



The
DETECTIVE'S
LOVER

Aliyah Burke

The Detective's Lover

An erotic novel by

Aliyah Burke

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Also by Aliyah Burke

Add a Little Mistletoe
Just a Dream
Sin Is Not a Four-Letter Word

Born to Fly: Landing in Love
Born to Fly: You Save Me
Born to Fly: Wild as the Wind



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Chapter 1

The newly-dark skateboard park was shattered with a single shot, followed by muzzle flashes and the stutter of an automatic weapon.

Ra-tat-tat-tat. Ra-tat-tat-tat.

Silence returned as quickly as it had been destroyed. Not even dogs barked in the area. As the night progressed, rain came and cleansed the city. Blood mixed with the water and washed down into Seattle's drainage system.

An early morning jogger heading through the park discovered the body. He grabbed his phone from his pocket, called 911, and then waited for the police to arrive.

A detective's car rolled up and stopped, its red flashing light cutting through the misty conditions. A tall, powerful man exited. His stern face settled into grim lines as steel-gray eyes flickered around the crime scene, taking in the yellow tape defining the perimeter. He noticed an officer taking a statement from a man in running clothes. The coroner stood in the drizzle, beside a gurney and the sheet-covered victim, waiting on him.

The detective sighed. *Nothing worse than starting a Sunday morning with a dead body.* Being a detective was hard. However, Ian Cavanaugh added onto this by being in Homicide. Carrying his Starbucks coffee with him, he went to the victim.

"Sorry for the hold up, Parsons. Won't take me but a minute and I'll let you get the vic back to the morgue." His deep voice stopped the coroner in his conversation with his assistant.

"Morning, Ian," the old man said as he wiped some moisture off his face. The morning drizzle had picked up, becoming a steady rain.

"Whaddya got?" Ian crouched beside the dead body. His hand reached for the sheet and slowly drew it away so he could see the face.

Gil Parsons answered, "Multiple shots. Some through-and-through, some not. With the rain I don't know what trace has been ruined and lost,

but I'll let you know, what I know, as soon as I know it." The man sighed and waited for Ian to look.

"Thanks." Ian glanced down at the unseeing eyes staring back at him. "Ah, hell," he muttered.

"You know him?"

Running his hand down his face, Ian didn't answer right away. He closed those sightless green eyes and recovered him with the sheet. Ian drained the remainder of his coffee before crushing the cup in his fist.

"Ian?" Parsons spoke in a low voice.

"This here is Gregory Maddox." Ian rested a hand on his thigh as he pushed to his feet. "I know you've heard of the Maddox clan."

Gil and his assistant got the body ready for transport with swift effectiveness. "The foster kids that raised holy hell?"

Ian helped load the body in the van, his mangled coffee cup stark against the somber blackness of the body bag. "Those are the ones. Trouble alone, terror on wheels when together." He sighed. "Only one lives here now, I should go tell him." At the last second, Ian grabbed his cup off the bag.

"Bye, Ian." Parsons climbed into his vehicle and drove off.

Ian watched him go. His mind worked fast as he stood there in the increasing rain. *I hope this is solved, and fast, before the Maddox Clan is reunited.*

Shaking off the twinge of foreboding, Ian tossed the cup in a trash receptacle, headed to his car and on toward the house of Herschel Maddox. The streets of Seattle may very well turn into a war zone if this wasn't cleared up very soon.

Fallon Maddox stood at a high vantage point, alone, and watched through the gray haze the burial of the only father she could recall with fondness. The hole was just waiting for the men press the button to lower his casket down into the waiting ground.

She picked out her four brothers. They had all made it. She hadn't been sure, when Herschel called to tell her the news, if they would all make it. But there they were.

Clayborne. Shawn. Herschel and his family. And the youngest sibling, Dylan. She felt tears prick the backs of her eyes.

She never moved from her position. She was late in arriving and it was a miracle that she had made it. Part of her wanted to be down there, but the part that won wanted to be alone, *needed* to be alone. Fallon observed stoically as people said their farewells and got into their vehicles. It was a huge turnout.

Finally, it was just her brothers and a man she didn't recognize. Snatches of their conversation reached her. The voice of the unknown struck her as familiar, but she couldn't place from where. Her brothers were upset and it was from more than just their recent loss.

Fallon stopped herself from going down there when Clayborne sent his fist flying into the guy's face. Now was not the time to get involved in an altercation. Herschel stepped in and so she remained where she was. The one in the scuffle with Clayborne turned his head and looked in her direction. Fallon stepped behind a tree and remained hidden from view. Hiding wasn't her forte, but she wasn't up to questions yet. Fallon had to say her goodbyes first, which was something to be done in private.

Once everyone had left, Fallon moved to the grave and laid a bouquet of flowers at her mother's headstone before saying her final farewell to her father and leaving a single rose for him. Silently she walked to the waiting taxi and climbed in.

The taxi pulled up to her childhood home. Fallon paid the driver, took a deep breath, and got out. *I can't believe Pops is gone.* Picking up her duffle bag, she walked up the steps, unlocked the door, and entered the silent house. The door clicked behind her, the sound reverberating through her empty soul. She was alone. Her bag hit the floor as she turned on a light. Her eyes swept the room. Memories danced before her. With another deep breath, she proceeded further into the room. It all looked the same. Light tan carpet and comfortable but old furniture.

The walls were covered by myriads of photos. A small smile crossed her face as she looked at her family. *Why did Pops have to die?*

"I miss you, Pops," she said absently as she retrieved her satchel and headed towards the room she had used while living there.

Pushing open the door, