have a life with Jenna. He had to admit it to himself. There was no running from it anymore. He loved her.

"Look, if you're finished with me, I want to check on Jenna and Tyler."

“Don’t plan on leaving. We aren’t finished with you yet. We know you killed him,” Hudson, the officer from that morning, said.

“Last I heard, he was still alive and on his way to the hospital. If I had wanted him dead, he would be dead. Not just hurt but dead all over.” Riley walked away, heading for the house.

He found her sitting in the kitchen, bundled up in a robe with a cup of coffee sitting in front of her, untouched by the look of it. She held herself as if she’d fly apart in a thousand pieces if she didn’t hold on. She looked so small and vulnerable sitting there. He didn’t make a sound as he walked around the table and knelt in front of her. When she looked up at him, a frown marred her features.

“What are you doing here?”

“Checking on you. I was worried about you.” Riley reached up to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear.

“I’m fine.” She searched his face. “What about Gregg?”

“I didn’t kill him, but he might not make it.”

“If you didn’t kill him, what happened?”

“He fell on the knife he was trying to use on me. I could have finished the job, but I didn’t. I didn’t want that between us.”

“Is it wrong that I hope he dies?” she asked with tears in her eyes.

“No, I don’t think it is. He made your life a living hell. He deserves whatever happens to him.”

Jenna sighed and squeezed her eyes shut. He could tell she was trying to keep the tears at bay.

“Don’t, Jenna. Cry if you need to.” He cupped her face in his hand.

“Why did you come back?” she asked.

“I never left. I thought we could draw him out by my giving him the opportunity to get to me, but he outsmarted us and went after you instead. I’m sorry I wasn’t here to protect you, baby.”

“You shouldn’t have put yourself in danger. I wouldn’t have been able to live with myself if something had happened to you because of me.” Jenna rubbed her face against his hand.

“Nothing happened to me,” Riley said.

“Except there’s blood on your shirt and it’s ripped in a few places.”

“Just some scratches is all.

“Let me see.” She rolled his shirt up and gasped at the bandage on his chest and the small cuts across his abdomen.

“See, just some scratches.”

“Let me see your chest.” She gently pulled the bandage away on one side to reveal an ugly cut. “You need stitches in this. It’s deep.”

“It will heal fine without them,” he said. He didn’t want to go to the hospital and leave her alone for one minute.

In fact, he didn’t want to ever leave her alone again. He’d almost lost her. It wasn’t lost on him that he was talking about forever. He pushed that aside and concentrated on Jenna.

“Please. I’ll even take you if they will let me get dressed now.” She scowled toward the men in the living room.

“They’re taking evidence. It may be awhile before they let you have any of your stuff back. Why don’t we go to Logan and Tina’s place?”

“You need stitches.” She huffed out a breath.

“First we’ll go to Logan’s. You can probably wear something of Tina’s,” Riley suggested.

“I’m holding you to letting me take you to the hospital for stitches,” she reminded him.

“First, we get you something to wear. You can’t traipse around in a robe all over town.”

He stood up and switched off the coffee pot before holding his hand out to Jenna. She smiled at him and let him pull her to her feet.

“At least they let you wear your tennis shoes,” he offered. “You’re going to look cute enough on the back of the bike wearing this.” He indicated the robe with a tug.

He held her hand as they walked outside toward where a group of police and the detective in charge stood discussing something with Logan. They all looked up when he and Jenna walked up.

"I'm taking Jenna to your house, Logan. She needs something to wear besides the bathrobe," Riley explained.

"I'm on my way home, too," Logan said.

Riley turned to the detective. "You know where to find us if you need anything else."

The detective looked at the three of them and nodded. Hudson grabbed his arm.

"He's a flight risk. He doesn't even have a permanent address, for God sakes."

"He isn't guilty of anything. We can't hold him just because you don't like him, Hudson. Now let the man go."

Riley looked at the hand holding his arm and then back up at the policeman. The other man paled and let him go. Riley stared just a few seconds longer then turned and headed for the bike, pulling Jenna behind him.

"I'll ride with Logan. I'm afraid I'll hurt you if I ride with you," Jenna said.

"You won't hurt me, baby. Come on and ride with me." Riley held out his hand again.

Jenna smiled up at him and took it. He grinned and put the helmet on her and fastened it. He waited as Jenna climbed on behind him. When she held on to his waist, he knew she was ready.

They arrived at Logan and Tina's place a few minutes later with Logan right behind them. Tina was waiting on them outside. Evidently, Logan had called ahead. She grabbed Jenna and hugged her then drew her inside the house.

"Tina will take care of her," Logan said, looking at Riley.

Riley resisted the urge to follow the women inside. After everything that had happened, he didn't want her out of his sight even with friends around them.

“Are you going to have trouble with those guys back there?” Logan asked.

“I don’t plan on it. I’m not wanted for anything if that’s what you mean.”

Logan laughed. “I wouldn’t say that. Jenna wants you in a bad way.” He slapped Riley on the back.

“Seriously, though, if her ex doesn’t pull through, are they going to try and pin it on you? I know and you know that you didn’t do it with intent to kill him, but that one policeman has it in for you for some reason.”

“True, but he isn’t over the case. The detective is, and he doesn’t seem to blame me. I’m not worried.”

Logan nodded and then followed Riley’s eyes to where a light had come on upstairs.

“So what are you going to do about Jenna? She loves you, you know.”

Riley drew in a deep breath and then let it out slow. “Yeah, I know.” He looked up at the window and smiled. “I love her, too.”

Chapter Twelve

Jenna let Tina lead her upstairs to the spare bedroom with attached bath.

“You need a hot shower and something to put on. You’ve got blood all over you.” Tina stopped and teared up. “Oh, Jenna. He might have killed you. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“I’m okay. I’ll have a sore face, but I’ve had a lot worse.” She tried for a grin to relax her friend, but it wasn’t very convincing, judging by the frown on Tina’s face.

“Really, it’s over now. They don’t think Gregg will pull through. Even if he does, he will go to prison for a very long time for killing Todd.” Jenna squeezed Tina’s hand.

“Don’t be thinking about it. Just be glad you’re okay.” Tina walked over to the bathroom.

“Riley needs stitches, but he won’t go to the hospital. I need to get dressed and make him go.”

“Then let’s get you showered and dressed. You go ahead. I’ll find something for you to put on. Of course, anything I have will swallow you and be a little short on you,” Tina said.

“I am sort of a stick figure, aren’t I?”

“No, you’re built like a model. I’m the plump one,” Tina fussed.

They looked at each other then broke out in hysterical giggles. Jenna figured the stress and tension had gotten to them. She climbed into the shower and enjoyed the hot water sleuthing over her skin. It felt good to her battered muscles from her fight with Gregg. Once she was out and had dried off, Jenna found a change of clothes minus a bra on the bed waiting for her.

So was Riley. His brooding stare had her wishing she hadn't left the towel in the bathroom.

"What is it?" She crossed her arms over her breasts.

It didn't do much good. He didn't say anything. Instead, he stood up and crossed the room to where she stood in the middle. He cupped her face in his hands and lowered his head. She knew he was going to kiss her. Her body waited in anticipation of those luscious lips on hers.

He placed gentle kisses against her lips and the corner of her mouth that was split. He kissed along her cheek and the bruise blossoming there. He continued down to her jaw and around to her neck. Riley pulled her arms away from her breasts then his large hands enfolded hers and pulled her into his arms. He gently hugged her against his chest. She didn't dare push against him for fear of hurting him and his many cuts.

"Baby, you scared me to death when I realized he had you." Riley rubbed his hand up and down her back in a soothing motion.

It was probably more to soothe him than her, Jenna figured. She soaked up the comfort he was offering, though, wishing with all her heart it could be forever. Still, now she knew he really did care. He hadn't left her after all. Instead, he had gone on with his plan of putting himself out as bait. She pursed her lips and drew back from his embrace to scowl at him.

"What?" he asked, clearly confused by her expression.

"You went ahead with that stupid plan to make yourself a target after I told you not to do it."

"I should have been with you. I'm sorry, Jenna. I screwed up."

"No, that's not what has me so pissed at you. I'm mad because you deliberately set yourself up to be hurt. That is what has me so upset. You could have been killed." Jenna walked over to the bed where the clothes were laying and began dressing.

When she was finally clothed, Jenna turned back around to find Riley leaning against the door, smiling at her. It was her turn to look confused.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because you’re only going to have to undress again. You’re not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“You’ve got to have stitches.” She growled, crossing her arms again.

“That’s already been taken care of.” He smirked and pushed away from the door to walk over to where she stood.

“What do you mean?”

He grinned and removed his shirt. All his cuts and scrapes were clean, and a fresh bandage covered the gash on his chest. He carefully pulled the bandage back for her to see the five stitches that now held the edges of the wound together.

“Who sewed you up?” She gasped.

“Logan. Both of us have done it in the past. Remember we were in the army. You learn skills like that.”

“At the very least, you need a tetanus shot.” She knew she was pouting, but she couldn’t help it.

Jenna had wanted to baby him, but he wasn’t going to let her.

“I had one two years ago. Don’t need another one right now.” He moved closer still. “I’m all taken care of. Let’s see about you. What can I do to take care of for you, baby?”

He ran a finger down her chin to the V in the neck of the blouse she was wearing. Then he brushed her nipple through the cloth of the shirt. Since Tina had larger breasts than Jenna, she didn’t have on a bra. Instantly, she became aroused and wanted him. He could do that with one touch. Riley smiled that half smile that turned her insides to molten lava. In seconds, she was wet for him.

He breathed in and closed his eyes. God, he could smell her arousal. The thought both embarrassed her and turned her on. She

took a step back from him. The back of her knees hit the bed, and she sat down on the mattress hard enough she bounced.

“Take off your blouse for me,” he ordered.

She slowly slipped the buttons through their slots and let the material slide down her arms to the bed. He hummed his approval with half-closed eyes.

“Now the pants. They come off, too.”

Jenna smiled her best come-hither smile and carefully unbuttoned then unzipped the pants. She didn’t bother standing up. Instead, she lifted her hips and shimmed out of them until they pooled on the floor around her feet.

Riley went to his knees and removed her shoes then lifted her leg up to his mouth. Chill bumps popped out along her arms as he slowly licked and kissed his way from her foot to her knee and then higher. Once he reached the back of her knee, she squirmed. He continued up her thigh and stopped at the edge of her panties. He blew a warm breath across the crotch, causing her to shiver all over with pleasure. Then he gently nipped at her pussy through the underwear. She groaned at the sensation.

Riley slipped one finger in on either side of her panties and pulled them down. They would only go so far before he had to lean back in order to pull them all the way off her legs. As soon as they were off, he held her legs wide for him and dove in to lap at her wet pussy. His fingers held her pussy lips apart as he licked and sucked at her juices as fast as they appeared. She squirmed, but he held her still with his arms against her thighs.

Jenna reached down with her hands and held on to him by his ears until he was laughing against her pussy. She realized what she was doing and let go only to buck and yelp when he shoved a finger inside her. She was so close to climax that most anything more would send her off now. She fought to hold it back. She wasn’t ready for it to be over yet. It felt too good. He felt too good. Jenna dug her fingers into

the bed sheets when he pushed a second finger inside of her. *Oh, God, closer, so much closer.*

He pumped his fingers inside her over and over again while he licked all around her pussy. Then he began sucking on her clit, and the lights brightened all around her as her climax drew a scream from her mouth. He rode her until she settled down. With one last lick, Riley stood up and very deliberately began unbuttoning his jeans.

Jenna loved button-down jeans, but his slow teasing was getting on her nerves. She wanted him inside of her now. As if knowing he was torturing her, Riley dragged it out even more. Finally, he had his jeans down around his ankles. He didn't bother taking off his boots to remove them. Instead, he grabbed her by her legs and flipped her over, pulling her to her knees. He positioned himself between her legs at her opening and surged forward to the hilt inside of her. She screamed again. Fully seated inside of her, he waited a few seconds to let her body adjust to his girth before he began riding her.

He pumped his hard cock in and out of her, pummeling her over and over. Jenna met him thrust for thrust, backing into him until flesh slapped flesh. His balls slammed against her pussy near her clit with each slap.

Another climax began to build inside her. She felt it racing toward her and knew she wouldn't be able to hold it off as she had before. Instead, she met it head on. It burned from within her and spread out inside her body until she felt it in her fingers and toes. White-hot light flashed behind her eyes.

Jenna came to awareness with Riley still inside of her, both of them lying on their sides. Her feet were tangled up in his pants. She tried to move to untangle them, but Riley groaned and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her back against him. His cock jerked inside her.

"Be still. I think I died. I need a few minutes to recover," he groused.

“Did you hurt your chest? What about the stitches?” Jenna tried to twist around to see, but he held her too tightly.

“If you keep moving like that, you’re going to do some more damage.”

Instantly, Jenna went still. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay, baby. I’ll get us both up in a few seconds. I need to relearn how to breathe again first.”

She giggled. Clearly he had come as hard as she had. She was content to lie in his arms for the time being.

A few seconds later, Riley gently pulled out of her. That was when they both realized he hadn’t used a condom.

“Ah hell,” he said. “I’m sorry, baby. I shouldn’t have gotten so carried away.”

“It’s okay. I’m on birth control.” Secretly, she hummed to herself.

Maybe she would get pregnant and have his baby. He would eventually leave, but she would have a child to remember him by. Then she chastised herself for wishing something like that. He was an honorable man and wouldn’t leave her alone with a child of his to care for. No, she didn’t want him like that. She wanted him to want to be with her just because it was her.

“Lie still while I get a bath cloth.”

Riley eased out of bed and disappeared into the bathroom. She heard the water run, and a few minutes later, he returned with a warm, wet cloth. He cleansed her despite her protesting she could do it.

“No, I’ve got you.” He finished up and returned to the bathroom.

“It’s been a long night. We both need some rest.” Riley said and climbed back into bed and pulled the covers over them before pulling her back against him.

He kissed her shoulder then her head. Jenna felt cherished, loved even. If only it were true, and he did love her. Even after Riley had clearly gone to sleep, judging by his light snore, she couldn’t rest. Too much had happened in the last twenty-four hours. Her mind needed to process it all before it would let her rest. She lay thinking and

contemplating for several hours before she finally wound down enough to fall asleep. Then the last thought on her mind was how long Riley would stay.

* * * *

Jenna woke the next morning to a mouth on her breast. She grinned before even opening her eyes. Teeth nipped at her nipple, and she yelped before collapsing in a fit of giggles. She felt so much lighter than she had in a very long time. The only thing that would make it perfect was if Riley would stay forever.

He pinched at her other nipple before he licked over it, soothing the tiny hurt. She shivered as pleasure suffused her insides. His mouth moved up from her breasts to her neck where he licked and sucked until she thought she would die of need. His fingers traced paths down her abdomen to just above her pussy. His hand massaged her mound, drawing her attention there without actually touching her.

“Please,” she begged.

“Please what?”

“I need you...”

He chuckled and slowly dipped one finger through her folds to circle her clit before pulling back again. She whimpered, begging with her body as she bowed up toward him. The heat of his body seeped into hers as his chest rubbed against her back. He turned her further and lifted her leg up and over his. Now she was spread open for his pleasure. Jenna loved the feeling.

“I need you inside of me,” she finally managed to get out.

Riley’s long, hard cock pressed against the crack of her buttocks as he rocked against her. He slipped a finger inside her wet pussy and pumped until she was meeting his thrusts with her own. Then he added a second finger and circled her clit with his thumb. She nearly came undone from the onslaught of feelings his fingers aroused. All the while, his mouth licked and nipped at her neck and shoulder.

“I’m going to fuck this pretty pussy long and deep.”

“Yes,” she managed to say in a breathy whisper.

He spread her wider with his leg and positioned his cock at her entrance before plunging forward to the hilt. She moaned, biting her lip to keep from crying out in pleasure. He filled her full and then some. His hard length pierced her core, leaving a hot trail of fiery need in its wake. The need grew until she was trying to ride him sideways. He laughed and nipped at her ear.

“Hold on, baby. Just feel. Feel how I fill you up, how hard I am for you. Do you know how much I want to bury myself so deep inside of you that you will always feel me there?” His strangled words belied how difficult it was for him to be still inside of her.

Then he rode her as she was meant to be ridden, long, hard, deep. He lifted her off the bed with each thrust. She stretched for the climax just out of reach. She willed it to hurry. An ache began deep within her womb and spread throughout her body. Release seemed only a heartbeat away, only to remain inaccessible despite her fervent pleas.

“That’s it, Jenna. Burn for me.” Riley thrust and retreated, thrust and retreated, then pulled out.

Jenna cried out, begging for him to finish her.

“Please, I need to come. Oh, God.”

“Easy, baby. I’ll take care of you.”

Riley rolled her to her back and pulled both her legs up over his shoulders. He lined his dick up with her entrance and surged forward once again. This time, he bumped the back of her cervix, and she came unglued. The climax washed over her in a flood of sensations. Her body flew apart and then remade itself as he tunneled in and out of her over and over again. His hoarse shout barely registered with her as she throbbed in time with her heartbeat.

Finally, she could breathe again and listened for Riley’s stuttering breathing. His took a little longer to settle, and she smiled. Having him lying on top of her thrilled her. The weight of him made it all the more real. He was there, with her, not out on his bike or on the road,

but there with her. But for how long? The sobering thought had her tearing up.

“Hey, why the tears? Did I hurt you?” Riley brushed one away.

He looked down at her as he rested on his elbows above her. The black pool of his eyes seemed brighter than normal. Probably a trick of the light, she decided.

“No,” she reassured him. “You didn’t hurt me.”

“Then why are you crying?”

“Because it felt so good.” Jenna knew Riley didn’t believe that was all there was to it, but he didn’t push it.

“Are you ready for breakfast?” he asked.

“Hmm, thought we already had breakfast,” she murmured as she ran her hand up and down his arm.

“If I’m going to keep up with you, I’m going to need more to sustain me.” He laughed before rolling out of bed.

“Oh, God.”

“What is it, baby?”

“We’re at Logan’s house!” The idea that she’d screamed her climax not once but twice at their house had her mortified to go downstairs.

“So?”

“So, I can’t go down there now. I’m too embarrassed.”

“You don’t have anything to be embarrassed about. Come on.” He grabbed her hand and pulled her from the bed.

She leaned into him and hid her face against his chest. She couldn’t stay up here forever, she would have to go downstairs, but surly later would be better. Then she winced as the doorbell rang. She glanced at the clock by the bed and noticed it was nearly four in the afternoon. They’d slept the day away.

“You better get dressed. I have a feeling that’s company we won’t be able to get out of,” Riley said with a grim face.

Jenna ran to the bathroom to clean up. Riley followed her and wrapped his arms around her from behind. She looked up at him

through the mirror. Their eyes met there. For one small instant, she thought she saw more than just caring in his eyes, but it was gone before she could capture the look. He swatted her on the ass and left her to finish dressing. She heard the bedroom door open then shut, leaving her in the bathroom all alone. She washed her face and dressed in the borrowed clothes once again. Since she didn't have a bra to wear, she felt self-conscious. Tina's bras would all be too large for her. She wasn't flat-chested, but she could get away without a bra in some outfits. The present one wasn't one of them. With a sigh, she combed her hair and drew in a deep breath. She had no choice except to go down stairs and see what was going on.

* * * *

"He made it through surgery, but the next twenty-four hours will be crucial to see if he will live or not. The odds are against him, but he's in good hands at the hospital with some of the best doctors on staff there," Detective Brunson said.

"And this concerns us how?" Riley asked as he walked into the room.

"I figured you would want to know that he will be up on charges for murder, attempted murder, and assault," Brunson said.

"If he pulls through," Logan reminded him.

"I get the feeling none of you care if he does or not," the detective noted.

"You didn't see what Jenna looked like when he attacked her." Riley growled.

"The doctors tell me that where the knife was, all someone would have had to do is twist it just a little to the left and he would have been beyond help," Brunson stated.

"He's a lucky SOB," Riley said.

"So, why is he so lucky?"

Riley looked the detective in the eyes. “She means more to me than anything. There is no way I’ll risk losing her.”

Brunson looked over Riley’s shoulder. Riley turned, and there stood Jenna. The jeans were big on her and two inches too short for her. A black blouse didn’t hide the fact that she didn’t have a bra on. He wanted to cover her up but knew that was ridiculous. She was covered. Instead, he held his hand out, and she came to him. He enfolded her in his arms and drew her scent deep into his lungs.

“Ma’am. I hope you are feeling better,” the detective said.

“I am, thanks. I guess Gregg is still alive.”

“He’s hanging on by a thread. He may or may not pull through.”

“Forgive me if I don’t care. He deserves whatever he gets,” she said.

Riley squeezed her against him and kissed the top of her head.

“I needed to ask you a couple more questions if you don’t mind.” The detective pulled out his little notepad and waited pen poised above the paper.

“Sure.” Jenna pulled out of Riley’s arms and walked over to the living room and sat on the couch.

Riley followed and stood behind her with his hands on her shoulders. He wasn’t sure why, but something about the detective’s look worried him. Both Logan and Morgan followed behind the detective. Riley wasn’t sure where Tina was at the moment. He worried that Jenna would need her.

“Did you know your husband had a life insurance policy?” The detective asked.

“Ex-husband,” she said. “And no. I didn’t know that.”

“He took out a one million dollar policy when you were married. About,” he looked at his notepad, “two years ago.”

“So what does that have to do with me?” Jenna asked.

Riley squeezed her shoulders. He didn’t like the direction this was going. Not one bit.

“You’re the beneficiary at his death,” Detective Brunson said, watching her closely.

Jenna’s head jerked up. “Me? Why? He didn’t care what happened to me.”

“Are you saying you didn’t know about the life insurance policy?”

“No, I didn’t know about it,” Jenna said.

“Your signature is on the policy. Are you sure you didn’t know about it?”

“I swear. I never knew about it. I signed so many forms when we were getting the divorce I might have signed one for that. I wouldn’t know. I wasn’t in the best shape when I filled out all the paperwork.”

Jenna was shaking now. Riley reached down and clasped her hands in his, pulling them back up to her shoulders where he held onto them. This wasn’t good. Someone had been digging to find a reason to cause trouble. His money was on the policeman, Hudson. Why did the little bastard have a hard-on for him?

“You see this puts things in a different light now, don’t you?” Detective Brunson said.

“No, I don’t really. I don’t want the money. The insurance company can keep it.”

“It’s not that simple. By law, they have to pay it out unless they can prove it was murder.”

There, it was out in the open now, Riley thought. *Ah, hell.* No matter what happened, she would be considered accessory at the very least and murder by contract at the worst. Thank God he hadn’t actually done it. This hanging over her head because of him would have been more than he could take. He was no good for her. He had known that from the beginning and kept trying to figure out a way to make it work.

If they found out his background in the army, they could make a case of it. *Fuck!* Riley’s gaze found Logan, and the other man jerked his head toward the kitchen. Then he disappeared. He knew what

Riley was thinking about. Morgan took Logan's place beside the couch.

"Are you saying they are going to try to prove I killed Gregg?" Jenna's voice had risen and sounded close to breaking.

Riley focused on soothing her. He ran a hand down her arms. She had chill bumps there.

"I'm just warning you about what to expect should your ex not make it. Insurance companies are notorious for looking for ways out of paying off on claims."

"How did all of this come up anyway?" Riley asked.

"Someone contacted the insurance company about Gregg Weatherby's situation, and they, in turn, contacted us," he said.

"Someone, hmm. My money is on that asshole, Hudson," Morgan said.

"Was there anything else you needed to talk about?" Riley asked.

"More like is there anything you think I might need to know about?" the detective asked.

"You have all the information about me already. Unless you want to go into my duties while I was in the army, that is," Riley said.

"Did it include murder?"

Chapter Thirteen

Jenna swallowed hard around the lump that had developed in her throat. Tina hugged her tight and drew her back into the kitchen from the living room where the men had gathered. Tyler was back from the hospital now, and though he claimed he was fine, she knew he had to have a headache. There was a fine line of tension evident in the furrow above his brow. It was her fault, all of it. They were going to end up accusing Riley of murder.

“You’re thinking too hard again,” Tina admonished.

“I can’t help it. It’s all my fault.”

“No it’s not. You aren’t to blame for any of it. Gregg is the one to blame. He’s caused all of this, first by beating you and second by setting you up to have to go through hell when he did die.”

“Why didn’t he change the beneficiary after we divorced?” Jenna asked.

“Because he planned for you to have to jump through hoops because of the insurance,” Tina said.

“They’re going to say I asked Riley to do it. I just know they are.”

“The guys will figure something out.”

She couldn’t hear what was going on in the other room. That fact alone ramped up her unease concerning the entire situation. What could they possibly come up with to keep Riley from going to prison for murder? She knew if Gregg died, Riley hadn’t done it on purpose.

Sure, she knew he was capable of killing. If he hadn’t told her that he hadn’t killed Gregg when he had the opportunity, she might have believed he’d done it to save her. It wouldn’t have changed how she felt about him, either. Still, he said he didn’t kill Gregg. She believed

him. Now she had to figure out how to make sure everyone else believed him, too. Somehow, she got the impression that wasn't going to be easy. He had secrets, and those secrets were what had everyone on edge.

"Jenna? Are you listening to me?" Tina asked.

"Sorry. I was thinking."

"Let's cook dinner so when they finish talking over whatever they are talking about, we can all eat. I don't think any of us have had a decent meal in a few days now. Have you even eaten in the last twenty-four hours?"

"Um, I'm not sure. I don't really want anything," Jenna said, then asked, "How well do you really know Logan?"

"Well enough, why?"

"Do you know what he did in the army?"

"No, it's never come up. I know he writes mission manuals for the army now." Tina sat down at the table. "Why?"

"He and Riley are really close. I just thought that maybe you knew more about what they did. I'm worried that something about his past is going to put him in trouble."

"You mean you think when he was in the army, something he did there might make him more of a target now," Tina said.

"Right."

"All we can do is let them handle it. You have got to stop worrying so much and let someone else help you."

"Says the stubborn woman who nearly got killed by a stalker because she wouldn't ask for help."

* * * *

"Unless he dies, you're covered," Morgan said.

"They can't demand any information from Uncle Sam about your status in the army without a damn good reason. Murder might be a

good reason, but right now, they don't have anything to push with," Logan agreed.

"If the bastard dies, then you might need to think about what they can find out. I'm taking it that you were into some covert ops," Tyler said.

"Yeah, you could assume that," Riley allowed. "I can't talk about any of it."

"If they bring it up, you can only deny." Logan flipped through an address book. "Here it is, Dodge Greer."

"You have his Stillwater phone number?" Morgan asked.

"Yeah." Logan picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hello?"

"Dodge, it's Logan. I've got Riley, Tyler, and Morgan here, too. I'm putting you on speakerphone."

"If this is some form of intervention, go fuck yourselves." Dodge said.

"Sorry, dude. It ain't about you." Logan rubbed a spot between his eyes.

"What's going on then?"

"Riley might be in some trouble. We need your help."

"What kind of help can an old cripple give you guys?" Dodge asked.

"Computer help. We need some records to disappear or at the least get buried as deep as possible."

"Hell, what did he go and do? Kill someone?"

Logan didn't say anything. Riley drew in a deep breath and let it out. The silence must have gotten to Dodge because he started cussing a blue streak.

"It's not a done deal yet. They guy isn't dead, but he might not make it," Logan interrupted.

"Riley, you were with Bo's unit, right?"

"Yeah."

“Well, shit. That’s going to be a tough one. I’ll see what I can do. I can’t promise to permanently lose anything, but I’ll be sure it’s damn hard to dig up on a civilian end.” Dodge promised.

“Good enough. Thanks, man,” Riley said.

“Got your ass,” Dodge said and hung up.

“It’s the best we can do for now.” Logan hung up the phone and leaned back in the chair.

“I think I’ll go visit Dodge when everything around here settles down. You with me, Riley?” Morgan asked.

“Naw, better count me out. I’m not sure what I’m doing right now.” Riley couldn’t help but think about Jenna in the next room.

Would she still want him if all he’d done in the army came out? Right now, she said it didn’t matter that he might have killed her ex. But that was different than being an assassin for the US Army. No, she might not accept that as easily. And if it didn’t come out, did he tell her or pretend it never happened?

He was actually thinking about it. He was contemplating a life with Jenna. A forever-after sort of life. Did he have it in him? Yeah, he thought he did. Was it the right thing to do? Hell no. She deserved someone with a hell of a lot more class than he had. His tastes in sex ran to the kinky side. She didn’t seem to mind, but she hadn’t really seen all of him. He was a heavy dominant sort of guy. He liked sex down and dirty and lots of it. What if she grew fearful of his kind of kink?

Riley shook it off. He had to get past this road block before he could even think of forever with Jenna. Forever. Just the word sent chills down his spine. He never thought he would ever think in those terms. Especially not about a woman. He laughed to himself. A bike, yeah, he could think in terms of forever. But a woman?

“Tina said dinner is on the table. Let’s eat,” Logan said, jerking him from his thoughts.

“Smells like spaghetti,” Morgan rubbed his hands together.

“My favorite.” Tyler brought up the rear.

“Everything edible is your favorite,” Morgan teased.

After dinner, Logan helped with the dishes while Riley and the others piled into the living room to watch a movie. Logan, Tina, and Jenna joined them after a short while. Everyone let the worries of the day slide away long enough to enjoy the action-thriller. An hour later, the phone rang. Logan paused the movie to answer it. “Yeah. I see. Okay, we’ll be waiting to hear from you.” Logan replaced the phone and shook his head.

“Gregg started bleeding again, so they had to take him back to surgery,” Logan finally said.

“Hell.”

“Damn.”

“Oh no.” Jenna looked over at Riley and squeezed his hand.

“It will be okay, Jenna,” he said.

They turned the movie back on, but no one really paid a lot of attention to it. Riley kept thinking back to his army career and how it was going to hang him if anyone found out about it. How would Jenna feel about it, he wondered? He couldn’t talk to her about it. It was classified information. If it came out during all of this mess, there was nothing he could do about it.

There was no word from the hospital after the movie, so they put on another one to pass the time. Riley kissed Jenna on the cheek and hugged her close. He couldn’t get enough of her, close enough to her, deep enough in her to satisfy his needs. Right then, the only thing he wanted to do was sink his dick all the way inside of her and stay that way.

The phone rang again. Tina handed it to Logan.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll tell him. Right.” Logan hung up the phone.

“He didn’t make it,” Logan finally said.

“I take it they want to talk to me again,” Riley said.

“Yeah, they asked if you would meet them downtown at nine in the morning.” Logan stood up and blew out a breath. “You know we’re behind you on this. It was self-defense all the way.”

"I know. I'm not worried. I didn't even have a weapon on me," Riley agreed.

Jenna held on to him as though he would disappear if she let him go. He knew she was scared. He could almost taste it on his tongue. He stood up, pulling her with him.

"I think we better get to bed if we are going to make it there by nine in the morning," Riley said. "I'll see you all in the morning."

They all said good night and split up to go upstairs. Riley kept a tight hold of Jenna. He wasn't sure she was going to make it all the way to the room before she fell apart. He could feel the fine tremors in her body.

Once they reached the room, he pulled her into his arms and held her as she started crying. He knew it wasn't out of loss with Gregg's death but with reaction to everything that had happened in the last few days. She was relieved and scared all at once. He understood.

"I'm s-sorry," she gasped. "I can't help it."

"Shhh, it's all right. Go ahead and cry, baby." Riley backed them up to the bed and sat down, pulling her down into his lap.

"What's going to happen to you now? I'm sorry I got you in this, Riley. I'm so sorry."

"Shhh, Jenna. You didn't get me involved. I involved myself. None of this is your fault, and nothing is going to happen. I didn't kill him. It was self-defense. I'm not worried about it. You don't need to be, either."

"I can't help it. You could go to prison because of me."

"Stop it!" Riley shook her. "I'm telling you this once, and I don't want to have to repeat myself again. This is not your fault, and if I hear you say you're sorry about it one more time, I'm going to turn you over my knee and spank that pretty ass of yours till it's rosy red. Do you understand me?"

Jenna nodded and sniffed. Her eyes had grown round in astonishment that he would spank her. Riley nearly grinned at that. He could tell from the way she licked her lips that the thought excited

her. When things had calmed down, he was going to introduce her to some of the things he liked. Just the thought of her bare ass in the air and his handprint on those round cheeks stirred his cock.

He needed a way to distract her, and his hard cock would do just the trick. Riley cupped the back of her head and brought her lips up to meet his. He lightly kissed along the corners of her mouth then licked the seam until she opened for him. He slipped his tongue into her hot mouth and proceeded to devour her from the inside out. His teeth nipped at her lower lip then licked over it with his tongue to sooth the sting. The feel of her tongue sliding against his drew a low growl from him. Their mouths met in a soul-searing kiss that went on until he had to break away to breathe.

He pulled away from her and looked deep into her eyes.

“On your knees, Jenna.”

Her brows drew together in a furrow of confusion.

“On your knees and unzip my pants.”

Her eyes lit up now with understanding. She knew what he wanted. Jenna slid off his lap to her knees and without taking her eyes off of his, unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. She licked her lower lip very slowly then pulled him to his feet so she could remove his jeans. He stood for her and waited as she drew his jeans down. He kicked off his boots then stepped out of the jeans for her. She positioned herself between his legs and took him with both hands.

“Suck my dick. All of it.”

She rolled her eyes back and lowered her head over him. She flicked out her tongue and licked off the drop of pre-cum before lowering herself over his cock. She took him in her mouth and slowly slid down the stalk until he rested at the back of her throat. He held her there, waiting for her to swallow. Knowing when she did he would die a little at the pleasure.

Jenna trembled beneath his hands. She swallowed, and he let go of her as she pulled back up. His breath came in a whoosh as she licked the underside of his cock. Then she nibbled at the flared head before

sucking him to the back of her throat again. This time she swallowed immediately, telling him she was learning what he liked. Again, she swallowed around him until he groaned. Then she pulled back up, letting her teeth graze him on the way back up. She dipped her tongue inside the slit before sucking on just the crown.

Her other hand found his balls and began a gentle game of squeeze and scratch against the sack. She manipulated his balls with surprising dexterity, and while he was concentrating on her hand on his nuts, she took him to the back of her throat again in one quick lunge that had his eyes rolling back in his head. She was going to kill him.

She used one hand to grasp him at the root and tug on him as she licked and sucked up and down his cock. The other hand continued to handle his balls until the pressure grew to be too much and he was ready to come. Riley didn't want to come in her mouth. He wanted to come on her breasts. He reached down and pulled at the blouse she had borrowed from Tina. He growled when he couldn't get the buttons undone. He started to rip it apart, but she stopped him with her hands.

Jenna unbuttoned the blouse, but before she could move it aside, he jerked it off her shoulders so that her arms were pinned by her side. He shoved his cock deep into her mouth over and over, holding her by her hair as he fucked her face. Electric fire bloomed along his spine as it traveled from there to his balls. They sparked, and his climax loomed. He quickly pulled out of Jenna's hot mouth and exploded across her breasts. His cum coated her breasts. With her arms locked to her sides, her breasts stuck out enticingly for his use.

As the last spurts of cum left his spent cock, Riley bent down and kissed her gently on the lips. Then he stood up and pulled her to her feet. The sight of his cum on her breasts drew a weak jerk from his flaccid dick.

"God, you look beautiful with my cum on you like that," Riley said.

“I wanted you to in my mouth,” she pouted.

“Next time I’ll let you have it all, baby,” he promised. “Let’s get you cleaned up so we can get some sleep.”

Riley helped her remove the blouse and the rest of their clothes soon followed. They stepped into the shower and soaped each other up. The temptation to fuck her in the shower was almost more than he could withstand, but she was obviously exhausted, and he needed to rest before the ordeal in the morning. He would make it up to them both later.

He all but carried Jenna to the bed after they dried off. She was dead on her feet. It amused him to see how petulant she could get when she was overly tired. He spanked her ass twice when she fussed about how he dried her off when she could do it herself. He looked forward to turning that fair skin a rosy shade of red. Soon, he promised himself. Soon she would be all his. He would take damn good care of her. He could see a future with her...once he got past the next few days.

* * * *

Jenna woke before Riley the next morning. The early light of dawn hung heavy in the air. It would be fall soon, and the days would become shorter as the nights grew longer. Nights she had begun to hope would include Riley in her bed. The dream of having him permanently in her life was a hard one to give up, but she wouldn’t do it. Right now, she longed to have him for a little longer.

Her head rested on his shoulder, and his arm wrapped around her shoulder as hers wrapped around his waist. She could hear his heartbeat and feel the soft in and out of his breath against her cheek. The easy rise and fall of his chest rocked her lazily in his embrace. Jenna felt at home in his arms and didn’t want to lose that feeling. Even for a few hours.

She knew the instant he woke by the hitch in his breathing and stutter in his heartbeat. Another peak toward the window revealed a brighter light seeping beneath the shade. A long, tedious day awaited Riley. An even longer one waited for her. She wouldn't know what was going on with Riley until he returned afterward. If he returned. Jenna didn't want to think along those lines. He didn't murder Gregg. He merely protected himself. It was self-defense. She had no doubt of it. He would have told her otherwise. She trusted him despite only knowing him a short time.

"Are you going to lie there and brood all morning?" Riley asked, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze.

"I'm too comfortable where I am to move."

"Hmm, there is that. I don't want to move, either, but we both have things to do today."

"Don't let them bait you into saying something that might get you in trouble, Riley," she said.

"Don't worry about me. I'm good with this."

"I'm not. I don't know what I'm going to do if they charge you with murder. You didn't murder him."

"It will be okay, baby. Try to not worry so much." Riley ran his hand over her hair.

Jenna knew better than to tell herself not to worry. She'd do it anyway, but she could make Riley think she would be fine.

"I know. You're going to be fine. You don't need to get up just yet, do you?" She ran a hand down his abdomen to find him gloriously erect and dripping pre-cum.

"I think I can lie here for a little while longer," he said, smiling.

Jenna smiled to herself. She ran her hand up and down the length of him over and over until he was pushing into her hand as fast as she could take him. She sat up and pushed the covers aside so she could take him in her mouth. She loved the musky smell of him along with the tangy taste that exploded off her tongue. She lazily took him in

and out of her mouth for several seconds then straddled him and positioned him at her entrance.

Their eyes locked, and Jenna knew hers would show just how much she loved him. His showed lust but nothing more. She let it hurt for all of a second then took him inside her as she dropped down on him.

The exquisite pressure of his cock forcing its way inside her took her breath. She closed her eyes and embraced the bite of pain until her body adjusted to his girth. Once she was fully seated, his cock all the way against her womb entrance, Jenna rose off of him only to drop back down again. She rode him slow and easy until he couldn't maintain it any longer and took over to shove her up and down his stalk.

Riley groaned as he pumped up into her over and over. She squeezed him with her vaginal muscles, trapping him for an instant inside the heated flesh of her womb. She grinned at the sounds coming from him. She loved it when he lost control and took over. His breath came in ragged gasps as he powered into her over and over again.

Jenna's climax was only a few short strokes away. It built inside of her, promising to be tremendous when it came. Riley's hands grasped her hips as he pummeled her. She angled her body so that his pubic bone rasped at her clit with each stroke.

It was obvious that Riley was close by the uncoordinated strokes beginning to unravel. She took his hands and placed them on her tits, begging him without words to touch her there. He immediately began squeezing her nipples and tugging on them. She moaned and tried to hold off. She wanted them to come together, but she was so close. Then he reached between them and pinched her clit. Jenna came unglued. She screamed and bucked above him.

Riley groaned before pumping his cum deep within her. She felt pulse after pulse of hot cum hit her walls as she quivered around him. Her eyes flew open and once again, she realized she hadn't used a

condom. She allowed herself a few seconds to catch her breath then eased off of Riley before hurrying to the bathroom to clean up.

She turned to take a warm bath cloth back to Riley only to find him standing behind her.

“We forgot again,” was all he said before he reached around her to turn on the shower.

Jenna couldn’t look at him. She slipped out of the bathroom and dressed in the same clothes as the day before. She would have to go home today and clean up her house. Surely by now they would let her. Maybe Tina would go with her, and she wouldn’t have to be alone while she did it. Getting her house back would go a long way in helping her to feel more like her old self again.

Riley emerged from the bathroom in nothing but a towel. His skin still held the glow of moist heat from the shower and his eyes the heat of recent sex. She watched as he slipped on his clothes. She couldn’t help but admire the strong muscles across his back. They rippled as he bent to pull on his boots. Once they were both dressed, he wrapped her in his arms and held her there.

“What are you doing today?”

“I’ve got to clean up my house. It’s a mess.”

“I don’t want you over there alone until we can fix the window,” Riley said.

“I figured Tina would go with me, and it will be in broad daylight,” she said.

“Keep in touch with either me or Logan at all times.”

“No problem.”

Riley opened the door to the hall and held it for her to go through first. They found the others downstairs in the kitchen eating. Riley urged her to fix a plate and followed behind her.

“Riley, I figure I’ll go with you to the station,” Logan said. “Morgan will go with Tina and Jenna to the house. They will need some help getting the furniture set right.”

Jenna looked at Tina with a frown. How had Logan known she would want to go to work on her house?

“Don’t look so puzzled. Tina said you were going to want to go home today and clean up.” Logan grinned.

“I need clothes for one thing,” Jenna admitted.

“Mine don’t exactly fit you, do they?” Tina said.

“I really appreciated them,” Jenna said.

“As long as you promise to stay together and where Morgan can see you, you can go,” Riley said.

“Whoa, you can’t tell me what I can and can’t do.” Jenna bristled at his orders.

“Don’t try me right now, Jenna. This is about your safety. We’ll talk about it later.”

“You bet your ass we will. You’re not my boss.”

“Like I said, we’ll discuss this later,” he said and jerked his head toward the door.

Logan nodded and kissed Tina good-bye before following Riley outside.

“Come on, Jenna. Get something to eat. I figured you might need to call that detective and be sure it’s okay for you to go back home,” Morgan said.

“I’ll call as soon as I finish eating,” Jenna said.

“You might want to think about what Riley said while you’re cleaning up,” he added.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s going to boss you around, honey. You might want to decide if you can handle that or not now because he’s looking at sticking around for awhile.”

“Define awhile,” Jenna said, looking him in the eye.

“I don’t know for sure. You’ll have to ask him, but I do know he’s going to boss you around. That’s his nature.”

“That’s between him and me,” Jenna stated.

“Just so you’re warned,” was all he said before he walked out of the kitchen.

“What was that all about?” she asked Tina.

“I think Morgan is feeling a little jealous.” Tina smiled.

“Jealous? Of what?”

“Whom,” Tina corrected her.

“Me?”

“Yep, you. Until you, Morgan and Riley rode together some. You’re taking his riding buddy away from him.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Jenna said.

“Nope. Morgan evidently has had a rough time in the past. I don’t know the whole story, but he used to have a wife and son. They are dead now. I don’t know anything more to tell you about it.”

“So? I know Riley is going to be bossy, but he isn’t going to dictate my entire life. I make my own decisions,” Jenna said.

“When you’re in a relationship with a dominant male, you give more than you get when it comes to power.” Tina patted her hand before standing up and gathering dirty dishes.

Jenna stood up and helped her with cleaning up the kitchen. It took them a good thirty minutes, but finally everything had been washed and put away. Anxious to get home, she used the card the detective had given her and made the phone call. He assured her Riley was fine and that she could have her house back. Something in his voice, though, caused her to wonder how much of “Riley is doing fine” she could actually believe.

They loaded up in Tina’s car with Morgan driving. Tyler had gone ahead with Riley and Logan. Tina and Jenna stepped out of the car only to be told to wait while Morgan checked the house over first. It grated on Jenna’s nerve, but she wasn’t going to fight about it. First, she wanted to get her home in order so she had a leg to stand on when she pleaded her case of independence with Riley.

She only hoped she had a chance to argue with him about it and not through prison bars.

Chapter Fourteen

“I didn’t kill him.” Riley didn’t blink when he looked Detective Brunson in the eyes.

“How do you explain his dead body in the morgue?” Hudson asked, leaning over the table.

Officer Smith stood by the door, leaning against the wall with one foot propped back against it. He didn’t look too pleased at being there.

“He fell on his knife when we were struggling. I didn’t stab him,” Riley said for the fourth or fifth time.

“Did you know about the life insurance policy?” Detective Brunson asked.

“No, not until you told us about it.”

“How long have you been fucking Jenna?” Hudson asked, still leaning over the table.

Riley fought to keep his anger in check. He stared long and hard at Hudson until the man stood back away from the table.

“I’ve known her for about two and a half months now.” He refused to rise to the bait Hudson was dangling.

“Did you say you would kill the deceased when you saw what he’d done to Jenna in the hospital?”

“I was angry and upset. I’m sure I probably said a lot of things at that time.”

“What did you do in the army?” Hudson demanded.

“What has that got to do with anything?” Riley asked.

“Just answer the question.”

“I did whatever Uncle Sam told me to do.”

“That’s no answer,” Hudson sneered.

“It’s the only answer you’re going to get.”

The officer took a step closer, but Detective Brunson held up his hand.

“Did you intentionally kill Scott?”

“No.”

Brunson nodded, closed his file, and stood up. “You’re free to go. If we have any further questions, where can I find you?”

“You can’t let him go! He’s guilty as hell,” Hudson sputtered.

“I’ll be at Jenna’s house until I get ready to leave,” Riley said as he stood up.

“Since you don’t have a permanent residence, how can we get in touch with you?” Brunson asked.

“My cell number is in the report.” Riley walked toward the door.

Officer Smith nodded at him and opened the door. Riley nodded back and strode through without looking back. He could hear Hudson arguing with the detective.

“You can’t just let him walk out of here a free man!”

“That’s exactly what he is, a free man,” Brunson said calmly.

“He fucking killed that man, and you know it,” Hudson insisted.

“It doesn’t matter what I do or don’t know. All that matters is proof, which we don’t have. Without proof, the DA will not prosecute. End of discussion.”

Riley didn’t hear anything else as he walked down the hall toward the large room where most of the cops tended to congregate, leaning against desks or sitting with their feet up. He found Logan sitting in a chair next to one of those desks with his legs crossed at the ankles, nearly blocking the walk way.

“Are you ready to go?” Logan asked.

“Yep. Let’s get out of here.” Riley waited on Logan to stand up and stretch.

“Riley,” Hudson called out.

Riley didn’t answer, just turned his head to regard the idiot.

"I'm going to be watching you."

Riley smiled and followed Logan. They wound through the desks and down a long hall before reaching the entrance and through it, freedom.

"I hate police stations," Riley said.

"Have you spent a lot of time in them?" Logan asked with a laugh.

"Enough. Seems being a biker without a physical address is a crime in most cities."

"Did they bring up the army?"

"It looks like Dodge was able to do some cloak and dagger with my records," Riley said with a nod.

"It helps to have friends in low places sometimes." Logan unlocked the truck and climbed in.

Riley opened the door and followed suit. He still couldn't figure out why Hudson was so damn gung ho on pinning him with murder. He'd never met the man before. He sighed. More than likely, it was the fact he was a biker in general and not personal. Still, it pissed him off.

Just as they pulled out of the parking lot, his cell phone rang. He answered on the second ring when he saw it was Morgan.

"Yeah."

"I thought I'd let you know the women are at Jenna's cleaning up."

"Cool. We're leaving the station now."

"Okay, see you here then."

Riley shoved his phone back in the clip.

"Head to Jenna's. They're over there cleaning up."

"I should have known. Women can't stand a mess." Logan flipped on his turn signal and pointed them in the right direction.

"So, what are you going to do about Jenna?" Logan asked.

"Nothing. There's nothing I can do."

"That's not an answer. Are you sticking around or leaving?"

"I'll stick around long enough to be sure she isn't going to have any fallout over Gregg's death. Does that answer your question?" Riley ground his teeth and stared out the side window.

Even under the influence of a lot of beer or good whiskey, he didn't like talking about emotional issues. He sure as hell didn't want to talk to his best friend while sober about them.

"I guess I thought for awhile there you were looking at sticking."

"Yeah, well. Things change," Riley said without turning his head.

"So what changed your mind?"

Riley sighed. He was persistent that was for damn sure. Why had he changed his mind? He was no good for her. She deserved someone whole, someone who could take care of her without all the baggage weighing them down. He was a rough, ex-army assassin with a penchant for getting kinky. He doubted she understood half of what he wanted to do to her much less want to experience it. It just wouldn't work.

"Gregg."

"I don't get it. What does Gregg have to do with your being with Jenna?" Logan asked.

"She's had a rough life between Gregg and then Todd. She deserves someone nice and normal to take care of her. I'm *not* nice and have *never* been normal." Riley finally turned to look at Logan.

"I think you're underestimating Jenna. I think she's a lot tougher than you are giving her credit for. Because of Scott and Todd, she is strong and self-sufficient. She might not need you to take care of her. All she might need is for you to love her."

"Love? Are you saying you love Tina?" Riley asked.

"Yeah. I am."

"Ah, hell." Riley shook his head and peered out the side window again.

The fact that he'd already been courting the word for the last few days only intensified his feelings that she would be better off without him. Love? Yeah, he could admit that he was falling in love with

her—or was already half way there. Admit it to Logan? No. Riley swallowed. He wouldn't leave Jenna to deal with the aftermath of Gregg's death alone, but it would be tough on him. The longer he stuck around, the harder it would be to leave. And he would leave. It was the best thing for both of them.

Logan pulled into the drive behind Tina's car. Morgan stood outside on the porch with his arms crossed, a scowl on his face.

"What's up?" Logan asked as they walked up the walkway.

"They kicked me out," Morgan grouched.

"What the hell did you do?" Riley asked with a half laugh.

"Hell if I know. They were moving furniture around, and I stepped in to help, and the next thing I know, I'm standing out here."

Logan shook his head and laughed. Riley shrugged. He didn't have a clue what the other man had done. Evidently, Logan did.

"You tried to move it for them, didn't you," Logan said.

"Well, yeah. They have no business trying to move that stuff by themselves," Morgan said.

"Been there, done that, slept on the couch for it," Logan said. "You were married. Didn't you learn anything?"

Morgan's face turned to stone, and he stomped off the porch toward the yard. Riley winced.

"Fuck!" Logan slapped his hand against the worn wooden post. "I knew better than that."

"He'll get past it. Just let him be for awhile." Riley opened the screen door and knocked twice before opening the wooden door to walk inside.

* * * *

Jenna knew the minute the men were back. It wasn't because she heard the truck pull into the drive or because she heard them talking on the front porch. It was the fluttery feeling inside her stomach. Whenever Riley was close by, she felt different. He stirred feelings

inside her she had never felt before, feelings that had grown stronger day by day. Despite knowing they were there, when someone rapped on the door, she started. Even before she turned to go answer it, the door was opening and closing.

Tina grinned from ear to ear and bounced into the other room to greet Logan. Jenna followed more slowly. She'd been rehearsing what she would say to him ever since he'd left. How she would explain to him that if they were going to make a relationship work, he had to back off some, let her make her own decisions? But one look at him and all thoughts of exerting her independence went out the window. She wanted to please him, even at the expense of her self-sufficiency.

He looked up at her when she walked in the room. Something in his eyes turned her blood to ice. A serrated knife jabbed at her heart. Were they charging him with murder? If so, why was he here instead of locked up? What could possibly have happened to put the distance she saw in his eyes?

"So everything is okay now?" Tina was asking Logan.

"Yeah, they aren't charging him with anything. They don't have any evidence, so they couldn't hold him." Logan wrapped his arm around Tina's waist, drawing her to him.

"Did ya'll get much accomplished?" Logan asked.

Tina slapped at his chest. "Look around you. Doesn't it look better than the last time you saw it?"

"Uh, yeah," he said sheepishly.

"Right answer." Tina smiled.

"How are you doing, Jenna?" Riley asked without taking a step toward her.

The distance between them may have only been a few feet, but it felt like a few thousand feet. Something was very wrong.

"I'm fine. Now that the house is back to normal again, I feel fine."

"Good." He shoved his hands in his pockets and stared at her.

"How about coffee, everyone?" Tina suddenly asked.

"Coffee sounds good," Logan agreed.

“Sure,” Jenna said. “I’ll come help make it.”

“Naw, Logan will help me.” Tina pulled at Logan.

“Uh, yeah, I’ll help.” Logan let the little woman pull him along through to the kitchen.

Jenna stood alone in the room with the man she was falling in love with. Hell, be honest, she thought. She was totally in love with him. Yet, here they were, acting like strangers to each other. Tears burned behind her eyes. She recognized the signs for what they were. He was pulling back from her, getting ready to leave. How had she read him so wrong? Up until now, she believed he planned to stay, if not forever then for a semi-permanent length of time. What had changed?

“So they are going to rule Gregg’s death self-defense?” she managed to ask despite the boulder lodged in her throat.

“It looks that way,” was all he said.

“So are you staying for awhile or leaving now that it’s over?”

“I’m gonna stick for awhile if you’ll let me. I want to make sure you don’t have any problems from the police.”

“Sure,” she managed despite the tears welling in her eyes.

Angrily, she swallowed hard enough it hurt to keep the tears at bay. She would not fall apart. This had always been a possibility. It wouldn’t be the end of the world, maybe her world, but not *the* world.

“Do you need help with anything?” he finally asked.

“No, I don’t need help.” She made herself look him in the eyes. “Tina and I have always been able to take care of things ourselves.”

“You’re a strong woman. It’s something I admire about you.”

“Okay, here’s coffee.” Tina walked into the room with two cups of coffee with Logan right behind her with two more.

Jenna took her cup from Tina and sipped it, grateful her hands didn’t shake. Inside she was shaking all apart. How would she find the strength to pick up the pieces and put them back together again when he left? How many times had she started over?

She took too large a gulp of coffee and choked. Instantly, Riley was there taking the coffee from her hands and sitting it on an end table. He patted her back and watched her with his intense dark eyes.

"I'm okay," she sputtered. "I just swallowed wrong."

Riley didn't move away from her once she'd regained her breath. Instead, he seemed to hover over her, almost guarding her. She didn't need guarding now. The threat was over. She needed him to be the man he'd been before he'd gone to talk to the police. This man, this new person before he confused her. Distant, almost aloof one minute then caring and worried the next. She didn't know what to believe.

"I think it's been a long day. Tina, we should be going." Logan took her cup of coffee and headed for the kitchen.

Tina smiled a bright, forced smile. "It's been a long couple of days."

Logan returned and took her hand in his.

