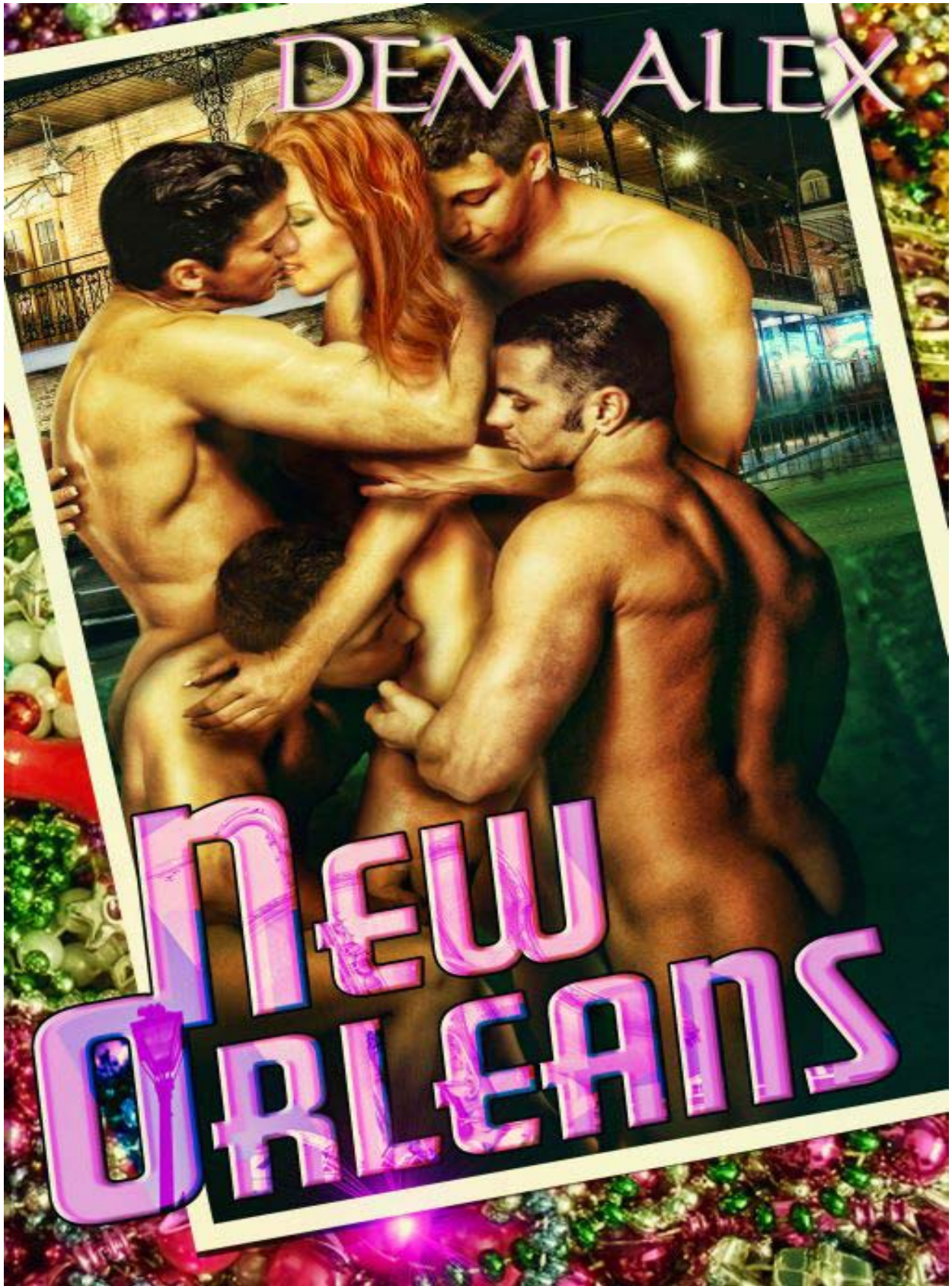


DEMI ALEX



IN NEW ORLEANS

# *New Orleans*

*A Moresome Tale*

By Demi Alex

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

*For Lillian,  
the boys godmother,  
with a blush on the cheeks and lowered lashes.*

## *Chapter One*

Housing. Work. A man.

Immediate needs to be met, and not necessarily in that order.

Huddling on a wrought iron bench, with three days of the Picayune and the latest edition of the Gambit folded on my lap, I should have been wary of sitting amidst the very unique personalities populating Jackson Square. Strangely, I was too comfortable for an out-of-towner. The fact was that I needed to start over and this historic city was my launching pad.

I searched the classified section. I wasn't taking any chances at missing the right thing, so I perused the repetitive listings and crossed out each of the ads that hadn't panned out—one at a time. By the end of the week, I needed to either find a job or invest in a vacant spot I could assume the rent on and start a business of my own.

Sighing, I acknowledged that I had to do it quick or I had to move on. I had no connections in the city and that wouldn't make a new venture easy. But nothing in my life had come easy, and blowing through the remainder of my cash wasn't an option, so I put on my big girl panties and searched the damn papers for an opportunity.

In retrospect, last week had been the lowest point of my adult life. Losing the job I'd worked so hard at all these years had been the final nail in the coffin. I'd rationalized packing my bags, and boy did I have baggage, and moving to a place where I knew no one. I knew the winters would be better in the South and there was absolutely nothing to keep me up North.

But I have to question my sanity. I mean, who makes life-altering decisions based on a fortune cookie?

Obviously, I did.

Let destiny be your guide.

Yeah, some guide. Closing my eyes, I had tossed the crumpled fortune on the newspaper travel map that was lying upon my messy coffee table. The lucky winner? The Big Easy. Woot-woot! The universe didn't disappoint. The colorful atmosphere would ignite my artistic inspiration and Jazz had always moved my soul. Besides, considering all the devastation this beautiful old city had endured recently, opportunities for hardworking people had to be available in New Orleans.

But days later, Destiny hadn't showed her face. I did my part and arrived as instructed, but I was still jobless and living in a hotel, going through my savings and severance pay in order to follow my freaking destiny. Not that I minded hanging out at the hotel's swanky carousel bar every evening, nor did I mind the plush down pillows on the king bed, but the dwindling of my funds was a burden that outweighed creature comforts.

My primary focus was to find an acceptable apartment and suitable employment to supplement my "starving artist" existence, so I pounded the bead-laden sidewalks, charted the Big Easy's tastiest muffaletta and spiciest jambalaya, knocking on every colorful door till my feet ached and my knuckles were raw.

On day three, I gave up a little after twelve, changed into shorts and flip-flops and headed to the riverfront for the afternoon. It would be most prudent to search in the early evening, when the crowds would push into the establishments and the managers would be reminded of the need for extra experienced hands. It's not like any of the people advertising for help were in before four or five, so I'd basically wasted my time, as I'd done the previous day trying to reach them by the phone numbers in the ads.

In the meantime, I was doing the local thing of minimizing all activities while the sun was high in the sky. An iced café au lait and some beignets to soothe my nerves and recharge my spirit.

“Come here, child.” A woman in a flowing purple skirt coiled her index finger and smiled. “We need to talk.”

“Excuse me?” I checked over my shoulder. Nobody. Glanced back at her. She was looking at and speaking directly to me. I brought my hand to my chest in a silent question.

“You heard correctly, Blue Eyes. Come here.”

Blue Eyes? Warmth filled my chest and replaced the nervousness that had fluttered through me with her invitation. I was instantly drawn to the older woman. Grammy Celine used to call me Blue Eyes. She’d always said that mom had chosen to name me Lilly because of the color of my eyes—not a typical light blue, but a deep violet blue, like the exotic water lilies in Egypt.

“Girly, you’ve taken your sweet time getting here. Don’t dilly-dally any longer.” Scooting her rather sizable behind, she patted the bench and insisted I sit. “Come to Dalia. We have so much to chat about.”

“Thank you, Dalia.” I sat and let her take my hand in both of hers. “What would you like to talk about?”

“Your destiny, child.”

Chills scurried down my spine and tiny goose bumps mapped the freckles on my skin. My destiny? Again?

It had to be a joke. First, the fortune cookie, and now a strange woman was talking about my destiny. What’s next? Examining the destiny line in the center of my palm?

“Wipe that frown off your face.” Dalia smoothed her craggy fingers over my forehead. “Wrinkles aren’t becoming, and trust me, one day they will catch up with you. How many years have you seen?”

It took me a moment to translate her old world terminology to modern English, but I found the eccentric out-of-a-box pink-haired lady very comforting, in spite of her peculiar ways. Wearing a large straw hat with a trailing lace ribbon, a simple white cotton shirt and a flowing purple skirt, she looked like a woman who could be pictured on a postcard with a tropical bird on her shoulder—even if she was only tossing crumbs at the pigeons around her feet. The

multicolored bangles on her wrist chimed as she moved her hands, and her earrings reflected the glow of the afternoon sun. She was definitely intriguing.

“I’m twenty-nine,” I replied, wondering about Dalia’s age.

“I have a few years on you.” She smiled and dropped her hand over mine again. “Listen carefully and do not doubt my words. I have seen you in the cards. I have seen what is ahead for you if you remain honest to your heart. So, do not question your fate. Accept and embrace it.”

“I do,” I whispered, confused and slightly dazed. Dalia’s voice had a mesmerizing quality and I couldn’t walk away if I wanted to. But, I didn’t want to leave. I remained seated to indulge the old lady and hear more of her so-called advice.

“Walk up the street on the north side of the square. When you come to Bourbon, make a right and continue past all the tourist hoopla. You will know when you reach your destination.” Her finger poked at my chest. “In here. Listen and hear.”

She was ancient and probably had more than a few screws loose, but I wasn’t about to hurt her feelings and tell her how nutty it all sounded. Besides, how could I judge her? I’d made life choices based on a fortune cookie. There was no harm in playing along with her.

“Thank you.” I stood and collected my newspapers.

“Leave those. You don’t need them.” She snatched the papers from my hands and smacked my rear with them. “Go. Your family is waiting.”

Damn. I rubbed my palm over the tight knot that formed between my breasts and constricted my breathing. Surely it was unintentional, but Dalia had delivered a stake through the heart.

I had no family. I’d buried my mother and my fiancé on the same day. A drunk driver had snatched them out of my life, and I hadn’t even had a chance to realize how their deaths changed my world and left me vulnerable to the greatest hurt imaginable. The days that followed had been surreal. I contacted my should-be in-laws, prepared my grandmother to bury her only daughter, changed the wedding canapés to funeral food, but at least the mortician had discounted their coffins for the double tragedy. It was too much to deal with, so I shut down my feelings and went through the physical motions to get through the burial service.



It was only a few weeks later that my grandmother left me as well, probably died from a broken heart over losing mom. And with grams' passing, I had no more family.

No family in New Orleans. No family any place in the world.

So what difference did it make where I lived? I chose New Orleans, or better yet, it chose me. I might stay, I might move on, but I had to start someplace I found invigorating. A place with rhythm and soul. The truth was that I was numb and dead on the inside. The past few years had been more than brutal for me, and it had been so difficult to get up in the mornings and smile. Making funeral arrangements for every person I had ever loved drained me and left me alone and lonely in sorrow.

What was the saying? Life is short.

Yeah, bumper stickers had never sounded more profound than they did in the past week. I was looking to the future, getting a fresh start, and reaching for my dreams. I wanted to do something that made me happy, something that would make blood pump through my veins again. Distracting myself with things and people I enjoyed, without the emotional attachments, I'd survive. I'd make it through the long days.

Once I got settled, I was going to paint in Jackson Square. Not for money, but for me. I couldn't wait to pour the colors on the canvas and cleanse my mind of all the unhappiness.

There was also the very real and simple issue of physical loneliness. Though my mind knew that my fiancé would have wanted me to find comfort and companionship again, I hadn't even been hugged since the funerals, much less contemplated a new lover. But New Orleans was crawling with eligible men who knew how to seduce a woman, and it was time to move on. I needed to be seduced.

"Hurry, Lilly." Dalia winked and smiled eagerly. "And seriously, wipe that concern off your face. Things may not be easy, but they are just what they should be." A strange aura of satisfaction settled over the old woman. She leaned back on the bench, clutched the papers to her chest, and dropped her eyelids. "Your men need you."

My men needed me.

I stifled a laugh. Shit, I needed my men. I had to get my mind going in the right direction, so I definitely needed a man to work off some of my pent-up frustration. Once upon a time, I'd

enjoyed an active sex life. So, it made perfect sense that I also missed men. I never considered myself a nympho or anything like that, but good sex was the best remedy for any ailment.

Prescription written. Sex. I had to fill it.

First objective: get laid.

Not by just anyone, but by the best find in New Orleans.

Target: tall, dark, and handsome.

A smooth talker.

I wasn't looking for a husband, just a good fuck.

Dropping my sunglasses onto the bridge of my nose, I hoisted my treasured leather backpack and its mess of contents onto my shoulder and set off on my mission.

I could have walked in the opposite direction from the one Dalia had suggested, but a stroll on Bourbon sounded pretty nice, and a cold beer from one of the bars sounded even nicer. I'd been out in the sun all afternoon and the heat had formed a sticky layer on my skin. I set out on a determined search for an irresistible man and a bit of air conditioning.

With emphatic insistence, the street pulled me forward. The deep reds of the brick, the peeling paint of the doors, and the black iron railings coaxed me toward a distinct destination. Even the eau d'alcool on the street from the night before, swirling around my ankles with each step I took further into the Quarter, soothed my worries. It was as if the streets of New Orleans had a life of their own and they embraced and welcomed my presence.

I belonged. With or without family, I really belonged.

Now, if only I could find a way to support myself and get a tiny space to call home before my money evaporated into the humid atmosphere.

Making a right on Bourbon Street, my shin collided with the wheel of a bicycle. My legs stopped, but my torso pivoted forward. The oblivious rider popped a wheelie and disappeared in a blur, but a stranger flashed across the sidewalk and caught me as my body folded over his forearm.

“Jackass!” My hero called to the rider’s back. He helped me stand straight while he apologized. “I should have seen that coming, ma’am. I’m so sorry. I was in a hurry and terribly distracted. I was on the way to—” He raised my chin with his thumb to look at my face. Pushing my hair back with the full span of his palm, his gaze locked on mine.

We stared at each other in stunned silence for a good ten seconds.

“I was on my way to find you,” he said at last.

Damn. He was fine. Gorgeous in fact. Add his confidence and ability to speak in such a polite, smooth tone to his dark good looks and any woman was a goner. Target in view.

“Sweetheart, you okay?” His chocolate-colored eyes gleamed with concern. “Should I call 9-1-1?”

“No,” I managed to whisper. “I’m not hurt.” But I didn’t dare budge. I didn’t want him to remove his hands from my face. I didn’t want him to step away from me.

He smiled, tracing my cheeks with long fingers, then bent and kissed me fully on the mouth. Soft, sure, and sensual, his kiss shot through me and made my mind swirl in delight. He didn’t rush the sweep of his tongue over my lips or the deliberate enjoyment of pushing between them. Rather he prolonged the joining, teasing me with slow erotic strokes, and leaving me wanting more and more of his addictive taste.

I couldn’t help it, and in spite of knowing him less than a minute, I raised my arms and wrapped them around his neck, returning his kiss with more passion than I’d ever felt. Tangling my fingers in his dark silky hair, I arched my back and brought my chest up against him. His hands roamed down my body, stalled a bit as his palms traced the sides of my breasts, eventually cupping my rear as he settled his strong erection against my abdomen.

“I’m so glad I had an attack for beignets,” he breathed, ending the kiss with tiny nips on my neck. “Otherwise, I might have missed you.”

Sealing my mouth with his lips, his tongue stroked through it and sent sparks of electricity through my body. With each caress, my legs grew weaker. I leaned against him, digging my fingers into the back of his collar and supporting myself.

“Did you dream of us, sweetheart?” he breathed.

“Dream of us?” I squinted against the sun, trying to understand his question. It made no sense. Maybe, he was joking.

But no, he appeared sincere and dead serious, as if he’d been expecting my arrival, and as if my dreaming about him would have been a totally normal thing.

I pulled my arm off his shoulder and adjusted the strap of my tank top. I didn’t know what to do, what to say, but suddenly, I didn’t feel like I was alone any longer. For some warped reason, I knew I was with him. My sexy stranger and I were together, as one, on Bourbon.

“Never mind. It’s really not important. What matters is that you’re here.” Still holding me, he wrapped his other arm around my waist. “My name is Manolin Amaron. Can I buy you a cold drink?”

“Aren’t you supposed to buy me a drink before you kiss me?”

“I couldn’t help myself.” He smiled, a big boyish grin, and playfully knocked his hip against mine. “I have a thing for redheads, and I act impulsively around beautiful women. I can’t take the chance that they’re not really thirsty, so I dazzle them with my kiss before I ask them for a drink. Come with me and I’ll buy you everything you want.”

Like he needed to promise me anything other than his attention. For some unexplained reason, I’d follow this stranger to any corner of the city. There was something about the way he looked at me, like he’d found a treasure. Then there was the way his possessive touch heated my skin, yet it was very welcomed and it comforted me. And all of this in only a few minutes.

Manolin didn’t wait for my response; rather he kept his arm secured around me and started walking. Like a zombie in a trance, I followed without a single word of protest.

“You may think that what I’m about to say is weird, but you are just the woman I’ve been waiting for, and I am so grateful to meet you. My heart has been pounding like a jack hammer from the moment I touched you and I don’t even know your name.” As we reached the corner, Manolin’s fingers hooked through the belt loop on my shorts and pulled me to a stop. He looked down at me and cocked his head in question.

“Lilly. My name is Lilly Marie.”

“Makes sense, sweetheart. Perfect sense. A beautiful name for a beautiful woman.”

I should have stopped blindly following him. Or at least I should have insisted that we stay on neutral ground and in a public place, but I didn't feel threatened in the least. It felt normal to walk beside this attractive man. He was my Lothario of Bourbon Street, with his handsome looks, irresistible charisma, dark-velvet voice, and a bulging groin to boot.

Moisture pooled in my core and I started daydreaming of the hours of passion that would follow our cold drink. "Where are you taking me? And what are the plans?" I asked, more out of needing something to say than really being worried about it.

"I told you. We're going to get a beer and introduce you to the rest of the family. We own and operate a place a few doors down."

I looked ahead and stared at the dangling sign he pointed to.

El Destino!

I stumbled and would have fallen flat on my face if Manolin hadn't caught me for the second time. The street distorted beneath my feet and suddenly everything went dark.

## *Chapter Two*

“What the hell did you tell her to make her pass out like that?” A man’s voice demanded in the dark.

“I offered her a cold beer,” Manolin replied. “Don’t act like such a moron, Xavier. She’s just shell-shocked. Lilly is the one. I know it. Her resemblance to the Queen is uncanny.”

“Okay, she’s a redhead, beautiful, and physically similar. But that doesn’t mean you can grab her off the street and drag her into your lair. She’s supposed to come on her own.”

“I’m telling you,” Manolin insisted, “she’s the one. Easygoing and intuitive, she’s more than wonderful and she was extremely receptive to my suggestion to come here. It’s like she came on her own. Now shut up and help me get her comfortable. I’d never do or say something to hurt her.”

“Shit. I believe you. I just don’t want her to spook and shut down. Go slow with her. She’s delicate,” Xavier drawled.

“Lilly simply tripped, that’s all. Let her be. She looked like she had a lot on her mind, but she was fine. I accept full responsibility. I’ll make sure she’s okay. Please check the door, José Antonio. I closed it on the way in to give her some privacy, but I want to make sure it’s locked,” my hero said. “And move back. When she opens her eyes, I don’t want your ugly mugs to startle her.”

“You might have brought her here, but she’s all of our responsibility,” a third man said.

“Maybe he brought her here, but I’ve seen her in my dreams,” Xavier argued. “I know what she feels, what she needs, and how to treat her.”

“Then maybe you should have gone for the beignets, Oh Great Seerer”

A relieved laughter rumbled through the darkness and a very close camaraderie filled the air. These guys were real comfortable with each other. They were obviously some type of team.

I forced my eyes open and slowly looked up into four sets of dark eyes. My head pounded and as I reached to steady it, Manolin took my hand and brought it to his mouth. He kissed the inside of my palm and breathed a sigh of relief.

“I was just about to call the paramedics. You alright, sweetheart?”

“I’m calling them anyway. She needs to be checked over.” This man was a little shorter than Manolin, but just as attractive. Dark wavy hair, piercing obsidian eyes, and a very muscular build. “Darling, do you know where you are?”

“How is she supposed to know where she is, Rafael? She just got here.”

Rafael didn’t seem to hear the other guy, who I was able to identify for the tone of his voice as the dreamer, Xavier. Again, handsome and dark. These men were a feast for a starved woman’s appetite.

Xavier pushed between them and picked up my wrist. “I’ll check her vitals and we’ll take it from there.”

A fourth man stood behind him, staring intently, but keeping silent. He leaned on a sturdy looking table, his hands crossed over his broad chest. He was probably the most bothered of the foursome—he looked like he was sizing me up and deciding if he truly wanted me there.

“I’m okay.” I used Manolin’s hand to pull myself up.

Dark and Sulky raised an eyebrow and cocked his head as if to question my proclamation, but he kept his distance. Sparks danced between us and I craved to let my fingers explore his handsome features. To feel the neatly trimmed hair lining his jaw, to trace the crook of the strong Grecian nose, and to linger on his alluring lips.

His chest rose and fell, and I hungered to wrap my arms around him, place my ear against his heart and listen to every beat. With only a gaze, he held me captive. With a blink of his eyes,

he branded me as his and there was no question that I wanted to be his beyond anything else in the world. There was something different, some undeniable magnetism in his appeal.

His ebony hair spliced over his forehead and hid his eyes, allowing intense loss to seep into my being and hollow my insides. Dark and Sulky was the man I needed. He was the fulfillment of my prescription. And he was the reason that I'd come to New Orleans.

"Sweetheart, are you sure you're okay?"

Manolin's voice broke into the haze clouding my mind and I breathed a mixture of relief and guilt. It was weird, and probably unfair, to be attracted to more than one man at the same time, but I couldn't deny the physical and emotional hold they had over me.

Nodding, I looked up at Manolin and smiled. Comfort filled the empty center in my chest and I reveled in the tender touch of my hero's fingertips. Logic and caution were lost to me, because even after the realization of my desire for Dark and Sulky, my skin heated at Manolin's touch and tingles danced on my nerves as Rafael looked at me. The truth was that I liked them. I liked the dark coziness of the bar, and even the smell of the spilt keg was welcoming.

My butt pressed on the hard surface of a pool table and the location made me a little confused, but in all reality, I had nothing to lose from being with these men. Surrounded by four of the most handsome guys I'd ever met was the answer to my prayers. Not only were they the sweetest of eye candy, but the attention they showered me with was an additional benefit and would feed my muse.

"Where am I?" I asked Manolin.

"You're in El Destino. We threw the patrons out and closed the doors to give you a little breathing room and time to recover. Did the heat get to you?"

I shook my head, accepting the glass of water Rafael put to my lips. He used his thumb to tilt my head so I could drink comfortably. I took a few swallows before placing my hand over his and indicating that I'd had enough. He nodded, lowered the glass, and kissed the side of my head.

"Aren't you hurting business and pissing customers off?"



“Not really. They took their drinks on the house with them. They’ll be back.” Xavier shrugged and smiled down at me. “Anyway, who cares about that? You okay?”

“Yes, I think so,” I replied, looking at the gorgeous murals on the walls. Some faded with time, others intense with color, but all of the characters were animated with passion and a vivacious existence. “This place is beautiful. It’s a breathing canvas of the club’s past life.”

“Welcome home, mi corazón.” Rafael’s voice rolled over me and soothed my rattled nerves. Rattled, not because of the men, but because there was so much to take in. Things happened like a storm building force over warm waters, and there was so much power surrounding me, in a place named El Destino.

Again, destiny, but this time the idea eased any apprehensions I’d felt. I had no idea why, but I liked it here. Why should I even consider fighting destiny? I was alone in the world and I could use some company.

Xavier rubbed my shoulder and smiled. “You don’t dream. Do you, babe?”

“I’m sorry.” Scrambling to catch my breath, because his dark gaze bore straight to my heart and squeezed life back into the limp muscle, I pushed my bangs out of my eyes. “Everyone dreams, but not all dreams are remembered. As a matter of fact, most dreams are eight seconds or less. It’s just that we think that we experience hours or days in them. It’s a way for the brain to relax and for our bodies to replenish.”

“You’re so cute.” Xavier captured my mouth and licked along a horizontal path till I allowed his tongue entrance. Like a fine brandy, his rich and potent flavor was meant to be savored and enjoyed.

I blinked and found that Manolin stood less than five feet away, looking at me with a possessive hunger. Startled into reality and a little bit of shame, I abruptly pulled away and ended the dreamy state Xavier had instilled within me. I wanted to get laid, not to start a bar brawl.

I came in with Manolin, and I needed to remember that. Just because the others oozed significant sex appeal like my hero didn’t mean I could lust after all of them.

“No worries, babe. It’s just us. Welcome home.” Xavier feathered his knuckles down my cheek and gave me another quick peck on my trembling lips before moving away.

“I’m glad you’re here, too.” Rafael stepped between my thighs and captured my face in his large hands. “Welcome, Lilly.”

Claiming my lips, Rafael didn’t seem to mind that the other men, who I had recently kissed and entertained, were standing around us. His tongue stole into my mouth and silenced my worries. His spicy taste zinged through me, and my swollen clit rubbed against the seam of my shorts, making me wriggle my butt for some relief.

Rafael’s breath singed my throat as he licked a path to my collarbone and suckled a tiny pleasure point at the base of my neck. His hands dropped to the side of my thighs, pulling me toward the end of the table and positioning his hard cock against my pussy.

“I can feel the racing of your pulse, mi corazón.” Rafael kissed back up my neck and brought his lips to my ear. “I can smell your beautiful excitement and it is driving me crazy. I’m dying to taste you. To feel you clench around me. You cannot know how much I want you to be happy, but I will wait for you. I will be patient and let you experience all you need.”

I gasped as he suckled the soft skin of my ear and his thumb stroked the inside of my thigh, sliding under the elastic of my panties. Reality phased out and I was enraptured with the sultry movements of the man snugly cradled between my legs. Rafael’s hypnotic whispers and soft promises settled in my heart, warming me and wrapping a security blanket around my being.

Rafael did so much more than turn me on, but I couldn’t explain what. Looking into his eyes, I connected with him, connected with his vigor, and I wanted him so bad. I angled my hips and opened wider to him. I’d wanted Manolin less than an hour earlier—in a very different way—now I wanted Rafael, Xavier, and the strange quiet one. But I didn’t want to choose.

Greed and temptations swirled in my mind, something foreign filled my heart, and my gaze locked on a woman painted on the wall. Clearly in the throes of passion, she reigned over the hearts drawn at her feet. I couldn’t decipher the image, but I could identify with her need of completion. I closed my eyes as I admitted to myself that I was confused. That I was selfish. That I wanted them all.

“You want the release, you need the adventure, so trust me and you’ll have all your heart and body desire. When you’re satiated, you’ll have us, you’ll have me. And we won’t go away.

We're meant." Rafael spread my pussy and ran his thumb between my moist folds. He circled my clit, holding my gaze, and fueling my desire.

I was aware of the other men, and their presence sexually excited me further. I hesitated as I glanced at Xavier, who pulled at his collar and rolled his shoulders. He was tense, perhaps uncomfortable, or perhaps he too felt the heat in the room.

"But—"

"Shh..." Rafael covered my lips with his free hand. "Don't think. Feel."

He slid a finger into my channel as his thumb continued with its magnificent attention on my pleasure. I was certainly feeling. I had no choice. Rafael escalated my need to explosive proportions and the other men's presence added to, rather than infringed on, the experience. I could have been on stage, but my pussy wouldn't deny the pleasure he gave me.

I wanted it. I needed it. And the shame of my desire to be with each of these men turned to expectancy of pure bliss.

I dropped my knees to the side, opening wider for him. I still wore my shorts, and the material pushed his hand closer and deeper. He filled me with a second finger, stroking his thumb over my pulsing nub.

"Come for me, mi corazón. For us," he coaxed, brushing my lips with his.

My heart pounded and my skin sizzled. I was about to explode with pleasure and I couldn't believe the delicious situation I was in. Immersed in a group of Lotharios, I was being fingered in the nicest and fullest way possible. Them watching and listening to the pleasure I couldn't refuse heightened the stakes on reaching my climax.

Rafael pumped his fingers, stretching and filling me with erotic longing for more. I gasped as his thumb circled my clit and dark spots flashed before my eyes, but I didn't ask him to stop. His hand palmed my cunt and spread my cream over the sensitive skin.

"First, and foremost, you need to have anything you think you might want," Rafael whispered against my ear. "Then you'll have it all, darling. We'll see to making you happy. We've been asking for a blessing like you to come our way, and we'll be damned if we don't meet your every desire."

Manolin moved behind me, leaned over and kissed the side of my neck.

“Rest against me,” he instructed.

A long arm came around and cupped my breast. Manolin rolled my nipple and squeezed just enough for a sting to shoot through me at the exact moment my pussy clamped around Rafael’s thick fingers.

I looked over Rafael’s shoulder and met Dark and Sulky’s gaze. He nodded his consent and my climax exploded. Pleasure tore over me and I moaned my release as my forehead dropped to Rafael’s shoulder, panting for breath.

Hands, numerous hands, played on my skin. Electricity sparked. And the raw scent of sexual excitement, my excitement, filled the air.

I let go, falling into my men’s arms.

## *Chapter Three*

“Better, mi corazón?” Rafael tipped my face to meet his gaze and brushed a tender kiss over my mouth.

I couldn’t answer. I couldn’t find my voice.

Rafael withdrew his hand from between my legs and tasted the cream on his fingers. I simply stared.

“Scrumptious” He looked toward the silent one. “Check the door, I might have to strip her completely and feast on her delectable pussy right now.” He licked another finger. “Damn, you’re addictive.” He sucked on a third finger then nodded toward Manolin. “You were right. She’s the one for us. I can’t deny her pull.”

I squeezed my legs together and held the waistband of my shorts. I knew it was too late for modesty, but I didn’t want to get fucked on a bar’s pool table in the middle of the afternoon.

“Not here. Not now,” I said.

“Sweetheart,” Manolin said, gently lifting the escaped strands of hair from my eyes. “With us, you need to relax and enjoy. There is nothing to prove, nothing that can ever separate us. The decision of when, where and how is always yours.”

Still, my heart lodged in my throat and I struggled to inhale and stay alert. I could barely focus on what he was saying, let alone understand it.

“You need time to assimilate to our situation, but at least you’re less tense now and open to us. Let’s get you settled and we’ll take things slowly. I’ll show you to your room,” Xavier

said, taking my hand and gently tugging. “We’ll explain everything when you’re rested. Most importantly, we want you comfortable and safe.”

Holy—freaking—shit! If this was slowly, what was fast? I wasn’t sure I wanted to rest, but I needed some space to digest all of this. I’d just been brought to climax by a stranger, amongst other strangers, and I didn’t object or find it peculiar. What was wrong with me? Had I lost it? But rather than feeling awkward or weird, I was floating on cloud nine. After all, there was a team of sexy men who wanted me comfortable and safe. I never expected so much attention in New Orleans. I didn’t know why I was getting it. But, and the next point was major, I wanted it. I needed it.

“It’s not that I don’t want you, because I do. I really do. I don’t feel ready,” I said, reaching for Rafael. “I can’t tell you how much I want you to fuck me. I want you to kiss me. And, I’d love to have you there.” I looked at my crotch and squeezed my thighs again. I was so wet, so ready for them, but something was holding me back. “The truth is that I am so confused, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

“Go with Xavier, sweetheart. Go rest. We’ll get the club prepped for the night, and then we’ll come up and check on you.” Manolin was my security. I didn’t know why, couldn’t explain it, but I didn’t question it. If he said it, then it was okay for me.

“My things are at a hotel down the street,” I whispered, my hand flying to my mouth to stifle the pretentious suggestion. I had some nerve assuming their hospitality was even semi-permanent. They probably just wanted me to wash up and get out. Or maybe just one more sexual romp, I thought wistfully. My pulse raced. What would it be like to please them all?

“No worries, babe. One of us will collect your things and check you out after the dinner rush. Which hotel you booked at?” Xavier held out his hand and helped me off the table.

“Uhhh...the...the carousel bar...”

“Oh. You’re at the Monteleone. Nice taste, Lilly. That’s a classy hotel, but I think your new room will be to your liking and comfortable enough for tonight. I’m sure we could get anything else you need tomorrow,” he said, as if this was something he’d expected to be doing. “The guys have to clean up a bit and open the doors before we lose the hungry crowd to the joints down the street. You can bathe, take a nap, or do whatever you need to, then join us

downstairs once the band gets going for the night. You'll like the music, and if you don't, we'll just play what you will like."

Swinging my backpack over his shoulder, Xavier led me to a staircase behind the uniquely decorated bar. The walls were painted a deep blue, and each section portrayed different scenes of daily life. Posh parties and dancing, dinners with family, even a young woman scrubbing the floor on her knees. The normalcy of each scene filled me with coziness and yearning to participate in them.

Like the four men, El Destino enticed and welcomed me.

Taking in all the scenery on the way, I followed Xavier up the narrow staircase. As we climbed, the décor changed from moody blues to basic earth tones. On the second floor, there was a hall which opened to a sitting room with a huge flat screen television. Bulky leather couches lined the walls and a sturdy wooden bookcase featured an extensive collection of encyclopedia-sized books and pictures.

"My room is the first door on the right, past the living room. Manolin, Rafael, and José Antonio's are on the left, with José Antonio's being the one furthest away. He likes his peace and quiet."

"I could tell," I said. "Either, José Antonio doesn't like me or he's not one for words."

Oh My! It hit me that even their names were super, super sexy.

"Neither," Xavier answered, continuing up a new flight of stairs. "He's just a little cautious when it comes to warming up to new situations. I guess it comes with the territory of being the 'responsible' one. He takes care of our finances and major household expenses. He's also been very preoccupied this last week. Brooding and downright moody to be exact. When we take that into consideration, I guess it's good that he keeps silent when he's like that. Otherwise, he's a bear to deal with."

"You're all related?"

"No, not by blood," he replied, shaking his head. "Manolin and Rafael are sort of blood relatives—second or third or ninth cousins." He chuckled at his own joke and that put me further at ease. I was as comfortable as any woman could be surrounded by all of them and walking into their cave without letting a soul know where she'd be.

Actually, I was okay with the ultra-stupid and dangerous move. There was no other place I'd rather have been than with them, surrounded by the sexual tension and electrified air. They seemed known to me.

“We’re all related by choice. We met in school, became best friends and roommates, and have never grown out of our fraternal ways. We choose to work and live together as a family.”

“Xavier?” I hesitated, for what if I had his name wrong and I insulted this striking man. Tenderness and gentleness were only a little of what he radiated. I wanted to cuddle up against him, bury my face in the side of his neck, and breathe and exhale every part of him for as long as he’d let me.

“Yes, babe?” He didn’t sound insulted, so I had his name right.

“What’s going on here?” I asked, stroking my thumb over the back of his palm, more comfortable with him than I’d ever been with any boyfriend. “What am I doing here?”

He stopped, cupped my face with his warm hands, and softly brushed his lips over mine. His dark eyes twinkled with adoration and his luscious lips curved into a broad smile.

“You really don’t have any idea, do you?”

Feeling like a freshman on my first day of high school, I shook my head and shrugged.

“But for some strange undefined reason you know you belong here?”

I nodded, agreeing with him, but offering no explanation because there was none to give. I couldn’t explain the emotional and physical ease bubbling inside me. I couldn’t explain why I wanted to hug each of the men and snuggle into their warmth and sleep like a satisfied woman—even, or rather, especially with my sulky one.

“You do belong, baby. Don’t question that fact. Accept it. There is nothing strange about you being here. There is nothing weird about how you feel. We feel it too. Perhaps, we feel it more because we’ve known that you were coming.” He let out a long breath, allowing his gaze to caress every inch of my blushing face.

I could feel the heat. Imagine the red color creeping on my neck and toward my heaving chest. But I couldn’t look away. With a wicked smile, Xavier enslaved my will.



“Lilly, I don’t want costumers to hear us. It’s none of their business.” He was kind, but firm. This man was certainly no pushover. He draped a protective arm over my shoulder and started down a narrow hallway. “Exactly eleven months and seventeen days ago, and don’t ask me why then because I don’t know, your pain was so deep that you had a very difficult time functioning.”

My mind kicked into overdrive and I knew the exact moment he spoke of. Grams passed that day. Sorrow had sat on my chest like an elephant on a grape. The only problem was that the grape, representing my heart, had instantly shriveled into a raisin, and I wasn’t sure if it would ever feel light and airy again.

“Baby, that was the first night I dreamt of you. It was so hard to see you in pain, to see you shred to pieces, and I was incapable of doing anything. I didn’t know where you were, nor did I know your name. All I knew was that you needed me and I couldn’t help you.” He opened a door and gallantly gestured for me to enter. “I’m so sorry, Lilly. I’m sorry I couldn’t come to you and take your hurt.”

I stepped into a sanctuary of deep, rich, and exotic decor, with his words swelling in my chest. I knew his story was truthful and heartfelt, and his hand closing over my shoulder only confirmed it. Secure against him, I appreciated the regal furnishings and textiles surrounding us.

A large bed four-poster bed, covered in what looked like a purple silk comforter and decorated with plush gold pillows, was on our left. An intricately sculpted dark wood armoire and matching dressing table warmed the lavender colored walls and grounded the large room with deep earthy browns and sturdiness. But it was the arched bay window, directly in front of us, that commanded my attention. Swathed in endless gold fabric, the clear glass framed a gorgeous view of the river and a tourist steamboat, trimmed in twinkling lights and awaiting its passengers.

Only a few yards from the inviting sitting area beneath the window, ornate pots with beautiful flowering plants diffused a heady scent of musky sweetness through the room and almost completely masked the smell of fresh paint. They reminded me of water lilies, but I knew it was impossible to grow them indoors. Plus, I wasn’t sure how water lilies smelled.

“I’m guessing you like your room,” he said.

“The room is extra special.” I stared at the large blooms, mesmerized by their beauty. “Did you decorate it?”

“Mostly. The others put their personal influence on a few things, but not because they believed me. I think they did it on a ‘Just In Case’ basis. I told them you were coming, but they thought I didn’t know what I was talking about. As if I could wish long and hard enough for you to appear.”

I bent and touched the tender petals of the magenta flowers, which were closing with the approaching night. “I hope they’re not done blooming.”

“No. At least, I don’t think so.” Xavier squatted beside me, resting an elbow on his knee and smiling as his gaze met mine. “José Antonio said that once they bloom, they flower for a couple of days. Much like you, these little beauties took their sweet time in appearing,” he said, brushing his mouth against my neck and sending ripples of expectation through my chest.

Never before had my body reacted as it had to this group of men over the past hour. First Manolin, then Rafael and Xavier, even José Antonio—and he’d only looked at me—from afar.

“He’s been growing lotus plants since we bought this place. They’re his prized possessions. Actually, he’s kind of obsessed with them. None of us are allowed near the balcony he houses them on.” A wrinkle formed on his forehead as he traced the porcelain pot’s rim with his index finger. “I was shocked when he carried these plants in here today. I was also shocked that they’d bloomed. It’s the first time ever.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Five and a half years. We continued to live together after we graduated, but each of us used to work in our own field. José Antonio is an accountant, Manolin is into corporate marketing, Rafael is a computer programmer, and I’m a physical therapist. Things were okay for a while, and then Katrina hit and blew the city to hell. I kept working in a hospital for a few months. We all worked when the waters receded and people started returning, but our hearts weren’t in it any longer. We wanted to do other things, to tap our creativity. You know, life is short, so live it to the fullest and all that psycho-babble. We were drinking on Bourbon one night. We saw the auction sign on the windows, and bought this place to play our music and make a living while enjoying our work.”

“And you’ve been happy?” I asked, knowing that I was bordering on being told that it was none of my business, but I wondered how four alpha males could run a club like the El Destino together and not butt heads.

“Yes. Most of the time,” he said, letting his voice drop as he rubbed his jaw.

Sizzling silence filled the space between us. It was as if we could communicate without talking, because I felt what he was thinking. I felt his relief on my arrival, as well as his trepidation on my possible departure.

“That’s good,” I replied, smiling and trying to lighten the mood. “All you need is a couple of hot ladies to keep you company, and you’ve got it made.”

“Babe, it isn’t that easy.” His jaw squared, his lips tightened into a straight line, and his eyes took on a hardened edge. “This might sound like a bunch of hocus pocus to you. In fact, the guys keep teasing me about how susceptible I am to all the pseudo-psychics, but I believe that fate brought us together. They can joke all they want, but you coming here was foretold time and time again. It is clear as day to anyone who isn’t blind. Just like the reader said, you complete us.” He stood and pulled me up and into his embrace. “We belong together, Lilly.”

“What do you mean foretold?” I looked up into his dark eyes and found total competence and sincerity. He was no loon, and he wasn’t making it up. Xavier believed what he said, and I believed him. Still, my curiosity peaked and I wanted more of an explanation. Xavier, on the other hand, shifted gears and didn’t appear interested in talking any longer.

His fingers played up my arm to my nape, releasing my ponytail and allowing my hair to fall down my back. He brought the long strands to his nose, and a big smile spread across his face as he inhaled.

“I knew your hair would smell like flowers. I had no doubt that your beauty would take my breath away. However, what I wasn’t prepared for was the sweet, enticing huskiness of your voice. It’s the best kind of invitation I’ve ever received. I want you so bad, and I don’t think I can wait for you to acclimate to our situation.”

He captured my mouth, and his tongue swept lovingly through my greedy lips. My body agreed with his proclamation: we belonged together.

I snuggled against his chest. He fit his thigh between mine, and his erection pushed against the denim of my shorts. We were the world's best-constructed jigsaw puzzle, and I ached to connect on every curve.

“I want you, too.”

Damn. Something was seriously wrong with me. I wanted all of these guys, and in the past hour, I'd fantasized about screwing each and every one of them—individually and together. I bit my lip as his Xavier kissed down my neck and then along my collarbone, spreading tingling ecstasy over my chest.

My breasts grew heavy. My nipples hurt from the strain. And my pussy protested against the pulsing nub, commanding my every move.

“Need you,” I breathed between the wanton pants escaping my lips.

Within seconds, we were naked and sprawled on the purple silk comforter, legs and arms entwined, and our bodies melding into each other. Bare, glorious and hard, Xavier's erection pressed against my thigh, branding my body and encouraging my assimilation into his family.

I couldn't think about details, all I could do was feel. His physical presence was so overwhelming, so necessary. I squirmed to fit him closer to my entrance, but he insisted on tasting as much of my exposed skin as possible.

His lips heated, then his tongue soothed.

I was about to erupt with need and he wasn't moving any closer to fucking me.

“Tell me what you want, babe. Tell me how you want it.” His breath scalded my ear, and he suckled the soft flesh, playing with the little diamond stud in the center like it was his greatest erotic pleasure. “The sound of your voice, the passion in your tone, and the desire in your rasp drive me insane.”

“Then fuck me, now. I want to feel you inside. I want your cock deep. I want to tighten around you, and I want to hear you call my name as you spill inside me.” The amazing image of my admission was vivid in my mind and overtaking my ability to restrain myself. “Please, Xavier. Quick and fast. I can't wait any longer.”

Immediately, he obliged. In a swift, long move, he pushed between my wet folds, tilting his hips so that his wondrous cock stroked each and every cell inside me with pure pleasure. His scrotum brushed against me when he reached as far as my body would allow, and it was the sweetest caress on sensitive skin I'd never realized was a sexual playground. He pulled out a little, and I moaned my protest and wriggled beneath him, requesting he continue. He returned, rising onto his arms and staring into my eyes.

“You're tight. I don't—”

“Harder, Xavier,” I begged, wrapping my legs around his waist and raising my hips to take him in. “Harder. Deeper.”

He groaned, pushed me back onto the mattress and pulled out. Flipping me over onto my knees and spreading my legs wide, he grasped my hips, held me steady, then plunged into my aching pussy, pumping his cock and slamming his balls against my clit till an orgasm ripped through me and stole the air from my lungs. Tremors of bliss consumed me and my orgasm climbed to volcanic heights as my moans filled the room.

My pussy sucked him tight, held him, begged him, and refused to let go, till he exerted his superior strength and held me still, commanding me to accept his power.

“You're not what you present yourself to be.” He smacked my ass, sending ripples of pleased pain to my clit.

“I didn't hide the fact that I want you,” I said, attempting to rub the sting on my flesh, but he pushed my hand away.

Smack.

“You're very naughty, Lilly. And you're not completely honest. You want me, but you haven't admitted to wanting all of us,” he said, spanking me for my transgression. “Why are you holding out on me when I've created a haven of your dreams and I'd do anything for you?”