"You don't have to leave so soon," Jenna said.

"No, you need to get some rest," Logan began. "You haven't had any in several days."

"Jenna, call me tomorrow, okay?" Tina looked worried about leaving her.

"I will."

She followed Logan and Tina to the front door and saw them out. Once they were gone, the house felt huge and empty save one person dominating the living room just by his presence. Riley had recovered her coffee cup and his own. He crossed the room to deposit them in the kitchen.

"I can do that." Jenna rushed to take them from him.

He relinquished them but with some reluctance.

"I can manage to put away some cups," he said and followed her into the kitchen.

"But it's my house," was all she said.

Jenna turned back from the sink to find him directly behind her, so close she could feel the heat from his body seep into her skin. She

looked up into his face to find need there. A strong, fierce need filled his face while anguish filled his eyes. Then it was gone as if it had never been. His face once more appeared as neutral as ever. No hint of his feelings for her or about the situation leaked from his stoic façade.

“You’re tired.” He rested his hands on her shoulders. “Let’s get you into the shower and then to bed.”

Without waiting to see if he would follow, she turned from his hands and shuffled to the bedroom. She didn’t expect him to join her in the shower, so when she stripped and stepped under the hot spray, he startled her when he followed her.

He took the bath cloth from her hands and began soaping it. Jenna wasn’t sure what to feel. One minute she felt cared for, cherished, and the next she felt almost shunned. It was all too much for her to handle. Tears flowed silently unchecked down her cheeks as he soaped her back and began bathing her. She didn’t even attempt to try to hide them now. He would know how she felt. Her face had to be an open book for him to read.

“Don’t cry, baby.” His lips brushed against her ear.

Jenna didn’t say anything. What could she say? Nothing would change his mind about leaving, and what would be the point anyway? If he didn’t care enough about her...love her enough to stay, then she didn’t need him around.

“I’m no good for you. I’m not the settling down kind of guy you need,” he explained.

“I don’t think you know anything about what I need, let alone what I want.”

“Maybe not.” He turned her around and grasped both her upper arms, pulling her into him.

His lips closed over hers in a fiery kiss that pulled her to her toes and burned a path straight through to her inner core. Helpless in his grasp, all Jenna could do was take the pleasure as he dealt it out to her. Each nibble of his teeth on her lip, each tease of his tongue stirred

passions in her she had only found when in his arms. She doubted she would ever feel it again. Not the kind that stirred her blood to a boiling point, the type that had her begging for anything and everything he wanted to do to her. In the heat of his passion, Riley could literally have her anyway he wanted her, and she'd beg for more.

He pulled back from the kiss to stare down at her. She watched him watch her then let her eyes flutter shut.

"No, don't close your eyes. Look at me," he said.

Jenna opened her eyes to find him staring intently down at her. He let go of her arms to grab one of her legs and wrap it around his hips. Before she knew what he was planning, he surged up and into her, his massive cock impaling her. She found herself on her tip toes once again. Riley reached down and grabbed her other leg and held her against the back of the shower stall as he pounded into her.

He reached between them and found her clit. He circled it with one finger then captured it between thumb and forefinger. Just the touch was enough to send her spiraling upward. When he pinched her clit, she shot off like a bottle rocket on the Fourth of July. Sparklers ignited behind her eyelids, and she was sure she would be blind when it was all over with. Then he bit her. Hard. She would have a bruise where he'd taken a bite near her neck on her shoulder.

"Fuck, I can't get enough of you." Riley growled.

"Evidently, you can. You're leaving." Why had she said anything at all, much less that?

To his credit, Riley didn't respond. He eased out of her and rinsed them both off before shutting off the shower and grabbing towels to dry them with.

She stepped away from him and used the rough cotton material to remove all traces of water from her skin. Then she slipped past him to the bedroom. For the first time since they'd slept together, Jenna pulled out a sleeping shirt and underwear. She dressed and climbed into bed, shutting off the light on her bedside table, uncaring of how

he would find his way to bed. Hell, he could sleep on the couch as far as she was concerned. Only she didn't really mean it. She craved any small bit of closeness she could gleam from him.

The bed sank on the other side and then bumped as Riley climbed in and got comfortable. She lay there a long time waiting for him to fall asleep so maybe she could. She hadn't realized how rigid she held herself until she relaxed and her stiff muscles protested the change in position.

Just as her eyelids drooped, Riley's hand snaked around her waist to rest lightly against her belly. He snuggled up against her until his rigid dick pressed against the crack of her ass. Somehow it seemed more intimate than just the act of sharing a bed did.

"Go to sleep, Jenna. You need to rest. There's been way too much violence in your life lately."

Chapter Fifteen

“Are you sure it’s a good idea for you to go back to work so soon?” Tina asked.

“Yeah, I’m healed, and Gregg is gone. I need to get back into my normal routine,” Jenna said.

She sipped the coffee then set it back on the table in front of her. Her doctor wanted her to take one more week off, but she knew Riley was getting ready to leave. She needed something to occupy her mind, or she would go crazy.

“I don’t know about healed,” she said. “You’re covered in bruises still.”

“Well, mostly healed.”

Tina cupped her coffee with both hands without looking at her.

“This is about Riley leaving, isn’t it?”

Jenna swallowed. “I said I wasn’t going to get attached to him. I knew better than to let him get to me.”

“I can’t believe he would leave. He cares about you. It’s all over his face,” Tina argued.

“Obviously it isn’t enough.”

“Maybe it’s too much.” Tina reached out and touched Jenna’s hand.

“Too much?” Jenna couldn’t hold back the quick sob.

“He thinks he’s no good for you. He’s being noble,” Tina explained.

“Well, he can take his nobility and fuck himself.” Jenna’s voice cracked.

It hurt so damn much to know he wasn't going to stay. They had circled around each other the last few days. Somehow the sex was more intense than before but no less satisfying. It was afterward that lacked the intimacy of before. He didn't hold her close anymore. He might as well have slept in the other room than have stayed in the bed with her but apart from her. Somehow she couldn't make herself demand he do that. She craved any contact with him she could get. She wanted everything he would give her while he was still there.

"Oh, Jenna, I wish I could do something to help." Tina got out of her chair and walked around the table to hug her.

"There's nothing either one of us can do to change his mind. Even if there were, I wouldn't want to do it. I don't want him staying unless he wants to. I'm nobody's charity case."

"Come on. Let's run to town and look for something to wear tomorrow like a nice new sweater or blouse," Tina suggested.

Jenna smiled. Her friend was valiantly trying to cheer her up. They both knew that nothing would make it any easier. Still, it would pass the time while Riley was off with Morgan and Taylor. The other two men were leaving the next morning. She wasn't sure why he wasn't going with them but wasn't going to question it. It gave her a few more days with him.

"Sure. I could use something to go with my camel-colored slacks."

They took Tina's car since it was parked behind hers. Her mind wandered as they drove. Tina didn't try and force a conversation for which she was eternally grateful. She wasn't up to small talk. Instead, she thought about the way she and Riley seemed to fit together. Not just in bed. Hell yeah, the sex was un-fucking-believable, but it was more than that. They meshed in other things. Their likes and dislikes in food and TV were so similar as to be amazing. Their views on life in general were along the same lines with a few key differences that allowed for some intriguing arguments. It added spice to their relationship.

Relationship. Obviously they hadn't really had one, or he wouldn't be walking out without a thought. Maybe that wasn't fair. He believed he was doing what was best for her. Why couldn't he see that what was best for her was for him to stick around? Her heart was breaking. Couldn't he tell that? Didn't he realize he was tearing a part of her to pieces?

"So, which one do you want to start with?" Tina asked.

"Huh? Oh, I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I was just asking where you wanted to start looking. Belk's or Paula's?" Tina said again.

"Um, I haven't been to Paula's in awhile. Let's start there."

"I know your heart isn't in this, but try to pay attention. I would hate to see you pick out an ugly, tan sweater to go with those beautiful silk slacks of yours."

Jenna laughed. The tears that threatened to fall receded for the time being. She could do this. She had to do this. This was the beginning of the rest of her life. A life without Riley.

* * * *

"Man, are you really going to leave her?" Morgan asked.

"Don't start, Morgan." Riley turned up his beer.

Tyler motioned the bartender for another round. Riley grunted. Getting drunk wasn't the answer. So what was the answer? Because right now, he felt like shit. He was hurting Jenna. *Yeah, but I would only hurt her worse later down the road.* Maybe not. Maybe he wouldn't leave at all. *Yeah, right. I don't last more than six months in any relationship.* Hell, the longest he'd ever lasted anywhere had been in the army.

"So, where are you planning to go next? I think I'm heading north. I might run up and see Dodge," Morgan said.

"I'm heading for the ocean," Tyler offered.

“You’ve been awful quiet, Logan.” Riley knew he was asking for it when he said it.

“Not much to say. I’ve already told you what an asshole you are.”

“Yeah, and like I told you, better now than later when it will only be worse.”

“I still think you’re selling yourself short. You love her, damn it. It’s obvious as hell to me. I still don’t think you’ll leave her.”

“Just because you settled down, doesn’t mean it’s for all of us, Logan.” Riley threw his money down to cover the bill and stomped out of the bar.

Logan didn’t know what he was talking about. There was no way in hell he would settle down. He’d been moving around since he was a kid when they moved him from foster home to foster home. He didn’t know what settling down was.

Riley jumped on the bike and roared off. He rode for a couple of hours, trying to calm down. When he finally pulled into the drive at Jenna’s, he’d made his plans. He wasn’t really happy with them but knew they were what needed to happen.

Jenna opened the door before he got to it and stepped back for him to go in. For the first time in several days, red-rimmed eyes didn’t meet him. Instead, she looked more resolved than anything. Somehow it hurt a little bit to realize she had come to terms with his leaving.

“I was just about to make a pot of coffee. Do you want some?” she asked.

“Yeah, sounds good. I’m going to go take a shower.”

Jenna nodded and turned toward the coffeepot. He started to say something but changed his mind and headed back to the bathroom. He needed to wash away the bitterness inside him as well as the beer and road grime. Maybe everything would click into place because despite his resolve to do what he thought was best, it didn’t feel right.

After drying off, he pulled on a pair of jeans and forwent the shirt. She sat at the kitchen table, sipping on the coffee and staring off into nothing. His heart hurt at the sight.

“Smells good,” he said and walked to the counter to pour a cup.

“I’m almost out of the dark roast. I am thinking about trying something different next.”

Small talk. He sighed.

“You should try that Southern Pecan. You were thinking about it the last time we were at the coffee house.”

“I’m going back to work on Monday.” She took another sip of coffee.

“Didn’t the doctor want you to wait another week?” He watched her face.

“I can’t see sitting around the house with nothing to do. If I’m tired by lunch, I can go home early for a few days. I’ll be fine.”

They lapsed into silence, drinking their coffee without looking at each other. It weighed heavy on him. When she got up to rinse out her cup, he followed suit. His hand hovered over her shoulder for an instant before he dropped it and waited for her to finish. She reached back and took his cup, as well, leaving him with nothing to do. He stepped back away from her.

“I think I’ll take a bath and get ready for bed,” she said, smiling up at him.

As smiles went, it was a brittle smile. Still, she made the effort. He watched as she walked out of the kitchen toward the bedroom. He hung back, waiting on her to get in the bathroom before he followed. She’d shut the door. Something she’d hadn’t done since they’d been sleeping together. He rubbed a hand over his face then turned and pulled the covers back on the bed. He took time to pack his pack and set it outside the door.

Riley walked over to the bathroom door and stood there for a few minutes, contemplating whether to go in or not. In the end, he walked away.

* * * *

Jenna waited while the water filled the tub. She sprinkled some of her bath salts in the water and inhaled as they dispersed the fragrant scent of lavender. She needed the calming quality of the herb tonight. Her nerves were about shot.

As soon as she turned it off, she climbed in the warm, soothing waters and leaned back against the bath cushion. Slowly, her muscles began to relax after having been tight all day from the stress of trying to hold in her anguish. Tina's presence had both helped and hurt her. It kept her from breaking down and wallowing in her pain, but it had also prevented her from getting used to being alone again.

She relaxed for awhile longer before bathing and getting out of the tub. She dried off quickly and pulled on her T-shirt and panties. Wearing them to bed helped her separate the sex from the intimate act of sleeping together. She needed that right now. She might regret it later, but for now, it worked for her.

When she walked back into the bedroom, it was to find Riley already in bed. He'd rolled over to one side and seemed to be asleep. She sighed and climbed into bed before turning off the bedside light. It would be another long night, she decided, and turned her back to him in hopes sleep wouldn't elude her again.

She wasn't sure how much time had gone by when Riley rolled over and wrapped his arms around her. She sighed and turned toward him. His mouth found hers in a soft kiss that deepened when she responded to him. She couldn't help but respond when her entire body craved his touch.

His hands slipped under her shirt to find her breasts. They molded them then settled on her nipples. First rolling them between thumb and forefinger then pinching and pulling them. He knew her body so well. His fingers knew how hard to pull, how far to twist.

Riley broke their kiss to settle on her abdomen with his mouth. He licked, nipped, and sucked his way upward pushing her shirt higher and higher until it settled under her chin as his mouth replaced his fingers on her breasts. He suckled first one taunt nipple then the other.

His teeth grazed them, drawing mewling noises from her as he laved them with his tongue. She couldn't be still under his ministrations.

"I love how responsive you are to me," he whispered to her.

She moaned when he returned to her lips while his hands drew her shirt over her head and over his. He retreated to toss her shirt off the bed. He raked his teeth along her jaw until he reached her ear. The sensation sent chills along her arms and down her spine. His teeth nipped at her earlobe before he drew it in his mouth and sucked. When he released it to trail kisses down her neck, she wrapped her arms around his neck to hold him there. Her neck was so sensitive there, and he knew it, taking extra time there to tease her with his tongue.

A hand snaked down beneath her panties to massage her mound. Then he withdrew it to trail over her pelvis, making her squirm, another sensitive spot he'd discovered over their many lovemaking sessions.

Jenna didn't think she could take much more teasing. Already her juices were seeping between her legs in preparation for his cock. She needed him inside her.

"Please," she whimpered.

He chuckled but lowered his head to trail kisses down her torso. He stopped to lick those special spots before nipping at her mound through her underwear. Then he pulled them down and off, adding them to her top on the floor by the bed. He shouldered her legs apart and settled between her thighs. God, she would die. His mouth could work magic down there. She'd go up in flames.

He blew against her wet folds then lightly licked them. More, God, she needed more. As if he heard her thoughts, he put his hands beneath her ass and lifted her to his mouth. One long, lazy lick against her pussy lips drew more of her cream from her. Then he settled down as if for a feast.

He licked her then teased her with his tongue at her pussy opening. When he teased her clit until it throbbed in response, she

began to undulate toward him. He stiffened his tongue and fucked her with it. Her womb began to pulse with his attention to her body. Heat suffused her as she felt the signs of her climax closing in. He poked and prodded with his tongue then slipped a finger inside her. He crooked it as his mouth settled to suck on her clit. He found that special spot deep within her and began stroking it.

Her hips had a mind of their own as they began pushing against his tongue then all out fucked his face. He tightened his grip on her ass as he drew her nubbin between his teeth and sucked. She came apart in his arms. Fire shot from her womb to her clit and back again. She bit her fist, and her muffled scream reverberated in the room. He withdrew his finger then replaced it with two fingers, fucking her as he continued to suck on her clit until she slowly began to come down from the highest high she'd experienced to date. He lazily licked her from her opening to her clit and back down again, eliciting another shudder from her before he climbed up her body and sank deep within her.

The minute his cock entered her, she climaxed again at the sheer force of his thrust. God, she needed him. He filled her to completion. He ran his arms beneath her shoulders and held on to her as he fucked her hard and deep. She rose to meet him with each thrust until she felt him against her cervix. The little pain only added to the intense pleasure of having him so deep within her.

Over and over again, he thrust and drove into her until that intense burn turned to liquid fire in her veins, and her climax over took her before she was ready for it. She wanted it to go on forever. Bright lights exploded behind her eyelids. Her womb contracted as he pulsed within her. Then he collapsed beside her, drawing her tight against him. They panted for long moments before finally catching their breath. He kissed her face at her temple then beside her ear.

“Sleep, baby, sleep.”

Long hours later, Jenna awoke with a start to find Riley gone. She rose and walked to the living room, jerking when she heard his

motorcycle start at then roar down the drive and out into the street. He was gone.

Chapter Sixteen

He'd left her without saying good-bye. But maybe he had in his own way. She wished he would have stayed just one more night. If he had waited until Monday to leave, she would have had work to help her deal with the loss of him. Instead, she had all day to think about it—hurt with it.

Jenna lay in bed late into the morning, curled up around his pillow and the fading scent of him there. She traced the faint indention of his head with her fingertips as soft tears slid silently down her face. Nothing could have prepared her for the gut-wrenching pain that filled her heart. Despite knowing he would be leaving, the reality of it was more than she thought she could withstand.

She ignored the ringing of the phone but couldn't ignore the pounding on the door. Tina. Jenna climbed out of bed and slipped on a robe. She glanced at the sleep shirt on the floor and swallowed convulsively before padding to the door in her bare feet. A glance through the peephole assured her it was her friend. She unlocked the door and let Tina in. It only took one look from Tina for her to burst into tears. Tina wrapped her in her arms and pulled her toward the sofa. She sank into the plush cushions, sobbing as if she would never be able to stop. Her best friend held her, rocking her without saying a word. There was nothing that could be said to stop the pain or ease the ache deep within her.

Finally, long minutes later, she shifted and tried to control the tears. They wouldn't stop, but she managed to drag in a deep breath to slow them down.

"He left without saying good-bye."

“Oh, honey.”

“It hurts so much.” Jenna hiccupped.

“I know. I know.” Tina stroked down her back over and over, trying to comfort her, but there was nothing that would help.

Jenna finally pulled herself together enough to extract herself from Tina’s arms. She wiped uselessly at her eyes before standing up and walking toward the kitchen.

“I need some coffee. Do you want some?” Jenna asked.

“Coffee sounds good. Would you like me to make it?” Tina stood up and followed her into the kitchen.