Smack.

I raised my ass, surprisingly requesting more punishment. Each smack sent tremors through me and my pussy ached for more.

Smack.

“You cream all over my dick and don’t wait for me. Now, you want to come again, and you want me to fuck you more, but I won’t. I will not fuck that sweet pussy of yours, my love. Not till you ask properly.” He moved back, leaving me empty and wanting.

I was so close, but he denied me of a second release.

I shut my eyes, dropped my hand to my center, hooked my finger into my hole, and rubbed my clit in a frantic attempt to reach an orgasm before the euphoria of his attentions weaned.

Smack.

“That isn’t the way it works,” Xavier announced, delivering the next sting on my tender ass. Using his cock, he massaged my cream into the hurt he’d instilled, then presented his bulging head to my virgin rear entrance for play. “You don’t touch yourself,” he ground out, nudging, but not breaking through the tight barrier.

## *Chapter Four*

“Why not?” I demanded.

My clit pulsed as he circled my anus, but my pussy wanted attention. Xavier wasn't touching me where I needed to be touched. There was no sane reason for me not to bring myself to climax.

“Because I'm here.” Tugging gently on my hair, Manolin lifted my head and captured my gaze. “Move a bit to the side, sweetheart. Let me in.”

Clasping his thighs around my hips, Xavier urged my knees to move and angled us toward the side of the bed. Placing his hand beneath my breasts, he lifted me and brought my back upright and against his chest.

“It's clear that you're too frustrated to think straight,” Manolin said in a teasing voice. “This is like dancing, sweetheart. We lead. You follow.”

Manolin dipped his head, cupped a breast with his left hand and slipped his right one between my thighs. Slow torturous licks circled my nipple, simulating his thumb on my clit. When he suckled, he filled me with two fingers. A sob of satisfaction rumbled low in my throat. The men groaned, and the scent of sex, my sex, wrapped around us.

Manolin guided my wet hand to his iron-hard shaft and closed my fingers around it. I stroked him with the rhythm he pumped into me, dropping my head back onto Xavier's shoulder and accepting his support.

“You've done this before?” Manolin asked, switching his attention to the other breast.

“Never,” I rasped, grinding my clit on the heel of his palm. “No. I mean, yes.”

“Really?”

“I mean, yes, I’ve had sex. But, no, never with two men,” I panted.

A third finger reached into me, then retreated and smoothed the creamy moisture on my rear hole. Carefully pushing past the tight virgin entrance, it circled and massaged, and slowly I accepted the intrusion, reveling in the sensations spiraling from its caresses.

“Your body knows us, babe,” Xavier spoke, nibbling along my shoulder. “Listen to it. Let it guide you in accepting us.”

Once again, I closed my eyes and let myself float in the dizzying pleasure Xavier and Manolin gave. Incredible and unexpected, I held my breath as electric ripples took over my being and my body responded to the surreal ministrations of two men. Never in my wildest dreams did I see myself in this position, willingly and easily accepting so much. It wasn’t every day that I allowed such beauty to be given to me. Normally, I was the giver, not the receiver.

Tenderly and lovingly, they coaxed my body to new levels of ecstasy. And as they gave to me, I had no idea what I should do.

The closest I’d ever been to any sort ménage experience was when Rafael had gotten me off on the pool table, in front of the others. Now, two of them had their hands on me. One cock in my hand, another nestled between my ass cheeks.

“This is heavenly,” I breathed. “I do want you both.”

Soft lips brushed over my mouth. Another hand, with calloused fingertips, met my free breast and caressed the heated globe, teasing and pulling on the taut nipple.

“And do you want me too, mi corazón?” Rafael pinched the sensitized tip.

I gasped as Rafael’s tongue slipped between my lips and stole an exclamation of surprise. His taste summoned my response and I moaned in agreement.

Yes. Yes. I want you, too.

The men climbed onto the bed and adjusted our position so that we fit. Manolin, on his back, buried his face in my pussy, lapping and sucking at my pulsing clit. A finger, probably



Xavier's, smoothed cream from my cunt to my anus, slowly circling and preparing me for deeper entry. Rafael massaged my breasts, and with his hands and lips, soothed the tremors raking my body with tiny kisses and soft words.

Dropping forward, my thighs spread wider for Manolin. I lowered my mouth onto his cock and circled the bulging dark head, licking the drop of pre-cum glistening on the crown. He was hot and wide. Thick veins adorned the length of his shaft, displaying his strength and readiness.

"Nice, mi corazón. Taste him. Enjoy the pulse of his excitement. Suck him and let him suck you," Rafael said, cupping my head and guiding my mouth down. "Feel the trembling of his thighs as you come on his tongue."

Manolin lifted his hips and fucked my mouth, pumping his marvelous erection over my gluttonous tongue, promising a treat to cherish as the moment of rapture approached.

Raw, and yet so real, I had never been so turned on in my life.

Warm, sweet saltiness coated the back of my throat as fingers tangled in my hair and Manolin groaned his release. I couldn't swallow fast enough. I sucked, then licked, and sucked again, till he dropped back to the mattress and returned to feasting on my throbbing pussy. My hero, my Manolin, had accepted me and climaxed from my doing.

His teeth scraped over my clit, and my orgasm hit, stealing the oxygen from the room and forcing the air from my lungs. As my channel convulsed, and Manolin lapped at my juices, Xavier sank his cock deep into my ass and a second sound of shock broke from my lips.

Xavier was in. Broad, long, and very big, but thankfully patient, and my quivering body wanted more. Never had a man taken me in the ass, and I'd never had a man of Xavier's length. How in the world could I accommodate him? It hurt, but it felt so good. The confusion of sensations spiraled within me, stirring the exhilaration buzzing inside my body and heightening my arousal.

Xavier stilled, waiting for me to adjust to his girth, but I couldn't help but push against him, pulling him further inside.

"That's it, babe. You can take me as slow or as fast as you want," Xavier coaxed, combing his fingers through the hair swaying on my back and gently guiding me up.

Rafael watched as I rose on my knees and lowered myself further onto Xavier.

“You are so beautiful, mi corazón.” He brushed a kiss on my lips. “And I believe that your body does know what to do. Relax. Stay in this moment with us.”

Manolin slipped his fingers along my wet folds and circled my nub, igniting new flames of pleasure and negating the pressure of Xavier’s cock stretching me like I’d never known.

“I don’t think I can take any more,” I whispered, licking my lips and searching Rafael’s eyes for direction. “I’ve never had so many orgasms back-to-back. I don’t know how.”

“Oh, you can take more. You want more, and you definitely know how,” Rafael replied, stroking his knuckles down my cheek. “Look at yourself in the mirror. Look at the pink flushing your skin. Look at your glorious nipples straining for more attention.”

I glanced toward the side and shuddered at the sight of the wild woman staring back at me. Her long auburn hair went every which way. Her lips were swollen. Her eyes shined like enormous dark lights. She sat half on one man’s lap, half on another’s face, and her hands splayed over her heavy breasts as she rolled her nipples between her fingers.

I didn’t recognize her, but she was clearly where she wanted to be. I yearned to be her, to feel the freedom, to let go of the past and move into the future.

“How?” I pleaded.

Xavier grunted his response, rose on his knees, and ran his hands over my bent legs, moving them to spread straight in front of us as he leaned back and pulled me with him, his cock still buried in my ass. He sprawled beneath me, taking my weight on his body and displaying my pussy to the other men. Manolin moved away, leaving me further exposed. My trimmed curls glistened with moisture and my clit pulsed at the anticipation of more attention from the men.

I felt wanton and unworthy, but I couldn’t refuse their interest in making me come again.

“Stop thinking, Lilly. Stop it.”

“If you don’t, I’ll need to spank you again,” Xavier warned, reaching around me and sliding his hand beneath my breasts and caressing my tingling skin.

“Sweetheart, making love to you is beautiful. You arrived and validated the reader’s interpretation. You complete us. We...”

Making love?

My heart swelled with hope and gratitude for what Manolin had said. He hadn't said having sex. He'd said love and nothing else mattered. Their hands, their lips, and their gazes all confirmed his words. They spoke of love, of belonging, and of completion.

I'd known them for what? A few hours? But my heart was theirs. My feelings for the four men, even the sulky one who wasn't with us, was so freaking powerful.

And with that admission, my body responded further.

I reached for Rafael's waistband and moved him near. Unclasping his jeans, I lowered the zipper, snaked my hand inside his boxers and wrapped my fingers around his steely erection. I played with him, stroked his shaft, and slipped beneath to cup his balls.

He groaned, pushed down the unnecessary clothing, and stepped out of the pants as he lifted his shirt over his head. His sculpted chest heaved with passion, his muscles, taut and bulging, enticed me to touch and savor the hard masculine feel of yet another perfect male.

"I don't know what I did to deserve each of you," I breathed. "Love me. Please make me yours. Now."

"Now that's the proper way to ask. We'll show you the way we love you. Every part of you, including your greedy little pussy," Xavier said. He grasped my hips and pumped into my ass with long, tender strokes. I had adjusted to him and the pain disappeared, completely replaced with an intense enjoyment of our bonding.

Rafael moved over me, straddled my chest and presented his cock for my pleasure. I caressed first his balls, then his shaft, and circled the opening on the tip with my finger before I let my lips follow the same path. He tangled his fingers in my hair and encouraged my mouth to take him and love him. I suckled the warm skin at the base of his cock and stroked my hand over his length.

Caressing the spot where my birthmark covered my ribs, Manolin slipped his hands down my torso and cupped my mound. He settled his groin between my thighs and straddled my legs. My hips bucked as Manolin slid his cock inside my channel, filling my pussy and body to maximum capacity. With Xavier on one side and Manolin on the other, I was brimming with pleasure and could barely close my lips around Rafael.

Full and sensitive, my insides hummed and my skin sizzled with each touch and stroke.

They took over, moving in harmony and coaxing my body to erupt with a frenzied climax of pure bliss and total freedom. Trembling, my calves wrapped around Xavier's strong legs and my hips lifted to meet Manolin's thrusts, then dropped to Xavier as he drove into my ass. I took all but an inch or two of Rafael in my mouth, feasting on him like a ravenous woman, and reveling in the way his control slipped with every flick of my tongue.

When all three men swelled within me, the room exploded with erotic delight as they inundated me with their warmth. Electric sparks shot from our union and we came undone in primal act of possession. I collapsed against them, spent and happy in their embrace. Dizzying fulfillment engulfed us and took me to a place of the greatest contentment and joy I'd ever know.

"You're ours now." Xavier slipped out of me, but held me on his chest. "And we're yours. Thank you, Lilly. Thank you for coming to us."

On my side, sprawled over Xavier's large frame and encompassed in his arms, I combed my fingers through Manolin's hair and smiled as the man who'd found me and brought me to them planted a soft kiss on my mouth.

"Welcome to the family," Manolin added.

"José Antonio may be pissed about the way this happened, but that's too bad. It couldn't be helped," Xavier said, kissing the top of my head. "Give us a day or two to make him come around."

"Why? What have I done to him?" The scent of lotus blooms tickled my nose and made me a little queasy. I hadn't done anything wrong, yet I wanted to hide. Actually, I wanted to run away. The tiny hairs on the back of my neck prickled as I thought of a confrontation with the silent and sulky one.

"Nothing. It's his problem," Xavier offered.

Rubbing the back of my neck to calm the unwelcomed mood, I refused to let the moment be spoiled. I snuggled closer to Xavier and intertwined my leg between his thighs.

"Seriously. Don't worry. We'll fill you in on the details as time passes," Rafael said, tracing his fingers up and down the line of my spine. "What is important is that you agree to have

us as your family. We pledge our endless loyalty and love to you, but we must insist that our relationship be exclusive.”

“Exclusive?” I couldn’t help laughing at the irony of his statement. “There are three of you.”

“Four,” they corrected in unison.

“You complete our family, sweetheart. The four of us have been a family for years...since the first day we met. We all needed family.”

“What about the families you grew up in?”

“My mother has been missing in action forever, and my father is the nastiest drunk you’ll ever meet. José Antonio has been on his own since the day he turned eighteen.” Manolin rubbed my shoulder and pulled my hand into his. “Rafael’s parents only wanted a doctor for a son. Once he declared his major, he was also on his own. Loving parents raised Xavier, till they got a second wind for life and announced that they were moving to France. They sold everything and took off to work at a vineyard and learn how to make goat cheese. He can visit any time he likes, but an eleven hour plane ride isn’t very convenient.” Manolin pushed the hair off my face and cupped my cheek.

“Pretty colorful group,” I said, picturing each scenario. “At least you can still go home if you want. My family is gone. Permanently.”

With a tender swipe of his thumb, Manolin caught the tear sliding down my cheek. “No more tears, Lilly. I know it hurts, but you’re not alone anymore. We’re your family now. We love you.”

“All of you?” That would be a good one to explain to the preacher. Sir, I’d like to ask if you could officiate at my wedding to these men?

“Yes, all of us. Our lifestyle isn’t traditional, but we don’t have a problem loving you together. As long as you love each of us,” Xavier said.

“So, you’ve all had sex with the same woman before?”

They shrugged. “Sex is sex,” Xavier added, waggling his brows.

“But, we never invited a woman into our lives until you .We hadn’t found the one that was right for all of us. We love you, Lilly. We’re a package deal, and if you love one of us, you must love us all,” Manolin explained. “It’s completely up to you.”

It was nuts. I was nuts. Obviously I wanted to stay. I did. Why else would I be nestled between three men I barely knew? Why would I take the chance of exposing myself to unknown dangers if it wasn’t for the insistence of my heart?

“And don’t confuse sex with love,” Xavier warned. “We’ve had sex with other women, but you’re the only one we’ve all made love to.”

The floor creaked, causing me to look over my shoulder. José Antonio framed the doorway, his arms crossed over his chest, danger firing in his eyes.

“Not all,” I whispered, my heart wringing in anguish.

## *Chapter Five*

José Antonio left as quickly as he'd appeared, and I dropped my face onto Xavier's chest and closed my eyes to keep the tears at bay.

Lulled to sleep by the men's breathing, I didn't notice them leave, but I woke to an empty bed and a starlit sky outside my window. Remaining still, I didn't move for a long time, but when the music changed, a familiar tune from the past was an irresistible call, calling me downstairs.

I debated showering and then going to see who was singing, but when he belted out the refrain and sang *Ne Me Quitte Pas* rather than *If You Go Away* just like the original version my gram had hummed along to, I had to know immediately. It was indisputably a personalized summons. Something I couldn't ignore.

The song was a classic, performed by everyone from Jacques Brel to Sting, and in many different languages. I knew every touching word to the rich, sultry, almost sad melody. I had hope that the singer and his love would sail the sun, ride the rain, talk to the trees and worship the rain. His heart wouldn't be broken on the summer day, and the sun wouldn't be taken away.

Unable to find my clothes, I wrapped the top sheet over my shoulders and hurried out the door and bound down the two flights of stairs to the main floor. Hiding in the shadows of the entrance to the club, I was blown away by the sight of my men creating the extraordinary music.

Xavier was on the piano, his back straight and his eyes closed, totally immersed in the melody and keying out the tune, having it dance over my spine. Rafael held a violin snug

beneath his handsome jaw and magically glided the bow over its strings, sending riveting vibrations straight to my core. Manolin picked at guitar strings, multiplying my appreciation of his talent as his fingertips tapped on my musical sense, bringing about the awareness that the song was meant for me.

The riveting and hypnotic promise in José Antonio's voice enchanted my soul and cemented my feet to floor. My breath was trapped in my chest and my eyes could only see the four men on the stage, spotlighted in blue and yellow.

Without warning, José Antonio captured my gaze and the world faded. We were alone. Two spirits, our fates bound with an unyielding thread. He sang of understanding if I went away, yet detailed the wondrous outcome if I'd stay, squeezing my heart and tugging on my every emotion, because I couldn't possibly make him—all of them—any of them happy.

The song ended, the lights dimmed, and I wiped the tears from my cheeks with my makeshift clothing. Before I could lower the sheet and turn to leave, strong arms closed about me and pulled me against a large, hard body.

José Antonio pushed away the silk covering. His dark gaze sealed on mine as he captured my lips and annihilated any sense I had left with his kiss.

When he was done, he remained pressed against me and intently stared into my eyes, placing his right hand over my left breast and thrumming his thumb over my nipple to the beat of my heart. The tiny lines on the corners of his eyes identified him as being older than the others. The darkness of his gaze declared that he possessed the power in the family. And the stern press of his lips indicated that he knew with that same power came responsibility.

"It's not a game we're playing. Be sure of what you ask. You must commit, for I won't let you change your mind." Releasing me, José Antonio turned and strolled back into the crowd.

I gulped air into my lungs, watching as he mingled with the guests, and finally found the strength to move when Xavier glanced my way and winked. I should have waited for him to come to me. But I didn't wait. Like a coward, I grabbed the banister and hurried to the bathroom on the third floor.

Locking myself in, I turned on the shower and leaned my trembling body against the door so I could hear the raucous on the other side.



“We’re a family. There is no reason for intimidation or bullying.”

“Not bullying. Just a statement of facts. She needs to know.”

El Destino and its family weren’t for me. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into, but I knew it wasn’t just a few days of fun and loads of exceptional sex. These men spoke of family. They spoke of love. And I wasn’t ready for, or worthy of, either. I couldn’t consider letting one person, let alone four, get so close that it would absolutely crush me when I lost them. I couldn’t be a part of something only to have it taken away, and I couldn’t be left behind again.

Amidst my sobs, I heard my men argue. Their voices grew loud, but I could only distinguish a few words.

“Don’t do that to her...not ready...wrong...commit...impossible...keep it to yourself...fate...you’re wrong...destiny...”

I had no clue who said what, but there was no doubt that they were arguing about me. Rivulets of sweat streamed down my back. I couldn’t listen to them fight. I didn’t want to be the source of familial discord.

A door slammed and silence fell over the hallway.

What did José Antonio want me to be sure of? How? It was impossible to be sure of anything, especially when I didn’t know what it was. Even more, I couldn’t do the one thing he’d asked of me. I couldn’t commit. I’d lost everyone I’d committed to, and I wasn’t ready to lose them and have my heart shattered again.

I dropped the sheet and stepped into the shower. Spending an indistinguishable amount of time under the streaming water, I allowed myself to consider all the possibilities. I could leave immediately and avoid any drama. I could stay for a while, enjoy, and leave when we all agreed that our relationship had run its course. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t deny that I had already developed feelings for my men, and I couldn’t imagine leaving with my heart intact.

When the water grew cold, I rinsed off, wrapped a towel around my exhausted body and went directly to bed. I’d make a decision in the morning.

## *Chapter Six*

Light dawned through the window, weaning me from a surprisingly peaceful slumber. The weight of his arm held me still, and my leg entwined between his thighs anchored me to him. His scent wafted over us like a blanket on a winter's day, and I inhaled the treasure I'd been blessed with to the start the morning. I opened my eyes, cradled in José Antonio's arm with my cheek on his chest.

"Good morning, Lilly," he said, placing a kiss atop my head.

His voice rippled over me and awakened every cell in my body. Tingles traveled from the tip of my head to my toes, recognizing the handsome man beside me and aching for his acceptance. My nipples hardened, my clit pulsed, and my fingers moved over his chest to rest on his heart.

"Good morning, José Antonio," I breathed, shutting my eyes to the sunlight. "I didn't hear you come in."

"Do you mind?"

"No." I swallowed a sigh, then took a deep breath. I couldn't lie to him, I couldn't pretend. "I like it. A lot."

"Good," he said, placing a finger beneath my chin and raising my face to his. He swept his lips over my mouth, once. "I'm sorry." Twice. "Forgive me." He deepened the kiss the third time, his tongue stealing into my mouth and slowly caressing every sensitive part. "Please, Lilly. I was wrong. I hurt you with my callousness. I'm sorry."

Trembling, I moved closer to him. Nobody had ever apologized to me like that; nobody had ever spoken to me with the sincerity in his tone. He rubbed his palm over my upper arm, breathing slow, and I guessed, waiting for my response.

But I couldn't speak. I couldn't find the words.

I looked into his eyes, saw the tenderness and regret I'd heard, and touched my hand to his jaw. "You're not angry that I'm here?"

"Never." He shook his head and moved my hand to his lips, kissing the inside of my fingertips. "What I should have said last night is that I want you to stay. I don't want you to go."

"I'll stay," I whispered. "But, I want to contribute to El Destino."

"You do."

"No," I insisted, pushing away to look at him. "I want to restore the murals and finish the empty wall."

"Done." He smiled, placed me gently on my back, and rose over me, sealing our agreement with a kiss.

My heart slammed against my chest and I opened to hold him. I had so much to ask him, so much I wanted to know, but I could think of nothing more important than kissing him back and losing myself in his touch.

Unhurried, and with words of adoration, he kissed every inch of my body, setting my skin ablaze and my heart soaring till the light in the room was bright and sweat glistened off our bodies.

"Beautiful," he breathed, tucking my hair behind my ear and fitting himself between my legs. "You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he repeated, lowering his mouth to my chest and suckling first one nipple, then the other.

I burned with the yearning for his possession, and when he placed his cock at my entrance, I bit my lip and held my breath in anticipation. As if asking for permission, he looked at me. I exhaled and raised my mouth to his.

"Yes," I whispered against his lips, and then breathed in his air as he sheathed himself inside me.

Raising my hips, I took him deep and my pussy tightened around him, demanding more. He responded and pumped his thick, long shaft fast and hard, then slow and tender, till my legs trembled and shudders of ecstasy raked my body. One orgasm climbed and spiraled into another—and another—and another until I didn't know where one ended and the other began. Gasping for breath, I threw my head back and screamed as I plunged into euphoric abyss of ecstasy so intense it bordered on pain.

“Lilly, together,” he rasped, closing his lips over my neck, branding me as his as he filled me with his warmth and sparked yet another explosive climax.

The light went out.

José Antonio wrapped his arms around me and pulled me onto his chest as he kissed the top of my head. My heart hammered in my chest, and I snuggled against him, trying hard to catch my breath.

He held me in his embrace and hooked his leg over me. Snug and secure, when my breathing slowed, I drifted back to sleep, sated and complete.

\* \* \* \*

“Time to get up, sleepy heads.” Rafael walked around the foot of the bed, holding two cups of coffee and wearing a smug grin of accomplishment. “Morning, shithead,” he said, pushing a mug into José Antonio’s hand.

José Antonio grunted and raised the coffee in gratitude.

“Good morning, mi corazón,” Rafael said, bending to kiss my forehead. “Your breakfast is on the dressing table.”