Jenna shook her head no and concentrated on the mechanics of filling the pot with water and measuring the coffee into the filter. The mundane chore helped to calm her—for the time being. She stared at the counter before turning to lean against it. She couldn’t be still. Even waiting for the coffee to make seemed like too much of a chore. Instead, she turned back to watch Tina take a seat on a stool at the bar. She seemed to be waiting patiently for her to speak. What was there to say?

She knew she wasn’t thinking straight. All that seemed to matter right then was that he’d left without saying good-bye. Later it would seep into her that he was gone for good. She had little doubt he would ever return. It would hurt too much, and he wouldn’t want to hurt her. She knew he cared about her. She doubted that he loved her, but he did care. He wouldn’t want to cause her more pain by stopping by for a brief visit. No, he was gone for good.

“Jenna?”

Her attention returned to Tina.

“Hmm?”

“The coffee is ready,” Tina offered.

“Oh, sorry.” Jenna jerked back around and grabbed two coffee cups from the cabinet.

She poured the coffee then crossed to the fridge and pulled out the milk. Tina didn’t take milk or sugar, but Jenna liked a little milk in

her coffee. Riley teased her about that. Riley. A stray tear trailed down her cheek. She angrily swiped it away as she splashed the milk into her cup. After returning it to the refrigerator, she stirred absently then dropped the spoon in the sink.

“Mmmm,” Tina hummed her approval. “You and Logan always have the best flavors of coffee.”

“I’m almost out of this. I’m thinking about trying the Southern Pecan...” The memory of Riley suggesting it clogged her throat.

“That’s right. They have it at The Coffee House, don’t they?”

“Yeah. I’ll probably go by there later.” She doubted she would any time soon.

“Why don’t you run take to a shower and dress? We can go there and have brunch,” Tina suggested.

“I really don’t feel like going anywhere, Tina.”

“Which is the very reason you need to.” Tina sipped her coffee and eyed her over the rim of the cup. “Go on. I’m not taking no for an answer.”

Jenna sighed, knowing it would be useless to argue. Tina would win in the end. Instead, she took her coffee with her and proceeded to try to put herself back together, at least as together as was possible. She later realized that no amount of makeup was going to hide the effects of losing Riley. Her eyes remained red rimmed and sunken. Her cheeks appeared hollow, and there seemed to be a fine tremor to her mouth. She couldn’t pull a smile no matter how hard she tried. Finally, she gave up and presented herself to Tina who waited patiently in the living room flipping through a magazine.

When she walked in the room, Tina jumped up and hugged her.

“Ready?”

“I suppose.” She shrugged.

“We’ll take my car. I’m parked behind yours,” she said.

Jenna locked the house behind them and climbed into Jenna’s car. Silence hung heavy in the car between them as Tina maneuvered through Sunday afternoon traffic then negotiated a parking place near

The Coffee House. Inside, there were only a few tables empty. They managed to grab one near the back. Once seated, they perused the menu. Tina settled on a roasted-chicken panini. Jenna chose the chicken soup. She doubted she would be able to eat anything else if she managed to swallow at all. Besides, wasn't chicken soup supposed to cure everything? Could it cure a broken heart? Somehow she doubted it.

Tina chattered about anything and everything, thankfully not expecting her to offer much in the way of conversation. When their food arrived, she stirred the soup more than she actually ate it but did take a few bites at Tina's urging.

"You need to eat. After all the coffee you drank earlier, you need something decent in your stomach, or you'll end up sick."

Jenna nodded and took the cursory bites of soup to please her friend.

Once they finished and started to pay their tabs, Tina stopped her.

"Wait. You were going to get coffee while we're here."

"Oh, I'll wait till another time."

"No, you won't do it later. You'll end up without decent coffee to drink before work. Then I'll get the brunt of your ill temper," Tina said with a smile.

Jenna tried not to cringe but placed the order for the three pound bag of whole beans. If she were going to get it, she might as well go for the beans and grind them herself.

One bag of coffee later, they returned to the house. Tina insisted on coming in.

"Just for a little while. I'll leave you alone after that," Tina said.

Jenna couldn't very well tell Tina no. Instead, she closed the door behind her friend and prepared for another hour or two of putting on a brave face.

"You better call Logan and let him know you're still here," she told her.

"Good idea. I'm actually surprised he hasn't already called."

While Tina talked with Logan in obvious code about her, Jenna put the coffee in the freezer to keep the beans fresh. She would take out just what she needed each morning and grind them, enough for one. Jenna swallowed hard, refusing to cry again around Tina. She would never get rid of her friend if she didn't hold it together around her. She would end up spending the night.

A little over an hour later, Tina finally left with the promise they would see each other in the morning at work. Jenna had every intention of being there. It was what she needed to get through the relentless emptiness she already felt without Riley.

The days turned to weeks, and she woke one morning after another restless night sick to her stomach. She barely made it to the toilet before throwing up. Her stomach heaved and rolled when she managed to sit back against the wall. She needed a bath cloth and to rinse her mouth out, but she didn't feel well enough yet to stand up. God, what time was it? She would have to call in sick. Tina would remind her she wasn't taking care of herself again.

Finally, she managed to stand. She washed her face and rinsed out her mouth before checking the time. Five thirty. Jenna decided to lie down for a little longer and see how she felt before calling in sick. She dozed for a good forty-five minutes and found she felt better, probably even well enough to go to work. Instead, she called in sick. It wouldn't hurt to take it easy. She really didn't want to deal with a stomach virus, and if spending a day in bed would ward it off, she was all for it.

She called Tina next so her friend wouldn't worry.

"Just wanted to let you know I have a stomach virus so I won't be in today."

"Do you need me to pick up some Sprite or something for you?"

"No, thanks. I have Sprite here. I'll be fine. I just need to try and sleep it off, I think."

"You call me if you need me. Okay?"

"I will."

Jenna lazed around in bed until after lunch then on the couch without a repeat episode of illness. She wasn't going to complain. She really hated to throw up.

Tina called to check on her later that afternoon. Her friend wanted to come by and bring her something to nibble on.

"I'm fine. I'll be at work tomorrow. Don't come by in case I'm still contagious."

Tina wasn't pleased but agreed and hung up with a promise that if she wasn't there in the morning, she would stop by and check on her at lunch.

When the same thing happened early the next morning, Jenna began to worry that she had a much bigger problem than a stomach virus. She forced herself past the sickness and managed to get ready for work. By the time she made it in, she felt much better, more like herself. Unfortunately, she must not have looked that well. Tina met her in the office with a frown.

"You've lost more weight. Your clothes are hanging on you."

"Oh, I don't think I've lost that much weight."

Tina hummed and shook her head. "Are you sure you're well enough to come back to work?"

Jenna nodded. "I'm fine, just a little weak maybe, but that's to be expected."

"If you're sure." Tina didn't look convinced. "Anyway, we need to eat lunch together. I have some gossip you are not going to want to miss. How about Arnolds?"

"Sounds good to me."

* * * *

Riley swung the hammer, pounding the nails into the boards as fast as he could. The construction job served a twofold purpose. It gave him the money he needed to survive on and offered a means to get rid of some of the guilt building up inside of him. A day didn't go

by that he didn't think about Jenna and wonder what she was doing, how she was doing. If she thought it hadn't been hard for him to leave, she was wrong. It was pure hell. The longer they were apart, the worse the ache became.

He'd tried forgetting her with another woman but in the end, had sent her away without being able to even get aroused. And yet, he stayed aroused just thinking about her. His cock knew what it wanted.

He talked to Logan once since leaving but didn't ask about her. He hadn't needed to. His friend provided enough to tear at his gut. She'd lost weight and had been sick a few times. Then Logan asked when he was coming back.

"I can't, Logan. You know that. It will only make things worse if I do."

"Not if you stay it won't. She needs you, man."

"No, she needs someone stable who can provide for her. I pick up odd jobs here and there to make ends meet. That's not what she needs."

"I still think you're a damn fool."

Riley couldn't agree with him more, but he had her best interests at heart. If only he could get his heart to agree. Some days he wondered if he would make it until quitting time. Some nights, he lay awake all night thinking about her. There were nights he drank himself into a stupor just to get some rest. When he wasn't in an alcohol-induced coma, he dreamed about her, erotic dreams that left him hard and hot and hurting. Then, during the days, he worked himself to exhaustion. Aching muscles and weary beyond belief but still he couldn't get her out of his mind.

"Do you feel like pulling some overtime, Riley?" The foreman for the job he was on walked up to him.

"Yeah, what do you need?" He wiped the sweat from his brow with one arm.

"I've got a job over on Tenth Avenue that needs to be finished by the end of the month. Everything is inside, and there's electricity so

you can work as late as you want. I've got two others on working it with you," he said.

"I'm in. Why'd you ask me? I'm not your regular crew."

"You're the hardest working son-of-a-bitch I have working for me right now. I need that to get this job done."

Riley nodded and continued working on his section of wall. The overtime would be good for his pocket and even better for possibly getting some sleep from exhaustion. He'd work all the overtime they wanted if it meant a decent night's rest. Somehow he doubted it would be enough. What he wouldn't give to see her one more time, just a glimpse to see him through another few days.

* * * *

Jenna made hot chocolate for her and Tina after they got back from shopping Saturday afternoon. Fall was in full swing, and winter not that far away. The chilly air left both of them cold with rosy red cheeks and chapped lips. The hot chocolate would hit the spot, Jenna was sure. She stirred the warming milk one last time then poured it into the two mugs. Tina dropped in spoons and stirred while Jenna set the boiler aside.

"When are you going to tell him, Jenna?"

"Tell who what?" she asked with her heart in her throat.

"Riley. Logan can get in touch with him for you. He deserves to know."

"I don't know what you're talking about." She swallowed and held her mug with both hands, blowing on the steaming liquid with abject concentration.

"Don't lie to me. You're pregnant. How long did you think you could keep it a secret?" Tina asked.

Jenna sighed and set the mug down on the counter. She brushed a stray wisp out of her face. She had hoped to keep it a secret a little while longer. She wanted to hold it close to her. Her little secret.

"I need a little more time, Tina. Just give me a little more time," she pleaded.

"You are going to tell him, aren't you?"

"Yes, just not yet. Don't say anything to Logan, all right? He'll call him if you do."

"I don't like keeping things from him," Tina said.

"Then pretend you don't know yet. I'll tell you in a couple more days." Jenna was desperate for a little more time.

"Very funny." Tina sighed. "Look, the other thing is you need to see a doctor. You're not eating, and you've lost a lot of weight. That can't be good for you or the baby."

"I'm taking prenatal vitamins. Once I get my appetite back, I'll gain weight soon enough. I'm still having morning sickness."

"How far along are you?" Tina asked.

"Three months," Jenna said.

"I know you were on birth control, so it must have been all the antibiotics you were on after getting out of the hospital." Tina smiled and hugged her. "Accidents happen. It will be fine. You know I'm going to be the best aunt ever."

"I'm doomed," Jenna grouched then leaned on the counter and took a sip of her hot chocolate. "I'm worried about what he's going to say."

"He'll be happy. Shocked, but then I'm sure you were, too."

"Yeah." She let out a breath. "I'm not sorry. I want the baby. It's a part of him, and if I can't have him, I'll have a little part of him."

"Jenna. He's going to want to settle down with you and take care of you." Tina touched her arm to get her attention.

"I don't want him to. He won't be happy sitting in one place for long. I know that. He'd grow to resent me and the baby. I couldn't stand that, Tina. It's better if he just lives his life, and we'll live ours. He can visit any time he wants to. I'd never keep his child from him, but I know better than to wish for a happy ever after."

“Oh, Jenna. You don’t know that. Sometimes it takes something like this to make a man realize just how much he wants to settle down. Give him a chance at least.”

“We’ll work it out, Tina. Let us work it out.”

“At least go ahead and make an appointment with a doctor now. You can schedule it for next week sometime. I’d just feel better knowing you had an appointment.”

Jenna shook her head and grinned at her friend. Friend, hell, bulldog was more like it, she thought to herself.

“Fine, I’ll make one for the end of next week if they can fit me in that soon.”

“Tell them you’re three months pregnant and having trouble maintaining your weight. That will get you in quick,” Tina said.

“You’re sneaky.”

“I’m worried.”

Chapter Seventeen

Riley pulled into Logan's drive a little after three on Friday afternoon. He planned to talk to Logan about Jenna before he actually went over to see her. He wanted to make sure she wasn't seeing anyone else before he dropped in out of the blue and asked her to forgive him and give him another chance.

He'd spent three damn months trying to live without her before realizing he couldn't. If she wasn't already involved with someone else, he wanted another shot at making her happy. He'd find a job and do everything in his power to take care of her. He wanted to hold her right now more than anything, but first he needed to be sure she was still free. If she wasn't? Well, he didn't want to think about that.

He knocked on the door and waited. He knew Tina wouldn't be home from work yet, so it was the perfect time to gather information and plan his attack.

Logan answered the door with a raised eyebrow.

"Where in the hell have you been? I've been trying to call you for the last three days." He pulled his buddy inside and hugged him.

Riley grimaced and pulled away. What in the hell was up with Logan?

"What's up? I've been on the road on my way here."

"Jenna's at the doctor's," Logan blurted out.

Riley felt his heart sink. Something was seriously wrong with her. He should have come back sooner.

"What's wrong with her? Is she okay?" He grabbed for the door. "Where is she?"

“Whoa,” Logan said, pushing the door closed. “You’re going to have to talk to Jenna about that, but she’s okay.”

“What in the hell did you scare me for if she’s okay?” Riley dropped his hand from the door knob.

“Just aggravated that you didn’t answer your damn cell phone.”

“Well, hell. I’m not Tina and at your beck and call.”

Logan burst out laughing. Riley eyed him with a frown. What was up with him?

“How about some coffee while we wait on the girls to get back?”

“Good, Tina is with her.” Riley relaxed some.

Tina being with her meant she wasn’t alone, and that was good.

“Yeah, coffee would be great,” he said.

“You’re looking a little worse for wear. You look road hard and put up wet,” Logan observed.

“Yeah, screw you. How is she really? Is she, ah, seeing anyone?” Riley asked, not looking at his buddy.

“She’s okay. She’s lost a lot of weight and has been sick, but she’s going to be fine.” Logan finished setting up the coffee pot and turned around. “And no, she’s not seeing anyone. Does this mean you’re thinking about sticking around for awhile this time?”

“If she’ll have me, I’m planning on asking her if she’ll let me stay permanently.”

“You’re going to ask her to marry you?” Logan asked, crossing his arms.

“Well, not right away. I, ah, wanted to have a job and all first.”

Hell, he didn’t want to have a conversation like this with Logan. Trust his friend to cut to the chase.

“I think you need to re-think that part.”

“What part? Asking her to marry me? Why? Do you think she’ll say no?”

“No, I mean I think you ought to ask her now.”

“What’s going on, Riley? Is she or isn’t she okay?”

Logan huffed out a breath.

“Fuck. She’s pregnant, Riley.”

Riley took a step back as if Logan had delivered a physical blow. Pregnant? She was pregnant?

“You’re sure?”

“That’s why she’s at the doctor’s. She hasn’t been able to keep anything down and has lost a lot of weight.”

“Why hasn’t she told me before now? She has to be at least three months. I’ve been gone that long.” Riley’s world tilted at the news.

“She just told us. I think she’s been in shock. That’s why I’ve been trying to call you. She wanted to talk to you,” Logan said.

“Oh, hell. What am I going to do? I don’t have a job to take care of her.”

“She has a job. Right now, what she needs is your support, man.”

A car pulled into the drive. Riley looked over at Logan with a sinking feeling. They were back, and he didn’t have a clue what to say to Jenna. He waited for them to come in. They sat in the car for a long time. He realized that Jenna would have noticed his bike in the drive. She didn’t want to come in. That thought hurt.

Finally, he heard the car doors close, first one and then the other. Logan patted him on the shoulder and handed him a cup of coffee. When the door opened, Tina entered first. She stood aside, and Jenna walked in.

He almost wouldn’t have recognized her. She’d lost a lot of weight. Her clothes sagged on her, and there were deep shadows under her eyes. He couldn’t keep his gaze from dropping to her belly where his child would be. When he raised his eyes to meet hers, there were tears in them. She turned toward Logan and shot him a dirty look.

“You told him.”

* * * *

Jenna knew the moment his eyes dropped to her abdomen that Logan had told him she was pregnant. Now she would never know how he really felt about her. He looked stricken. Of course he would be shocked. Appalled maybe? Dear God, what would she do if he asked her to marry him now?

“Logan, why did you?” Tina asked quietly.

“He was making himself crazy thinking there was something seriously wrong with Jenna. I had to tell him something.” Logan crossed over to Jenna and hugged her. “Aw, hell, Jenna. I’m sorry. It should have come from you.”

“It’s okay.” Only it wasn’t.

“I think Riley and I have some things to discuss. Maybe we should leave now.” Jenna avoided Riley’s eyes. “That is if Riley will give me a lift home.”

“Is it safe for you to ride a bike?” he blurted out.

“Yeah, it’s safe.” She almost smiled at that.

“Let’s go then.” He walked across the room then seemed to remember he had a cup of coffee and handed it back to Logan.

Logan chuckled, and it earned him a scathing look. Jenna rolled her lips inward to keep from grinning. Then she sobered. They had a lot of serious ground to cover.

“Jenna, call me later, okay?” Tina said.

“Okay.”

Riley opened the door for her and led her to the bike. He pulled out a helmet from the saddle bag and instead of handing it to her, placed it carefully on her head and fastened it for her. Then he climbed on the bike and started it up. Jenna climbed on back and held loosely to his waist.

“Hold on.”

He started off slow and easy then sped up as they left the drive. She realized they were going to have some trouble by the time he finally pulled into her drive long minutes later. He’d driven slow and

careful the entire way. He held the bike steady while she climbed off the bike.

Jenna didn't wait for him. She hurried up to the door and unlocked it. Nerves tickled her spine, and butterflies danced in her stomach. She could almost attribute it to the baby but decided it was all her discomfort now that Riley was actually there in her house.

"Um, can I fix you something to drink?" she asked once he'd closed the door behind him.

"No, thanks. Do you need something? Go ahead and fix yourself whatever you need." He jammed his hands in his pockets as if he didn't know what to do with them.

This wasn't like Riley at all. She was used to his self-assured attitude. The fact that she was pregnant had floored him obviously. Maybe they should put off this talk until he had time to process it and what he wanted to do. There was no doubt what she was going to do. She was having the baby, and if he wanted to be a part of it, that was fine.

"How far along are you?" he finally asked.

"The doctor said fourteen to fifteen weeks."

"What did he say about your weight loss?" Riley took a step forward, pulling his hands out of his pocket.

"I need to gain a little before my next visit," she hedged.

"Somehow I expect that's not exactly what he said."

Jenna glimpsed the old Riley she was used to now. She much preferred this Riley.

"You've lost way too much weight, Jenna. It can't be healthy."

"I'll start gaining again. I need to get past the morning sickness is all."

As if suddenly realizing she was standing up, he walked over to her and touched her voluntarily for the first time. His hand took her arm and pulled her toward the couch.

"You need to sit down."

Jenna suppressed a smile but did what he said. Why was he back? It suddenly occurred to her that Logan hadn't been able to get in touch with him, but he was there.

"Why did you come back, Riley?" she asked.

"I couldn't stay away." He took a deep breath. "I came back to ask you to marry me."

Jenna burst out crying. This was exactly what she had been afraid of.

"What's wrong?" Riley patted her shoulder, a desperate look on his face.

"It's just hormones," she managed around sobs. "I cry at the drop of a hat now."

"No, you started crying because I asked you to marry me," Riley said.

"You only did it because I'm pregnant. I won't marry you like this." Jenna swallowed and attempted to control the tears.

Riley jumped up and grabbed a box of tissues and handed them to her. He paced for a few seconds then turned around to face her.

"That is why I came back, but I can see where you wouldn't believe me with the way I left you and all."

"You can be a part of the baby's life and even live here if you want to, but I won't marry you just because I'm pregnant. I don't think you would have asked me otherwise."

"Baby, I've missed you so much and regret ever leaving you. I thought I was doing what was best for you. I know now I was wrong. I can't live without you."

"I wish I could believe you, Riley, but I just can't. Maybe after the baby's born, if you are still around, we can talk about it again." She swallowed and stood up.

She needed something to drink. Her mouth was dry, and the tears had drained her. If he wanted to stay, she wouldn't be able to resist him if he pushed it. She'd be back in bed with him in a New York second. She loved him, but she wouldn't marry him.

“What do you need? I’ll get it for you,” he said.

“I can get it. I just want something to drink. Then I need a nap. I’m tired, Riley.”

“I’ll get you something to drink. Go lie down.” He was already walking toward the kitchen.

Jenna closed her eyes for a second and shook her head. He would be bossy, maybe even bossier than he had been before. And she loved him for it.

* * * *

Riley opened the refrigerator door and sighed. There was a half gallon of milk, a pitcher of water, and some cheese and butter, but that was all. No wonder she had lost weight. There was nothing to eat. He didn’t know much about pregnancy, but he knew she needed fresh fruit and vegetables. He checked the milk and finding it good, poured a glass. He carried it to the bedroom where Jenna lay stretched out on the bed on her side.

“I brought you some milk. I’m sure it’s good for you,” he said.

He didn’t mention her lack of food. He didn’t want to upset her. Another thing he was sure of was that she shouldn’t get upset. If she were crying all the time, that would be difficult to stop, he surmised.

“Thanks. Water would have been fine.”

She rose up on her elbow. He held the glass for her. She frowned at him, so he relinquished it to her. She took a few sips then started to put it on the nightstand.

“Whoa, that’s not enough. You’re going to drink at least half of it,” he admonished.

“Don’t get bossy with me,” she said, but she drank a few more swallows.

“I’ll put it back in the fridge.”

He returned a few minutes later and took off his boots. He was going to hold her while she slept. He hoped she wouldn't balk at the idea, but he had missed her so much.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm going to rest awhile with you. I've missed you, Jenna. I want to hold you." He sat on the edge of the bed and gazed into her startled eyes.

Jenna moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue and nodded. He let out a soft sigh of relief. He needed this. The bed sank as he rolled over to curl around her. She didn't balk when he placed a hand over her abdomen. To think that their child rested there. It amazed him to even consider it. It humbled him to contemplate the huge responsibility their having a child entailed.

"Riley?"

"Yes, baby?" he answered.

"How are we going to do this?" she asked

"Do what?" He was almost afraid of her answer.

"Live. The two of us and a baby?"

Riley closed his eyes and relaxed. She was including him.

"One day at a time, Jenna. One day at a time."

This seemed to settle her since she relaxed, as well. He rested on his elbow so he could see her face and where his hand cupped her abdomen. Slowly, her facial features smoothed out, and the frown lines disappeared. Once he sensed she was asleep, Riley carefully rolled out of the bed and padded into the living room, carrying his boots. After pulling them back on, he wrote a note telling Jenna he was going grocery shopping. Leaving it on the kitchen counter where she could see it, he borrowed her key to the house, the one he had left that day three months before, and locked the door behind him. He rolled his bike to the end of the drive before cranking it up in an effort not to wake her.

Nearly an hour later, he was back with two bags of groceries. He hadn't been able to fit much in his saddlebags even without the spare

helmet. He had enough for a couple of days. They would go shopping together on Saturday and use her car. It was important that she keep food on hand, and he would assure she did. He was appointing himself her personal caretaker.

Riley planned to cook baked chicken with steamed vegetables and rolls. He'd also picked a few oranges and bananas for her. He had feared for the safety of the bananas, but they fared well on the ride back.

When he checked the door, he found it unlocked. His heart leapt in his throat that someone could be in the house with Jenna. He flung the door open only to find her reclining on the couch reading a magazine.

"Why is the door unlocked?" he all but demanded.

"I heard you ride up, so I unlocked it for you." She frowned at him. "Don't go getting bossy on me."

"Get used to it. I'm going to boss you nonstop," he said as he carried the bags through the living room and into the kitchen.

Jenna followed him and took a seat on one of the bar stools. "What did you get?"

"Food, of which you had none in the house. No wonder you've lost so much weight, Jenna. Are you trying to starve yourself?" He cringed. So much for not upsetting her.

Jenna's brows furrowed as anger replaced the curious look from earlier.

"I haven't been hungry, and when I am, I eat. Forcing something down my throat only makes the nausea worse," she complained.

"Well, you're going to get healthy food from now on. I'll make sure you have what you need. All you have to do is eat it."

They stared at each other, each as stubborn as the other. Finally, Jenna huffed out a breath and shook her head.

"I just haven't felt like shopping, Riley. Thanks for getting the groceries."

He relaxed and smiled at her from across the bar.

“We need to go in your car next time. I couldn’t fit more than a couple of days’ worth of food in the bike. I figured we would go Saturday when you feel up to it.” Riley reached across the bar and brushed his knuckles across her cheek.

Jenna nodded. “I’m usually okay by about nine. Until then, I wouldn’t be able to stomach the idea of food much less shop for it.”

Riley turned to the sink and washed the chicken breasts under the faucet.

“I’m cooking baked chicken and steamed veggies. Does that sound okay to you?” He asked.

“Yeah, right now it does. I never know, though, until I start to eat how it will go down.”

“This will go down great because I’m cooking it.”

A great weight lifted at the tinkling sound of her laughter. The sound lightened his heart. It had been heavy ever since he realized how sick she had been.

“Pretty confident in your cooking skills, are you?” Jenna watched as he prepared the chicken.

“I can cook a few things or at least enough not to starve. I think I can handle a few meals for you.”

“I’m sorry,” she said.

He stopped what he was doing and frowned at her. “Sorry for what?”

“For complicating your life so much. I’ve been a constant burden ever since you met me.”

Riley wiped his hands on a cloth and walked around the island to stand in front of her. He pulled her into his arms. It had never occurred to him that she would see herself as a burden.

“You’re not a problem to be endured, Jenna. You’re a woman who’s had a rough life. None of it was your fault.” He leaned back and brushed a strand of hair from her eyes. “And as for complicating my life, it’s a good complication. You’re giving me a child. I honestly never thought to have one.”

Jenna sighed. "And now I've taken the decision out of your hands."

"Let's get one thing straight here. I'm the one who didn't use a condom. You were on birth control. It wasn't your fault it didn't work."

"The doctor said it was because of all the antibiotics I had been on. It weakened the pills," she explained.

"See. It wasn't your fault. Now go read or watch TV or something while I cook. I'll come get you when it's ready." Riley kissed the top of her head and helped her down from the stool.

He watched as she walked into the other room. She had thought he would blame her for getting pregnant. He didn't blame her. Hell, he didn't even blame himself though clearly the blame rested on him. The thought of a child with her eyes warmed him. He'd never considered settling down and having children. Something inside him thought he'd wander from place to place the rest of his life. Settling down seemed to be out of his reach.

The early part of his life had been spent in foster care, and he'd never stayed in one longer than a few months. He fumed. No child of his would ever feel unloved or alone. He knew Jenna would love and care for their child with all her heart. He would make sure she had everything she needed to be happy. Somehow, he would be there for her no matter what. Time would tell how he handled being in one place. Right now, he couldn't imagine being anywhere else.

Forty-five minutes later, he found her dozing on the couch with a magazine lying on the floor. He smiled and leaned down to kiss her cheek. Startled eyes met his. She smiled up at him and attempted to sit up. Riley helped her.

"Dinner is ready."

"Smells good. I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep. You would think after a nap I would be rested," she said.

Riley helped her to her feet then followed her to the kitchen. He wanted to be sure she ate as much as possible. When she was seated at

the bar, he filled her plate with chicken and the steamed vegetables. If he read her facial expressions right, she looked hungry. That was a good sign.

“I can’t possibly eat all this.”

“Just eat what you can.” He fixed his plate and stood across from her, waiting for her to take her first bite.

“Mmmm, it’s delicious,” she said after taking a fork full of broccoli. “It’s cooked just right.”

“Let’s see how much of it you can put away. Then I’ll know if it was really that good or not.”

Riley watched as she ate, marveling at the faint glow about her. She looked lovely despite the weight loss and dark circles under her eyes. Her skin shone in the light.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” she asked, nodding at his untouched plate.

“Yeah, I was just watching you. You’re so beautiful,” he said.

She blushed and ducked her head. He reached across and lifted her chin with two fingers.

“I mean it, Jenna. You’re so beautiful sitting there with your hair mused and your skin glowing. I can hardly take my eyes off you.”

“Stop it. You’re making me uncomfortable.” She shifted on the stool.

Grinning, Riley began to eat so she would. More than anything, he wanted her to clean her plate. She needed the food desperately.

When she said she had eaten all she could, Riley nodded and cleared the dishes. He wished she could have eaten a bit more, but she managed to eat over half of what he’d put on her plate. It was a start. She started helping him, and he shooed her away.

“I’ll get this. There isn’t much to do. It all goes in the dishwasher anyway.” He demonstrated by adding a plate to the rack.

She walked over and leaned against him. Her breasts pressed into his chest. She rested her head against his shoulder. He dropped his chin to the top of her head. He drew in her scent. He liked that she

touched him despite their separation. He could almost think nothing had changed. Almost.

Chapter Eighteen

Riley followed her into the bedroom. She planned to take a shower. But then she looked at him again and wanted him more. Jenna found she couldn't resist him. She wanted to be close to him, wanted to touch him and be touched by him. How could she possibly live with him without being with him? Of course, he might not feel the same way despite his asking her to marry him. Surely that was a product of finding out she was pregnant with his child. What decent man wouldn't ask the mother of his child to marry them? Riley was a decent, honorable man. He just wasn't the type to stick around. She sighed.

When he reached for her, Jenna found herself going to him. He pulled her into his arms and held her almost loosely as if he were afraid of hurting her, or their child.

"You know, I'm not going to break."

"You look so fragile right now. It feels as if I could break you in half just by holding you," he said.

"Nonsense. I'm not different now than I was three months ago."

"But you are," Riley said.

Still, he pulled her tighter into his arms. She breathed in his scent, all masculine. His musky smell aroused the woman in her. That deep down, wanton siren who ached to feel him inside her. Did he feel the same way? Did he still want her?

The T-shirt he wore stretched tight over his muscled chest. She dragged her nails across the outline of his nipples. He growled. It warmed her to hear the sound. The evidence of his arousal lay pulsing

against her belly. Her hips undulated against his, wanting more of him.

“We’ve got to stop this, Jenna.” He swallowed hard.

“Why? You want me, don’t you?” she asked, just a little scared he wouldn’t.

What if he said no? Could she bear the thought of him not wanting to make love to her?

“You’re in no shape for my loving. I’d hurt you.”

“Bullshit. I’m not the fragile doll you are making me out to be. Either you want me or you don’t. Tell me now so I stop making a fool of myself.” Jenna pushed away from him and crossed her arms as anger welled up in her.

“It’s not that I don’t want you because I do. I want to lay you across the bed and bury my cock inside you, but you’re weak right now. Pushing me will only hurt us both. I’m not a gentle man, baby.”

“You’ve never hurt me before.” She swallowed hard around the lump forming in her throat. “Does my body turn you off now that I’ve lost a little weight?”

“No!” he exclaimed. “I want you just as much if not more so than ever. But you’ve lost more than a little weight, Jenna, and I’m worried about how weak you are. I don’t want to make it worse.”

Jenna sighed and walked across the bedroom to the bed. She peeled off her T-shirt and unbuttoned her jeans. His eyes never left her body. Hers remained on his eyes as she slowly slid the jeans down her legs. She bent over and stepped out of them. He took a hesitant step forward then stopped. She unclasped the front closure of her bra and let it slide down her arms and drop to the floor. She smiled a triumphant smile when his hands went over his head to grasp his T-shirt and pulled it over his head and off his body. She remained where she stood, waiting on him to come to her.

Riley sat on the bed to take off his boots. When he stood back up, his jeans soon joined his shirt on the floor.

“You’re a temptation that should be banned,” he said with a low growl.

“I can’t help it that being pregnant makes me horny,” she said with a smile.

“Is that the excuse you’re using?” He stepped closer to her without touching her.

She licked her lips, and he groaned. The sound ramped up her arousal.

“It’s no excuse. The pregnancy books talk about it.”

One of Riley’s hands slid down her arm from shoulder to fingertips and back up again.

“You’ve been reading baby books.” He made it a statement.

“Of course. I need to know what to expect.” Chills ran down her spine as he trailed his hand in the same fashion along the other arm.

“I think I need to read these books and be sure you are interpreting them correctly.”

Jenna laughed. “Somehow I can’t see you reading baby books, motorcycle magazines, maybe.”

“Careful or you’re going to hurt my feelings,” Riley teased.

Jenna thrilled at the easy banter between them as he simply touched her. The atmosphere around them was relaxing. She waited to see what he would do next. His hands rubbed up her arms and over her collarbone to cup either side of her face. Riley leaned in ever so slowly and sank into her mouth. The kiss started out slow and sensual, his lips sipping at hers, his tongue licking along the seam of her lips. A sigh left her when he nipped at her lower lip then laved it with his tongue. When she opened her mouth, he delved inside to explore and taste her. Their tongues twined and danced until she was forced to pull back for air.

They stood there panting, staring into each other’s eyes. Mirrored in his was the lust and arousal she craved. It warmed her inside and out knowing she could do this to him. If only he loved her. She

pushed that thought aside. She didn't need that right now. What she needed was him.

"I want you," he said.

Their foreheads met as each leaned against the other.

"I want you, too."

He pressed his erection against her belly and growled as she added her own pressure to his, trapping it between them.

"Baby, I don't want to hurt you."

"Riley, you're not going to hurt me. I'll hit you if you do. Will that make you feel better?" She was fast losing patience.

Jenna wanted him to fuck her and do it now. He wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in the curve of her neck before biting gently down on her shoulder. She shivered. Riley leaned down and drew in one nipple, laving it with his tongue then nipping it. He drew in more of her breast and sucked, rolling the nipple around in his mouth. She sighed and held his bald head to her. He moved to the other breast and treated it equally. A thrill traveled down her spine to her core. Heat built deep inside her. The thread between breast and womb tightened until the last tingle trilled along it.

Riley gently pushed her back toward the bed until it hit the back of her knees and she sat down. Going to his knees, he nudged her legs apart with his broad shoulders. She lay spread before him, the wanton woman open to him. Only now, she didn't feel so confident. If he noticed her unease, he didn't show it.

Instead, he leaned in and licked from clit to her opening and back up again. She shivered at the cooling air once his hot breath left her. Deep within her womb, a spark built. His tongue licked along the seam of her pussy, separating the lips. He used his fingers to separate her farther and delved in deep with his tongue. She moaned and squirmed. He slid his hands beneath her ass and lifted her to his mouth. He dined on her.

That spark grew in size and heat. It burned from the inside out. With each lick and suck of his mouth against her pussy, she drew

closer to climax. When he circled her clit with his tongue, she lifted her body closer to his mouth. He chuckled and pushed her back down with one hand splayed across her stomach. Then he froze.

“God, baby. Did I hurt you?”

“If you don’t put your mouth back down there and finish what you started, I’m going to hurt you!” she nearly screamed.

He looked sheepish then fucked her with his tongue, taking her by surprise. She squealed, undulating her hips in time with his tongue forging inside her. He circled her clit without touching it, leaving her wanting even more. Fire raced from womb to clit. She needed him to touch her there. No matter how she moved, he avoided the one spot needing attention. Frustration laced with a bit of fear left her growling and demanding he finish her.

“I can’t take anymore. Please, Riley. I need...”

“What do you need, baby? Tell me and I’ll give it to you.”

“I need to come. Lick my clit. Please. Hurry.” Jenna shuddered and whimpered at being denied.

Suddenly, Riley licked directly over her clit, sending her spiraling higher than ever. When he sucked the little bud into his mouth and held it with his teeth, she exploded around him. The more he licked it while he held it prisoner, the hotter she burned.

Was that her she heard mewling like a baby tiger? Jenna’s ears rang as she slowly came down off her high. His mouth continued to languidly lick, scooping up all the cream he could. He ate at her as if he were starving. Finally, with one last lick, he leaned back and looked up the line of her body to stare into her eyes. His were dark with lids half closed. His mouth was shiny wet from her core. He rose and leaned in to kiss her stomach. He lavished it with licks and kisses until she couldn’t stop the giggles from escaping her mouth. He was tickling her.

“Stop.” She laughed, throwing her hands up to hold his head away from her.

“You don’t like my kisses?” he demanded as he licked around her bellybutton.

“I love your kisses. Just not there.”