“Thank you,” I called as he strolled out the door.

Without another word, I sat up and reached for my coffee. José Antonio propped the pillows and leaned on them, patting for me to sit against his chest. I did, and we sipped the rich chicory blend and sweet milk in silence. After a few minutes, I handed him my mug and went to retrieve the beignets from the tray.

Shaking the powdered sugar off the warm fried dough, I first fed him a bite then took one myself. We polished off the whole plate in the same manner, breaking only for sips of coffee between beignets.

“When Manolin carried you through the door yesterday, I wasn’t sure what to make of it.” He placed my fist, enclosed in his, over his heart. “The attraction was instant. The bond overpowering. I was overwhelmed, but had to analyze the allure of instantly accepting you into the family. I’m a man who deals with facts. By training, I’m an accountant. The black on white always speaks the truth to me. I didn’t want to misinterpret anything or react inappropriately because of my enthusiasm.”

He slowed his speech and his gaze glided over me. His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed and his teeth grazed his lower lip. “I am, and have always been, responsible for the family. Because of that, I try not to act impulsively, and because of that, I treated you rudely. I’m sorry I did that. You didn’t deserve it.”

“It’s okay. I understand—”

“No. It’s not okay,” he insisted, shaking his head. “I’m so glad you’re a better person than I am and that you accept my apology.”

Smiling, I moved both mugs to a nightstand and fit myself against him. I gathered my legs close and let him wrap me up in his glorious body.

“Our lifestyle is unique and our home life even more so.”

“I’ve noticed,” I said, a nervous laugh in my voice. “I don’t know how that works.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, stroking my hair.

“There are four of you and only one of me.”

“Do you want each and all of us?”

“Yes,” I admitted.

“Then there is no problem. There are four of us who want you, and there is one of you who want four of us.” He raised my chin and ran his thumb along my jaw. “Xavier, Manolin, Rafael, and I are all in agreement. We want you to stay.”

“I don’t want to be a freeloader, and I don’t just want to be a sex toy—not that I mind the physical attention.”

He laughed, really laughed, and relief shined in his eyes. “No problem. You’re hired as the in-house artist. We have much work for you to do.”

“Okay, then,” I said, pushing out of his hold. “I’ll need materials and limited interference from you when it comes to the art.”

“You have complete artistic freedom to create and restore a wonderful El Destino.”

“Thank you,” I said, hopping off the bed, my heart happier and lighter than it had been in ages. “Come on, we need to shower and go shopping.”

“Shopping?” His eyes got big and shock covered his face as he shook his head and pulled the sheet up his chest. “I don’t do shopping.”

“But I do,” Xavier called from the entrance.

Surprised, I twirled about, just missing the mugs on the nightstand. “Do you guys always listen in?”

“Not if the door is closed.” Xavier grinned, sauntering into the room and pulling me into his arms. “Good morning, babe. Want to fire up some credit cards today?”

## *Chapter Seven*

We worked, we played, we laughed, and we loved. Our days flowed into weeks, and the weeks into months. I couldn't have asked for anything more. Each morning, I thanked my lucky stars for my men. They made me smile and they filled my heart with joy.

I returned to Jackson Square almost every afternoon, looking for inspiration and talking with the other artists about the restoration of the murals. Dalia always greeted me beneath the large oaks, and we shared bags of beignets and had our iced café au lait in the old trees' shade.

I was comfortable and I was happy.

Sitting at the bar, I was preparing a sketch for the last wall in El Destino when one of the artists from the Square came in. He refused to speak with me. He wanted to speak privately with Manolin. The dread that filled my stomach as my friend avoided my eyes was bitter and toxic.

When Manolin approached and pulled me into his arms, he didn't have to speak a word. I knew. I knew.

Dalia was gone.

I felt it. I'd let myself love Dalia and now she was gone.

Sorrow tore through me, opening old wounds and hurling pain in my heart.

"She had a full life," Manolin whispered. "She was tired; it was time for her to rest."

"No. No!" My heart wrenched and my temples throbbed. "I love her. I can't lose her, too. Not now."

Manolin held tight as sobs consumed me. I couldn't help it. I couldn't stop. I cried for days, always with a pair of strong arms around me. At the funeral, I stood between José Antonio and Xavier, with Manolin and Rafael at our backs for added support. Speechless, I stared as they placed the woman I'd come to consider family in her final resting place.

Numb and distraught, I believed that I was not destined to have a family. My family was always taken from me.

In the coming days, I was never alone. Trying to comfort me, they never left me alone. But the last thing I wanted was for one of the men I loved was to comfort me. They couldn't. I wouldn't let them.

After a week or so, I hung a tarp over the last wall and insisted they give me privacy to work. Every waking moment the club was closed for business, I painted. It was the only pleasure I allowed myself. I wanted my men on stage, happy, strong and vibrant. I finished, signed my name with a heart over the 'i' and dropped the tarp. Knowing it would be the last time I saw them, I wiped the tears from my cheeks and gathered what I could fit into my backpack.

I had to leave before they returned. I had to go before I broke down and couldn't find the courage to walk away from them. I loved them. I loved them too much.

They wanted us to be a family, but I couldn't give them what they wanted. I couldn't trust my heart to anyone because I couldn't take any more pain.

I ran onto to Bourbon and snaked through hordes of people, spilling drinks and collecting snide remarks from every person I bumped into. Wanting to be alone and thinking it would be safer, I walked toward the business district and made a right on Canal.

After a few blocks, it proved not to be the smartest move. The area was obviously not tourist stomping ground. Following a sign, indicating a police station, I made a second right and continued on a path I couldn't resist, even if the neighborhood wasn't the most welcoming. Actually, it looked shady and I knew I should turn back, but my feet had a mind of their own. The thing was, I didn't know where I was heading, only that I had to go.

I felt someone watching me, perhaps following me, so I walked faster and deeper into the neighborhood as the light faded and night settled on the city. My heart pounded and sweat trickled down my back, but when I saw the cemetery's wrought iron gate, I had to stop and look



inside. I glanced at the police station on the corner, decided that things looked peaceful enough, and carefully crossed the street to the gate.

Candles and the lanterns reflected off the graves, which stood like proud little houses for the departed souls. Dense humidity blanketed the cemetery and nothing stirred. But the lights twinkled and the illuminated fog added to the spooky rapture. I was like an irresistible picture card with an invitation to proceed down the uneven paths and lose oneself.

Exhausted, I leaned my forehead on the cool bars and almost fell forward when the gate swung open. The posted hours of the cemetery indicated that the gates should be locked, but since they were open, what would it hurt if I went for a quick walk? I couldn't resist the peace and solitude.

I heard phantom footsteps as I moved onto the path and I stilled for the slightest moment. No one was at my side, no one was ahead, and I couldn't see anyone behind me, so I continued with cautious steps past large and small graves. Some ornate, most simple. Some were decorated with flowers, others with pictures, and even a few had little statues.

A fat little cherub atop a small red brick grave protected its inhabitant and patrolled the walkway. Stepping over debris and broken clay pots, I noted that many of the tombs were family resting places with multiple souls within. No homogeneous design in this cemetery. A homemade rock grave, wide and sturdy, neighbored a skinny white stucco structure.

Two bouquets and Mardi Gras beads hooked onto the narrow door of a skinny white tomb. Gold chains and plastic beads lay amongst what appeared to be a diamond ring at the base. On the lower left, there was some sort of bronze fixture, and I thought it looked like a mailbox. Clearly it wasn't, for no one was home to receive any bills. The little house resembled a country oven, but this was a grave visited by many. Candles, flowers, and even food and drink were strewn on the perimeter and leaned against the walls. A vibrant energy resonated from within and I ogled the lanterns' glow, mesmerized by the mysterious rhythm the humid air had assumed.

A cold passed through me and raised the hairs on my neck. Checking over my shoulder to make sure I was still alone, I thought I saw a shadow. I squinted into the night, scanned the area as best I could, but saw nobody. My imagination raced with images of grave walkers and spirits out for a naughty night, and I realized how dumb I'd been to walk into a graveyard alone in the

dark. I smoothed the goose bumps on my arms, turned to leave, but caught sight of the large pot on the side. Lotus flowers bloomed—even in the night. I inched closer, close enough to read the capital letters on the tomb’s plaque.

MARIE LAVAEU  
THIS GREEK REVIVAL TOMB IS  
REPUTED BURIAL PLACE OF THIS  
NOTORIOUS “VOODOO QUEEN”,

...

Stunned, I held my breath. I’d found the infamous grave of the legendary Voodoo Priestess without searching for it.

The heady scent of the lilies enveloped me. A second cold rushed at my back and pushed me closer to the flowers. Awestruck with my discovery and entranced in the moment, I reached for the fragrant blooms.

“Don’t!”

I stumbled against the grave, my nose coming against the numerous “X” markings on the stucco. Long fingers materialized from the night and closed around my wrist.

“Don’t touch any of the stuff against her tomb.” José Antonio placed my hands between us and crushed me against him.

“Why? Why can’t I touch this stuff?”

“Because they’re offerings to Marie Laveau. Those flowers belong to her,” he said sternly, refusing to release me.

I stopped struggling against his hold, let my palm settle against his chest, and discovered that our hearts beat with identical tempos.

“How do you know those flowers belong to her?” I whispered.

“Because I gave them to her.” He gazed at the lilies, as if looking at a lover. The yearning and longing displayed on the gentle press of his mouth.

I wrinkled my nose in confusion. He’d placed the same type of flowers in my room at El Destino the day I’d met him as he had at the Voodoo Queen’s grave. Why?

“I gave them to her because you came. I come and keep their water full every day, and they’ve miraculously continued to blossom,” he added, wrapping his arm around my waist and pressing his groin against my belly. He connected us, assuring that I was aware of his every intention. He then raised our joined hands and traced three carefully drawn slanted crosses above the lotus plants. “These are our markings.”

I glanced from the markings to his eyes and back again, but I didn’t see how these drawings had anything to do with me. “I’ve never been here before.”

“I have,” he said. “Six months ago, I asked the Priestess for the other half of my heart. She sent you.”

“How—”

He immediately silenced me with a quick rise of his brows and a stern look. No questions allowed till he was done.

“I was very skeptical when so-called fortunetellers predicted your appearance so quick after my request. Not one, but two readers spoke of our family being complete. Then Xavier started dreaming. Each word he spoke of you confirmed your predestined arrival.”

My head swarmed with all the details and I fought to piece the information José Antonio offered with the facts that Xavier had confided in me that first day. The harder I tried, the more my head pounded.

“But—”

“Shhh,” he breathed, sealing my lips with the hush. My knees got weak, but his hold got stronger, and his power infused me with hope. He sighed and dropped his forehead to mine.

“Don’t cut us out of your life, mi amor. You’re the other half of my heart. I love you,” he said. “You’re scared, and I don’t want you to hurt, but our love is worth walking on coals for.”

We stood in the dark night, entwined in each other's arms, and did not speak for what seemed like hours. The flames in the lanterns burned brighter and a cooling essence settled over us. My heart ached for him, and I closed my eyes and wished for his fear to dissipate. I'd never intended to make him doubt his feelings or to hurt him.

"I couldn't bear the idea of having you brush by my life and not grabbing hold of you. I can't let you slip through my fingers." He cupped my face and raised it to his. "Stay with me. Please be at my side and complete our family."

"There are four of you in the family," I stammered.