He smiled down at her before crawling up her body and laying down beside her. She turned to stare at him. His cock pulsed against her abdomen, but he looked relaxed and sated. She was anything but sated. She grinned at him and reached between them to grasp his cock in her hand. She squeezed. He closed his eyes and groaned. The feel of his hard flesh made up of satin skin in her hand caused her breath to hitch.

Riley threw back his head when she used her thumb to spread the drop of pre-cum around the mushroom head. She squeezed, relishing how he jumped in her hand. Jenna rose to her knees and scooted down the bed until her mouth was level with his hot cock. Saliva pooled in her mouth at the sight of it. She stuck out her tongue and licked him from root to tip. The heavy stalk jerked at her touch. Slowly, she enclosed him with her mouth and sucked all the way down until he hit the back of her throat. She swallowed and was rewarded with a curse and Riley’s hand in her hair.

“Fuck, your mouth is hot,” Riley said.

Jenna didn’t stop to talk. Instead, she sucked him hard and fast then slow and easy until he was fucking her mouth, his hand in her hair holding her still. She moaned around him, sending another groan from his mouth above her.

She tongued the slit at the top of his cock then twirled her tongue around the cap, paying close attention to the underside where he seemed to be most sensitive. She rubbed that spot with her tongue until he all but jerked her head from him. She stared up into his eyes, reveling in how his breath came in quick spurts. His raspy voice gave away how close he’d been to coming in her mouth.

“You’re playing with fire, baby. One of us is going to get burned.”

She crawled up his body and positioned her pussy over the top of his pulsing cock.

“I say we both get burned.” She dropped on top of him, taking him halfway before her tightness stopped her.

She groaned and lifted with his hands on her hips and tried again to fit all of him inside her. He felt enormous inside her. The slight burn to the stretch heightened her arousal to untold proportions. Surely she would explode if it got any hotter. He wiggled beneath her, and she sank another inch. Just a little more, she thought. Then he surged upward and buried himself inside her. The rasp of his pubic hair tickled her clit, sending another round of sparks throughout her body.

“Oh, baby. I’m not going to last if you don’t be still. Let me catch my breath.” His voice came out an octave lower than usual.

“I need you to move, Riley. I can’t stand this. Let me.”

Riley let go of her hips, and she rose on her knees until only the head remained inside her. Then she dropped back down, swallowing him within her. She rose and dropped, rose and dropped until she thought she would die from the rush of heat searing through her veins. Her movements became frenzied with need as her orgasm drew closer.

Riley rolled them over. He took control of her body and drove her higher than she thought possible with his long, deep thrusts that moved her body up the bed. He pounded into her over and over. She pushed her hands above her to keep her head from smacking the headboard. Still he thrust deep and hard, bringing one of her legs up over his arm and bowing her up on herself.

Just when she thought nothing could lead her any higher, he reached between them and pinched her clit, sending her into spasms of pleasure unlike anything she’d ever experienced before. He thrust twice more and followed her over the edge into oblivion. There was no other word for the equisetic pleasure that took over her body and mind. She soared higher and dropped harder until she lost sight of everything but the pure feelings dancing inside her.

When she came to much later, Riley had pulled the covers over them and was holding her close against his body. His hand lay splayed across her belly as if protecting the little spark of a life within.

“You’re awake,” he said. “Are you okay? Did I hurt you?”

“Mmmm, I’m fine. I’m better than fine.”

“You’re not bleeding. I checked. You’re sure you’re okay?”

“You checked to see if I was bleeding?” Jenna couldn’t keep the humor from her voice. “What are you? A doctor now?” She giggled then threw her hand over her mouth. She didn’t want to upset him.

“I was rough with you. I told you not to push me.” His voice sounded firm perhaps even a bit angry.

“I’m fine, Riley. You can’t hurt me.” She sighed and attempted to roll over, but his hand on her abdomen prevented it.

“You’re pregnant, Jenna. I can’t help but feel protective of you—of the baby. I’m a rough man. I worried about you even when you weren’t pregnant.”

“Is that why you left? Because you were scared you were going to hurt me?” She bit her lip. She hadn’t planned on bringing that up any time soon.

“I left because I didn’t think I would be able to be the man you needed. Sticking around has never been my strong suit,” he said.

“Why do you think you’ll stick around now? What, besides my being pregnant, has changed?” Jenna rolled over to face him.

“I realized I can’t live without you. I want to be with you all the time. Leaving you was supposed to keep you safe, but I hurt you instead. I’m sorry.”

He didn’t say the one thing she wanted to hear. The one thing that would convince her he was serious about sticking around. He hadn’t said he loved her. Jenna swallowed down the tears threatening to escape. Until and unless he said those words and meant them, she wouldn’t marry him. Baby or no baby. It saddened her. She had hoped

he had fallen in love with her as she had with him. Even if he had, he wouldn't admit it.

"It's okay, Riley. Let's just go to sleep. I'm tired." She rolled back to her side and closed her eyes, hoping for sleep.

* * * *

He waited until she was fast asleep, her little snores amusing him. Riley carefully disentangled himself from her arms and slipped out of bed. Grabbing his jeans, he pulled them on and padded quietly into the living room to stare out the window. His inner clock said it was around two in the morning, the night outside slowly heading toward the dawn.

She was everything he remembered her to be. He feared that once he returned he would have made some part of her up in his head. Instead, he found her even more attractive than he remembered—her body and her soul. The fact that she now carried his baby beneath her breast only added to his love for her. That thought stilled him. Yes, he loved her. It was the only answer for how he felt around her.

Riley swallowed hard and attempted to clear his mind. When had he fallen in love? Perhaps he'd known it all along and that was the reason he'd come back. All he knew for certain was that he wanted her next to him forever. Something about her drew him close to her and activated some instinct within him to protect and care for her. Keeping her safe and happy seemed the most important thing in the world to him now. Not riding, not traveling, not anything but being with her.

There were so many things he needed to do now. First and foremost was finding a job so he could provide for her. He had no doubt that she would always make more money than he did if she continued to work, but he would work and make things as easy for her as possible. He'd work two jobs if she wanted to stay home with the

baby. That wasn't even an issue. All that mattered was that she was happy.

The next thing on his list would be reading those damn baby books. He needed to be sure she was telling the truth on certain things. He grinned. He needed to know what kind of food she should eat and evidently, about sex. She seemed to think there wasn't anything they couldn't do. He wanted to know for sure.

He remained standing in the living room, looking out the window for several more long minutes, then sighed and returned to the bedroom and the arms of the woman he loved.

Chapter Nineteen

“Easy, baby.” Riley held Jenna’s hair back from her face as she threw up.

She’d awakened him by jumping out of bed and racing to the bathroom. He’d instantly known what the problem was and joined her. The sight of her being so violently ill clawed at him. He’d done this to her. Slamming the door shut on that thought, Riley grabbed a cloth and moistened it before wiping her face once she’d stopped heaving.

“God, I hate this part,” she grumbled, holding the wet cloth to her mouth.

“How much longer till it’s gone?” Riley asked as he crouched next to her on the bathroom floor.

“It depends on the woman, according to the doctor. In some women it lasts longer than others. I’m crossing my fingers that mine will be over with soon.”

“Is there anything that makes it better?”

“Not really,” she said. “Sometimes, if I can get some crackers inside of me before it starts, I’m okay.”

“Then why don’t you have them sitting by your bed?” he demanded.

“I forget at night and don’t feel well enough after being sick to bother with it.” She started to stand up.

Riley lifted her in his arms instead and carried her back to the bed. He tucked her back under the covers and pulled on his jeans again.

“I’m going to go get some crackers so they will be there in the morning. You get some more rest.”

Jenna merely nodded her head and closed her eyes. He smiled then frowned. He didn't like to see her sick like that. Something had to be done about it. He walked into the kitchen and searched until he came up with a half sleeve of crackers. He sat them on the bar to put by her bed later once she was up again.

Coffee was his next order of business. Hot, black coffee would help clear his head. Nothing like getting up at a dead run to knock you for a loop. He hadn't done that since being in the army. Funny that something he'd learned how to do in the army would help him in real life. Riley waited while the coffee made and busied himself gathering the ingredients for an omelet when Jenna got up.

He found her baby book on the coffee table and carried it into the kitchen to read. He noticed there were several pages marked and decided to read those first since they were obviously important to Jenna. Two cups of coffee and nearly two hours later, he put down the book and rubbed his belly. Now he knew why women had morning sickness. Some of the things he had read about were interesting and some downright scary.

"What are you doing?" Jenna asked, standing in the doorway in nothing but a T-shirt and panties.

He smiled and walked over to kiss her. She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him back. He could easily get use to this.

"I'm finding out what is going on inside that delicious body of yours," he said with a wink.

"I'm hungry." Jenna grinned at him. "Does it tell you in there that you are supposed to feed me?"

Riley laughed and kissed her on the forehead. "It does indeed. Why don't you go get a shower, and I'll fix you an omelet. How does that sound?"

"Yummy." She squeezed his ass then turned and walked back toward the bedroom.

Riley spied the crackers on the island counter top. He took them to the bedroom and placed them on the bedside table. He would wake

her up a little before six each morning and feed her a couple of crackers. The books seemed to think it would stop the nausea. He'd try anything to get her past that part.

By the time they finished breakfast, Jenna was ready to go shopping. He made sure she ate over half the omelet and drank her milk and OJ. She had balked at the juice but did manage to sip half the little glass. He accepted that it was the best she could do and quickly cleaned up the kitchen while she gathered her purse and a light sweater. The mornings were much cooler now with winter so close.

About the time they were ready to leave, the phone rang. Riley grabbed it and handed it to Jenna. It turned out to be Tina. They chatted for a few minutes then hung up.

"Tina wants us to come over there for dinner tonight. Is that okay with you?" she asked.

"As long as you're up to it. We'll see how you feel after shopping." Riley wasn't promising anything until he knew how she did during the day.

She seemed to have plenty of energy to shop, though she did let him do all the lifting. They started off at a department store where he insisted she buy a couple of pairs of jeans that fit her.

"The ones you're wearing are only staying up because of the belt. Without it, they would be around your ankles," he fussed.

"I would think you would like the easy access," she teased.

He just shook his head and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "I read what the book said about pregnant women being horny all the time, and it isn't supposed to start until later in the pregnancy." He smirked at her.

"Well, mine started early," she pouted and turned away to go try on the jeans.

Riley laughed and waited patiently as she tried on several pairs of jeans until she found two pair that fit her too-skinny figure. He would be much happier when she put on some weight. The sight of her hip

bones poking out worried him. Some guys might like their women thin as a rake, but he didn't. He liked them soft with a little padding on them.

After unloading the groceries from the car, Riley sent Jenna to deal with her other purchases while he put them away. He didn't want her handling the heavy stuff or climbing on a stool to put things up on shelves. That was for him to handle. He rolled up the plastic bags and shoved them in the bag sock on the pantry door. When he turned around, it was to find Jenna waiting for him with a naughty look in her eyes.

"I'm ready for a nap," she said.

Riley lifted an eyebrow at her and shook his head. "You're up to something."

"No I'm not. I just want to take a little nap with you."

"I tell you what," he began. "You eat a snack for me, and I'll lie down with you for awhile."

She frowned at him but nodded. He grabbed an apple and peeled it before slicing it up and handing it to her in a bowl. She scowled and took a bite. She hummed and took another bite. He grinned. She hadn't realized she was hungry. Maybe all she needed was a little encouragement to eat and gain weight. He hoped it would be that simple. He settled her on the couch with her feet in his lap and fed her the sliced apple. She managed to eat the entire apple minus one slice she insisted on feeding him.

He put the bowl on the coffee table then picked up one of her feet in his hands and began massaging it. She moaned her appreciation. Riley grinned and moved up her leg before changing feet and having a go at the other one. When he finished, he noticed she was sound asleep. He chuckled to himself and gathered her in his arms to carry her to bed. She needed to be comfortable, and the couch was not comfortable in the least as far as he was concerned.

She stirred when he laid her on the bed but didn't argue. She grabbed hold of his shirt in an effort to keep him from leaving.

“I’m not going anywhere. Let go so I can get in beside you, baby.”

She released her hold on his shirt and gazed with sleep-heavy eyes into his. “Don’t leave me, okay?”

“I’m not. Go back to sleep.” He climbed in beside her and pulled her into his arms.

Once her light snores told him she was asleep, he could have eased from her arms, but he’d promised he wouldn’t leave her. He figured that had been a subconscious plea that he not leave her alone again. He didn’t plan on it. He planned to marry her and raise their child together. Right now, she wouldn’t marry him. Why? He’d come back to her on his own. He hadn’t known about the baby until after he’d gotten back. Sighing, he huffed out a quiet breath. There was no telling what went on inside a woman’s mind and especially a pregnant woman according to the book. Maybe he needed to get another book to double-check some of the things he was reading.

Riley nearly laughed out loud. What would Logan say to him once he found out he was reading pregnancy books? He’d give him shit, that’s what he would do. Maybe he could talk Jenna into not saying anything. Glancing at her face next to his shoulder tightened his gut. She was his. Despite her balking at marrying him, she was all his. He’d get her to marry him one way or another. She belonged with him.

At some point, Riley had fallen asleep since the clock on the bedside table said four in the afternoon. He needed to wake Jenna up so she could get ready to go to Tina and Logan’s house. He would have to check, but he was pretty sure Logan had called while he’d been sleeping. His phone had vibrated at some point, but he’d ignored it.

Riley leaned over and gently kissed Jenna on the lips. Then he moved down her jaw to her ear. When he sucked her earlobe into his mouth, she squinched her neck and giggled.

“What, my kisses are funny now?”

“They are when you tickle me. Your beard is ticklish.”

He rubbed a hand over his chin and realized he hadn’t shaved in a couple of days now. Time for a razor. His head probably needed it, too.

“You ready to get up, sleeping beauty? It’s a little after four.” Riley bit her chin.

“Yeah, I better. I need to change clothes to go to Tina’s,” she said, stretching.

“I’m going to take a shower and shave. If you’ll hang around until I get out, I’ll help you dress.”

“I don’t need help dressing, yet.” She laughed. “When I’m as big as an elephant, I will probably need help with my shoes then.”

“I’ll always enjoy dressing you...and undressing you.” He growled in a low voice.

Jenna sat up and shook her head at him. He sat up next to her and turned her head for a kiss. He took his time and explored her mouth with his, paying extra attention to her lips. He nipped at them then licked them before delving inside to dance with her tongue. When he pulled back, her eyes had gone dark with desire.

“I hate it when you do that.”

“Do what?” he asked with a knowing grin.

“Get me all hot and bothered and then stop.”

“It’s a promise of more to come after we get home tonight. I figure that way you won’t want to stay all night.” He ducked when she grabbed a pillow and hit him with it.

Laughing, Riley escaped to the bathroom. He stopped and stared at himself in the mirror. He was laughing and teasing, something he couldn’t ever remember doing before. Something about Jenna lightened his heart. He would love her for that alone.

* * * *

Jenna stretched and smiled at the way Riley had hightailed it to the bathroom. If she hadn't been looking forward to talking with Tina again, she would have gone in there and shown him some shower love, but that would lead them into another bout in bed, and they would be late or miss the dinner entirely. She needed to talk to her friend.

Riley was everything she wanted in a man. He was strong, serious when needed, and playful when provoked. He took care of her, making sure she had what she needed despite her grumbling. He didn't take things personally when she fussed, and he went out of his way not to hurt her. After years of abusive men in her life, this amazed her the most. He didn't want to cause her the least bit of pain.

But did he love her? Could she live with him even if he didn't love her? He did everything and said everything right except for those three simple words. I love you. Jenna needed to think about it long and hard. It took two to make a marriage work, and with a baby starting out, it would be harder than most new marriages. Was she really considering marrying him even if he didn't love her? Maybe.

The sound of the shower turning off had her looking hastily at the clock. She'd been daydreaming for nearly thirty minutes. She jumped out of bed and raced for the closet to find something to put on. She would wear a pair of her new jeans and maybe the gypsy blouse. It wouldn't matter if it were a little bigger. Besides, despite having lost weight, her boobs were larger and a little more sensitive, too, she realized.

She had just gotten her jeans on and the blouse over her head when Riley walked out of the bathroom totally nude and looking completely edible. She sighed and couldn't help licking her lips. Though he'd dried off, there was a drop of water here and there that raced down his smooth skin. She ached to lick a path up his bare chest to nip at his nipples. Jenna took a step toward him. Something must have shown in her eyes because he grinned and put up both hands to ward her off.

“Whoa, baby. I need to get dressed, and you don’t look like you’re going to let me.”

“Just one lick. Please?” she pleaded.

He narrowed his eyes. “Where?”

“Your chest.”

“One lick,” he said with a growl.

Jenna crossed to him and put her hands on his shoulders before leaning in and licked a line from one nipple to the other. She stopped only to suck at the nipple until he was holding her pressed to his chest. She grinned. She would be able to control him if need be.

He pulled her away from him and wagged a finger at her nose.

“Uh, uh, uh. cheater.” He pushed her gently away and grabbed clothes from his pack.

It hit her then that he needed room in her dresser and chest to put his things. Hell, he needed things to put there. She doubted he had more than three changes of clothes to his name. The thought made her a little sad. Riley must have noticed her frown because he walked over and put his arms around her. She snuggled into him and rested her head against his chest. She pulled lightly on his chest hair.

“What, baby?” he asked.

“There’s plenty of room in the chest of drawers for your clothes. Do you have anything anywhere else that you need to bring here?”

He stilled around her. She feared she’d said something she shouldn’t have.

“Are you saying I can move in with you?” he asked, his voice quiet.

“Of course you can. I thought you already knew that.”

“I wasn’t sure what you wanted after you said you wouldn’t marry me.”

“I want you here with me. I...I love you, Riley. I just can’t marry you right now. You weren’t expecting to have to deal with a baby, and that’s the only reason you asked me to marry you right now.

Maybe later, if you still feel the same way..." She let it trail off then pulled out of his arms.

"I'm going to read while you finish getting dressed. Tina wanted us to come over anytime around six, so whenever you're ready, I am." She walked out of the room and escaped to the living room.

So much for playing it cool and not pushing him, Jenna thought. She'd screwed that up. What would she do if he refused to wait around for her to make up her mind about marrying him? What if he had some things at another woman's place that he needed to go get? The thought of another woman in his life pumped up her blood pressure until she realized she was gritting her teeth and curling her nails into her hands. She drew in one deep breath after another until she had calmed down. Whatever he did before her, before now, didn't matter. All that mattered now was what came after. But she didn't feel very convinced.

The sound of Riley walking into the room stirred her from her musings. He stopped and frowned down at her.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking about something at work."

His lips thinned, but he didn't challenge her on it. Instead, he pulled her to her feet. Warm arms wrapped around her, and he settled his chin on her head.

"Let's run by the liquor store and get a bottle of wine to take with us. Do you mind taking your car?"

"Of course not. I have a spare pair of keys I'll give you so you can drive it whenever you want to." She pulled from his arms to hunt for the spare keys in the kitchen drawer.

She also grabbed the spare house key. They would need to get another made to have in case of emergencies. She returned and handed them to him. He looked deep into her eyes before his hand closed over the keys in her palm. He pulled out his bike key and slipped them all on the same key ring. Something inside her clicked when he shoved the keys into his pocket. It felt like a piece of her

heart fastening in place. She refused to dwell on it. Instead, she grabbed his arm and tugged on him.

“Come on, let’s go. I’m getting hungry.”

It was evidently all she would ever need to say to get him in gear. He fairly carried her outside and into the car. She laughed when he fastened the seatbelt for her.

“I can do that myself, you know.”

“Humor me,” was all he said as he backed out of the drive.

They stopped by a liquor store, and Riley bought a bottle of white zinfandel as well as a sparkling grape juice for her since she couldn’t indulge in alcohol. Then he drove them across town to Tina and Logan’s house.

Tina still kept her house next door, but they were making plans to sell it soon. It was larger than her little place. She only had two bedrooms, but Tina’s had four. Maybe she should think about selling hers and buying Tina’s. She kept that thought to herself for the time being. She would talk to Riley about it after she discussed it with Tina. She wasn’t sure how Riley would feel about living next door to them. She would love being so close to her best friend, but there was no telling how men thought.

The moment they pulled into the drive, Tina was running from the house to open Jenna’s door. Logan was right behind her and exchanged a quizzical look with Riley. Jenna smiled. They probably wondered why they would be so happy to see each other when they’d only been together the day before. So much had happened, though, since then. They would have a lot to talk about.

“I wasn’t sure when you would come. I know you take a nap in the afternoons,” Tina was saying.

“I took it earlier today since I knew I was coming here for dinner.” She turned to grab the bag from the seat only to find Riley already had it.

“I’ve got it. I’ll go put it in the fridge,” he said.

“We brought wine and some grape juice for me,” she explained to Tina.

“Goodness, I hadn’t even thought about that. I have Diet Coke and milk. I forgot you wouldn’t be able to drink beer or wine coolers.” Tina looked worried.

“Riley thought about it and bought the grape juice for me. I’ll be fine.”

Jenna followed Tina inside. They relaxed on the couch as the men disappeared into the kitchen. She could hear them talking seriously about something, but they were too far away for her to eavesdrop. Not that she would of course. She looked over at Tina and realized they were both trying to do the same thing and burst out laughing. Tina grinned, as well.

“They’ll go outside in a minute to work on the grill then we can talk,” Tina said.

Sure enough, the men reemerged from the kitchen with beers in their hands and slipped outside through the sliding glass door.

“Now, spill it. What’s going on?” Tina asked.

Chapter Twenty

“So she’s still refusing to marry you?” Logan leaned back against the picnic table and took a sip of his beer.

“Yeah. She seems fine with my living with her but balks at making it official. I don’t get it.”

“What exactly did she say?”

“That I wouldn’t have asked her to marry her if she hadn’t been pregnant. You know that isn’t true. I was planning on asking her as soon as I found a job.” Riley shook his head.

“Well, start small. Move in and get her so hung up on you that she can’t say no.” Logan’s idea was almost funny.

“Somehow, I don’t think that’s going to help. She told me she loved me earlier. That’s as good as it gets.” He lifted the beer to his mouth.

“Yeah, it is.” Logan was silent for several minutes then a thought seemed to occur to him. He stood up and looked Riley straight in the eye.

“Have you told her you love her yet?”

“Huh?” Riley just looked at him, his beer temporarily forgotten.

“She’s told you she loves you. Have you told her you love her?”

“Well, of course I have. I told her I couldn’t live without her.” Riley shoved his hands in his pockets, uncomfortable with the turn of conversation between him and Logan.

“It’s not the same thing. You need to tell her, use the words.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope. I’m serious. Tina didn’t believe me at first because I told her sooner than she expected me to. You haven’t said them soon enough. You need to tell her.” Logan put his hands on his hips.

“Okay. I’ll tell her right now and get it over with.”

Logan grabbed him before he could walk inside. “No you don’t. This is something private. You tell her when you get her back home. Make it romantic.”

“I’ll lose my nerve, man. Telling her I love her will be tough enough. Thinking about telling her the rest of the night is going to be pure hell.”

Logan just laughed and shook his head. “You don’t have a clue what all is going to happen in the next few months, and you’re nervous about telling the woman you love that you love her? Man, you’re twisted.”

Riley grinned. “Yeah, guess I am.”

Logan lifted the lid of the grill and started arranging the grates.

“So, what about you and Tina? Are you getting married any time soon?” Riley asked.

“She wants to wait until the first of December. I’d rather go ahead and get it over with, but that’s a no-no with women. You don’t want to ‘get it over with’ because that sounds like you really don’t want to get married at all. Don’t make that mistake with Jenna.”

Riley grinned. Evidently, poor Logan had already learned a thing or two the hard way. He’d use all the help he could get from his friend.

“So what are you planning to do about Tina’s house?”

“She plans to sell it eventually. I think she wants to wait until after the wedding to actually put it on the market. I guess she’s nervous about it actually happening.” Logan closed the grill.

“I was thinking about maybe buying it and moving Jenna over closer.” Riley didn’t look at Logan when he said it.

“No shit! That would be great. The girls would be happier than pigs in a mud bath.”

"I never could figure out where you got your sayings, but I really doubt they would like to hear that you compared them to pigs." Riley chuckled.

"And don't you go telling them, either." Logan pushed the electric start on the grill, and a whoosh could be heard as the burners fired up.

"So you honestly think it would be a good idea?" Riley asked.

"I sure as hell like it. You and I can hide when they go on the war path."

"So, let me talk to Jenna about it before you say anything to Tina. If she isn't planning to put it on the market till December, I have some time to talk Jenna into it. The house she has now is nice but too small for a family."

"I doubt you're going to have to do much to convince Jenna to move next door to her best friend," Logan said.

"So when are you and Tina going to have a baby?"

Logan spewed out a mouthful of beer. Wiping his arm across his mouth, he stared at Riley as if he were the son of Satan.

"What? You're cursing me now?" Logan blurted out.

"Hey, I just think it would be nice if my little guy has your little guy to play with," Riley said without looking at Logan.

If he did, he would end up laughing his ass off. He looked over at Logan. The other man was sheet white. He'd only meant it as a joke, but come to think of it, it would be nice if their kids grew up together. Living next door to each other would help that.

"Some friend you are, wishing something like that on me. I mean, in a couple of years maybe, but right now?"

"You're not getting any younger. You better think about how you're going to handle a teenager when you're fifty years old."

Logan wiped his eyes with one hand. "Good point."

* * * *

“He still wants me to marry him. I told him maybe later but not right now. I still think the only reason he even asked is because I’m pregnant,” Jenna said.

Tina shook her head and sighed. “I really think you’re wrong about that. I think he loves you. He looks at you as if he can’t stand the thought of losing you. He’s crazy about you, Jenna.”

“Being crazy about me is not the same thing as loving me.” Jenna sighed and leaned back against the back of the couch. “I should be happy and marry him. He treats me like a queen. He doesn’t hit me, and he is unbelievable in bed.”

Tina died out laughing. “You’ll have to tell me more about the ‘good in bed’ part later. If you want the words, then you should hold out for the words. I made Logan tell me. I knew he did in my heart, but I needed to hear him say it.”

“He’s going to drive me crazy, though, about eating. He keeps trying to push food down my throat,” Jenna complained.

“Someone needs to worry about your eating. I sure did. You’ve lost so much weight, Jenna. You really look ill.” Tina winced after she said it.

Jenna frowned. “Gee, thanks for the encouraging words, girlfriend.”

“You know what I mean. By the way, you must have gone shopping ’cause those jeans look good on you.”

“Yeah, Riley insisted I have some that fit. It is more comfortable than all that material bunched up around my waist.”

“How is the morning sickness?” Tina asked.

“Still there. Not any better really. The doctor said it should be getting better soon. I sure hope so. I’m tired of puking my guts up every morning,” Jenna said.

“Didn’t the crackers help you some?”

“When I wake up early enough to eat one, it works fine, but lately, I haven’t woken up before I needed to be in the bathroom. I guess I could set an alarm or something. Sheesh, how pitiful is that?”

"If it would help, I wouldn't care how bad it sounds.

"How about something to drink?" Tina asked, standing up.

"I'll take a Diet Coke," Jenna said.

"Don't move. I'll be right back."

"Hey. Do you have anything planned tomorrow?" Jenna asked.

"Not really. What did you need?" Tina called from the other room.

"I want to buy Riley some things. He doesn't have anything but a few changes of clothes. I don't know if he has some somewhere else, but..." She let it trail off.

Jenna wasn't sure she wanted to confess her worry that Riley might have some at another woman's house somewhere. She really didn't want him to go back and get them if he did.

"You don't want him to leave and go get them. I don't blame you. Sure, we can go do that. Do you know his sizes? If not, you need to check when he is in the shower or something," Tina advised as she handed the can of Diet Coke to her.

"I already did. Do you think he's going to get pissed at me for doing it?" Jenna asked.

"Probably, but he'll get over it. Most men could care less about clothes, so once he gets it out of his system that you bought him stuff, he'll forget about them."

"There's something else I wanted to talk to you about." Jenna took a sip of the Diet Coke.

"Sure." Tina eased down on the couch with her wine cooler.

"Have you decided yet if you're going to sell your house?"

"Yeah, I plan to sell it. I was thinking about waiting till after the wedding, but now I'm not so sure about waiting that long."

"You still have your heart set on a December wedding?" Jenna teased.

"Yeah, I don't know why, but I've always wanted to get married then." She smiled then grinned an evil smile. "We could make it a double wedding, you know."

“Bite your tongue.” Jenna laughed. “Even if he were to tell me he loved me tonight, I’m not getting married with you. That’s your special time.”

“It would be even better if you were getting married with me,” Tina pleaded.

“No.”

Tina sighed and shook her head. “Okay, okay. So what were you wanting to talk about?”

“How would you feel about selling your house to me and Riley?” Jenna waited, holding her breath.

“You’re kidding, right? I would love for you two to move next door to us!” Tina jumped up and wrapped her arms around Jenna, nearly spilling her drink all over them both.

“Well, I guess that tells me how you really feel.” Jenna laughed.

“You can have it whenever you want it. I can move my stuff out in a couple of days.”

“No, don’t do that yet. I need to talk to Riley about it. I just wanted to know how you felt about it before I brought it up. I don’t know how he’ll feel about it. He might not want to live next door to Logan. Men can be weird,” Jenna said.

“You’re telling me, especially when you start talking feelings. You know and I know that Logan and Riley love each other, but tell them that and you’ve broken some sort of man rule.” Tina shook her head.

Jenna nearly burst out laughing at that. She couldn’t imagine Riley confessing his love for her much less Logan. Maybe she was asking too much of the man. He had lived on the streets for most of his life when not in the army. Revealing his feelings would come hard for him, Jenna knew. If she waited on him to tell her he loved her, she might be waiting the rest of her life with a man like Riley. It didn’t mean he was a bad man or that he cared any less for her. It just meant he didn’t express his feelings well. It gave Jenna something else to think about.

“So, let’s get together after work one night and talk about it. The house I mean,” she qualified.

Jenna nodded absently, still thinking about Riley telling her he loved her. He was there and hadn’t run off when he found out she was pregnant. That was saying a lot for a man like him. Jenna drew in a deep breath. Maybe she was asking too much of him. She loved him, and he treated her like gold. What more should she demand?

“I’ll talk to my real estate agent and see what needs to be done first,” Tina continued.

“Don’t go to any great lengths right now. I need to talk to Riley about it and see how he feels about it. I’ll talk to you more about it next week,” Jenna tried again.

“You just wait. He’ll be great with it. If I’d have realized you might want to move, I would have already offered the house to you, but I thought you loved that little house,” Tina complained.

“I do love it, but I have to be practical. Even if Riley wasn’t in the picture, I’d need more room with a child on the way. Besides, there’s practically no yard at that house, and it’s not even fenced in.”

“Those are good points. I guess when I look at getting pregnant, I need to think about things like that, too.” Tina was quiet for a little while, sipping her wine cooler.

Jenna wondered if she were seriously thinking about having a baby. It would really be wonderful if their children could grow up together. They’d always have a friend that way. By the dreamy look on Tina’s face, she might not have to wish too hard, Jenna thought.

“What are you girls doing in here?” Logan asked, startling them both.

“Hey, baby. Are Diet Cokes safe for you to be drinking?” Riley asked, a worried look on his face.

“They are fine if I don’t drink too many of them,” Jenna assured him.

Tina and Jenna exchanged looks. She was sure Tina was thinking how cute it was that Riley was so concerned about what she had to

drink. “Just wait till you’re pregnant,” she mouthed to the other woman. Tina just grinned.

The four of them relaxed in the living room after dinner, talking about everything from bikes to baby beds. Mostly, the women talked about the things related to babies. Jenna didn’t grunt without Riley wanting to know if she was okay, or if he could get her anything. It wasn’t lost on Logan or Tina, either. They laughed about it, much to Riley’s consternation. Jenna yawned and noticed that it was close to one in the morning.

“You know I hate to break this up, but I’m really tired.”

Instantly, Riley was on his feet. “I’m sorry, baby. I didn’t think about you being tired. I’ll get you home.”

“Jenna, I’m so glad you two came over tonight. I’ll talk to you tomorrow, okay?” Tina said.

“Don’t call before noon,” Riley said.

Logan laughed. “Don’t worry. If she manages to wake up that early, I’ll keep her busy.”

Tina huffed out an outraged growl and hit him in the arm. “Bastard.”

Jenna laughed and leaned back against Riley. This was what she longed for, family and friends to spend time with and grow old with. She couldn’t imagine life without Tina and Logan as her friends. She didn’t want to even contemplate a life without Riley. Maybe she should rethink her need for the words. Maybe they didn’t matter that much after all. Words were easy to say and not mean. Actions spoke much louder than words.

* * * *

Sunday morning around six, Riley woke and immediately checked on Jenna. Finding her asleep, he slipped out of the bed and around to pull out a couple of crackers from the package on the bedside table.

Then he leaned in and kissed her gently on the lips. She moaned and woke up with a confused expression on her face at first.

“Hmm? Is something wrong?” she asked, groggy with sleep.

“No, baby, I want you to eat a couple of crackers, and let’s see if we can outsmart that ole morning sickness guy.” He held out a cracker to her mouth.

He watched as Jenna ate the first cracker and then the second. He gave her the glass of water to wash it down and then settled her back in bed. As soon as she closed her eyes again, he visited the bathroom then climbed back in bed to curl around her. She hummed her appreciation and promptly fell back asleep.

Riley dozed off and on for the next few hours, relieved as time went by and she didn’t get up sick to her stomach. Maybe there was something to the crackers first thing. He could definitely take care of that for her.

“Riley?”

He started when she called his name. He hadn’t realized she woken up.

“Yeah, baby?” He leaned up on one elbow to look down into her upturned face.

“I’ll marry you.”

“What did you say?” He wasn’t sure he had heard her correctly.

“I’ll marry you. If you’ll still have me?”

She sounded so unsure. It tightened something around his heart to hear her sounding insecure in how he felt about her. Riley pulled her into his arms and kissed her as if he’d never get enough of her. When he finally pulled back, they were both panting.

“Jenna, darling. I love you. I love you more than anything else in this world.”

Riley had planned to get on his knees and tell her that. He’d thought long and hard about it while he’d watched her sleep that morning. Now that he’d said it, he wondered why he’d waited so long to do it.

“Do you really? Love me, I mean?” Jenna’s eyes were full of tears.

“Yes, baby. I love you. I’ve loved you since the first time I saw you at Tina’s house sitting on the deck. I just didn’t realize what it was till I had left. I’m so sorry I left you like that. I thought it was the right thing to do.”

“Just don’t ever leave me again and I’ll forgive you,” Jenna said.

“How would you feel about living next door to Tina and Logan?” Riley asked. Hell, he was on a roll. He might as well go for broke.

Jenna started laughing and didn’t act as if she were going to stop.

“What’s so funny?” he asked, a little put out.

“I was trying to figure out how to ask you if you’d mind living next door to them,” Jenna confessed.

“Then you like the idea?”

“I love the idea. Then our children can grow up together.”

“Well, when they decide to have children,” Riley said with a grin.

“Oh, I think there will be children in their future sooner than they think,” Jenna said with a smirk.

“I for one would love to see Logan’s face when Tina tells him she’s pregnant,” Riley confessed.

“I’ll talk to Tina about the house next week at work. We normally eat lunch together anyway.”

“Am I going to have to limit the time you girls have together?” Riley asked with a stern look.

“You just try it, buddy.”

“Hey, all I have to do is touch you like this.” He demonstrated with a finger to her clit. “And you’ll do whatever I ask.”

Jenna moaned and reached out to take his cock into her hand.

“And all I have to do is hold this and you’ll follow me around anywhere I go,” Jenna countered.

“Hmmm, what were we fussing over?” Riley asked.

“I don’t know,” Jenna said as he circled her clit with his finger.

“We can continue the conversation later,” Riley said and groaned when she tightened her grip on him.

He leaned in and kissed her before she could say anything else. He wanted her and would go on wanting her for the rest of his life. When she wrapped her arms around him, he knew he’d come home. Home was in her arms.

THE END

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Marla Monroe lives in the southern part of the United States. She writes sexy romance from the heart and often puts a twist of suspense in her books. She is a nurse and works in a busy hospital, but finds plenty of time to follow her two passions, reading and writing. You can find her in a book store or a library at any given time when she's not at work or writing. Marla would love for you to visit her at her blog at themarlamonroe.blogspot.com and leave a comment.

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