"Part of our unique way of life." He smiled and brought his nose to mine. "You didn't seem to mind in the past. Actually, I have it on good authority that you enjoyed it," he clarified, sweeping his tongue across my lips till I parted them and kissed him back.

Slow and comfortable, his kiss settled in my heart and warmed my bones. It was right. It was meant. If I let my feelings lead, I'd stand beside José Antonio for as long as he wanted me to. I'd always be his.

"Mi amor, we all agree. There is nothing that we want more than for you to decide to stay with us. We love you, I love you." He stroked my cheek, then gently placed a kiss in the center. "You are the answer to my dreams."

"How can you be sure?"

"Woman. Are you not hearing me? Once upon a time, I asked you to be sure. I asked you to commit." He glanced at the marks on the tomb. "Not only because I asked her for you and she delivered, but because I am the way I am, there are great consequences to our actions. Once I make love to you, you're bound to me forever. I'll never let you go. So, I asked that you be sure and you said yes. Now, you take off like a thief in the night. Why?"

"Because, I don't want to hurt anyone." Tears filled my eyes and threatened to spill over. "Because, I can't stand losing someone I love again."

He caught the tears and wiped them away, then kissed my moist cheeks in slow tender touches.

“To answer your question, mi amor, I am sure because I know it,” he said, tapping his chest. “In here. I feel it in my heart. I don’t want to analyze anything. I want you. And, I’m not going anywhere. I know you’ve had it hard, I know you’ve lost so much, but that doesn’t mean you can’t be happy and loved. Trust in what we have. We love you. I love you. Aren’t we worth the risk?”

Even José Antonio couldn’t catch the tears any longer. They streamed down my face and blurred my sight. Like magic, my heart swelled with ardor and a glow of ecstasy engulfed me, engulfed us.

They were more than worth the risk. They were my world.

“I love you,” I confessed, my fear evaporating in the night. “I can’t leave you. I can’t.”

Instantly, he lifted me into his arms and twirled me in the air, kissing me between laughter and exclamations of joy.

“Come on, Lilly. Let’s tell our best men to get their suits out of the closet. We’re getting married Sunday.”

“Sunday? That’s—”

“Not soon enough,” he said. “But, it’ll give you time to paint our queen in our scene.”

“Your queen?”

“You silly girl. Haven’t you noticed the resemblance you have to the woman on the throne who oversees the parade?”

I thought about it. He was right. We did have similarities: long red hair, violet eyes, and surrounded by men. “I named her Tykhe, after the Ancient Greek Fate, goddess of luck and fortune.”

“No. She’s the Queen of El Destino. Our queen.”

“My honor,” I replied.

“So, Sunday. I’ll be patient and let you plan a wedding, clean the paint from under your nails, and do things right. After all, we only get married once. But, I’m not a saint, and I can’t wait too long. Sunday.”

“Sunday,” I agreed, and sealed it with a kiss.

## ***BTW***

*Three days later, we entered the church as five individuals, and we exited an hour later as husband and wife, with a complete family.*

*One year later, we entered the maternity ward as an ecstatic and expectant family of five, and we left two days later as six, with our new addition, baby Destiny.*

*Each Monday since we've been together, we eat Chinese food and collect our fortunes in a huge brandy bowl that sits on the piano in El Destino. When the bowl is full, we plan on taking it to Marie Lavaeu and asking her to spread the fortunes to those in need.*

## *About the Author*

Demi Alex is a hopeless romantic who sits at her neighborhood café and fabricates stories of magical interludes between her fellow java worshipers. Writing since elementary school, she's been published since junior high, but her stories have taken on a much spicier and more mature tone in the past years.

Needing to taste the flavors life has to offer, Demi attended college in New York. Long before graduating, she developed a passion for 'people watching'. Lunchtimes on St. Patrick's steps and afternoons in the Village led to mornings and nights at the computer, typing away like mad to put on paper the stories that played in her head about the colorful people she'd seen and placed into hypothetical relationship in the depths of her mind.

Traveling as often as work would allow her, Demi has since added to the topographies in her writing and does personal research of all her settings in order to make her stories speak to her readers. Her characters can be found in any town or city, but their attitude is what sets them apart. They let loose and experience what is thrown at them!

“What would life be, if we didn't take a few risks along the way and place our hearts on the line? Boring! So come on—let loose.”

Demi invites all readers to send her scenarios on a 'what if' they had made a different choice and decision at a certain time. “If you write to me about that specific choice, and I can give you an alternate ending, I'll name the character in the story according to your wish.”

You can find her at [www.DemiAlex.com](http://www.DemiAlex.com).



*More Demi Alex from  
Resplendence Publishing*

*Key West*

What a time for a revelation! The moment Prince Charming proposes, Addison London realizes that she is about to say “yes” to a lifetime of love and stability—and constancy—having never really lived her life to the fullest, and runs.

As a straight-laced good girl grown into a responsible, respectable woman, Addison is always prim and proper, and...well, boring. She always does the right thing, plays it safe, makes the right decisions, and suppresses her own longings to meet the expectations of others.

But she will have no regrets. Before committing to a life wrapped in a white picket fence, she will have a little excitement and adventure, she will throw caution to the wind, and she will live out her most secret sexual fantasies—if only for a weekend.

Desperate to break free, she travels to Key West and surrounds herself with willing, gorgeous men. All she has to do is pick one. But with only one weekend in the tropical paradise, and one chance for a hedonistic experience meant to last a lifetime, she discovers that “one” is not enough. After all, what happens in Key West stays in Key West, right?

## ***Cuff Me Lacy***

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with "The Bull" she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacKlick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

## ***Unwrap Me, I'm Yours***

Hope Verdetti lies to her mother about having a phenomenal fiancé who surprises her on a trip to Vegas. Now, her family expects him to come home with her for the holidays. She needs a man that fits the bill—and fast!

After seven interviews with hired applicants in three days, she finds her solution in the neighborhood coffee shop. Sexy and irresistible Jon Edwards volunteers for the task, having an agenda of his own.

With their holiday agreement set, Jon turns up the heat and gives Hope the present of her life...himself.

Ribbons Not Included

Just when I thought I had it all together, just when I thought my life was perfect, Christian comes out and accuses me of only wanting him as a stud horse! Not true. I love him. I do.

It's Christmas, and I'm searching for the perfect present to convince him that he's my number one priority. I'm trying everything to spice up our love life-from sexy lingerie, to new positions, to different locations. But then he pushes me too far. I'm not sure I can do it.

Giving it all I have, I shiver with the thrill of being exposed. Really exposed. What if someone sees me naked at the very moment I can only see shooting stars? Will they think I'm a total slut? Or will they get turned on and join in? My mind says no, but my body can't refuse.

### ***A Night in the Life of Cinderella***

We all know how important finding the right shoes can be to a woman's soul. We all know how Prince Charming fit the glass slipper on Cinderella's foot and they lived happily ever after. But have you wondered what happened once they were alone? And more importantly, is the fairytale ending available for today's lovers?

In line for a four dollar pick-me-up at a New York City café, Cindy, an aspiring shoe designer, meets her Latte Romeo and the drudgery of daily responsibilities evaporate from her world for an hour. When their time together comes to an abrupt end, she flees, not knowing his true name, and without giving him a way to contact her.

But if they are meant to be, he will find her. Won't he?

## ***Knight in Shining Amour***

An uncharacteristic storm catapults Effie Genes to the night medieval Rhodes fell into the Ottoman hands. Pulled onto Lord Kavin's stallion, the modern-day Effie experiences the war and degrading occupation of her birthplace, as passion and danger dictate the fate of lovers born five hundred years apart.

Lord Kavin risks his life to keep Effie out of a Sultanzada's bed and claim her as his own. But once he has her in his arms, will he need to release her in order to save her?

*Also Available from  
Resplendence Publishing*

*Belonging to Them* by Brynn Paulin

On the run from her past, Rayna Halliday is devastated when her old car breaks down in the middle of nowhere. She soon finds that her ex has managed to block her credit cards, her accounts and even her cell phones in an attempt to exert his control over her. Giving in to him is something she refuses to do.

When the owners of O’Keefe’s Gas and Repair come to her rescue, they make her an offer that tantalizes the forbidden desires within her—she can find a way to pay for the car repairs, or she can belong to them for two weeks and they’ll see to her repairs for free. At the sexual mercy of four gorgeous men for two weeks... Why not? She can have fun and get things straightened out, all at once. But there are two problems heading her way: an ex on a rampage and her heart that’s in for more than just fun.

*FU* by Mia Watts

When a screw-up by the Fullerton University Housing Office leaves Parker Galloway shacked

up with four sexy men, Parker thinks four just might be her lucky number...as long as she can get Kei Yamamoto to join in the fun.

But will taking advantage of FU's mistake end up getting all five roomies kicked off campus, or will it be the closest thing to heaven Parker has ever experienced?

### ***Ultimate Ultimatum*** by Dakota Rebel

Annabelle has been dating Mike, Kyle and Josh at the same time for quite a while. She believes they are all happy with the arrangement until one night they drop an ultimatum on her. They inform her that she will have to pick one of them or they will decide for her. Torn by her love for all of them, she figures that she would rather be alone and heartbroken than to have to choose between them. But when the time comes to share that decision with the men, she finds out they've had a different plan in mind the whole time. One that will ultimately satisfy all of them.

### ***Just Right*** by Bronwyn Green

When Department of Natural Resources officer, Gwendolyn Locke, hits a black bear on the way home from work one night, her entire view of reality changes. She discovers that shape-shifters exist, and she's just become Goldilocks to three gorgeous, very aroused men who also happen to be werebears. Being snowbound has never been so hot.

### ***Oriana and the Three Werebears*** by Tia Fanning

Oriana Ricci has taken over the family business—flying cargo and rich tourists around Alaska's

barely inhabited Kodiak Archipelago. When her plane malfunctions and she's forced to make an emergency landing, she finds herself stranded in the middle of a National Wildlife Refuge. With no civilization for miles and no hope of rescue, she thinks all is lost... Until she stumbles upon the entrance to an underground bunker.

Jack, Jordan, and Jonathan McMathan own and operate a secret intelligence firm contracted by the US Government. Hidden away in an old Cold War spy station located the middle of the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, the brothers are not only able to do their top secret jobs safely without fear of discovery, but are better to protect their other, more personal secret: They have the ability to shift into Kodiak bears.

Like a fairy tale gone bad, the brothers return home to find their lunch tasted—or eaten, their computer chairs adjusted—or broken, and a beautiful blonde sleeping in one of their beds. This situation poses a big problem for the brothers... Their location is now compromised. But more importantly, what are they to do with the lady?

### ***The Elves and I* by Catrina Calloway**

Marni Sands is spoiled, pampered, and has never done a day's work in her life. Arrested for speeding through a small town traffic circle, Marni's defiant attitude makes the judge think long and hard about her punishment. He assigns her 'community service' in Christmas Town, where she's to (horror of all horrors!) work with the elves that live there and help them create toys for some very needy children.

Meet Kip, Noel and Eldan, the three hot and hunky elves assigned to keep Marni in line. She needs a firm hand—on a very luscious part of her beautiful anatomy. It is hard to discipline such a gorgeous human, particularly when she divulges a painful secret—the mystery that has kept her miserable for most of her life.

If tough-love won't work, the elves have only one solution: to turn Marni into a caring elf, capable of holiday cheer, they must make love to her as often as possible. Only then will they be able to convince her that good can triumph over evil and love really does conquer all.



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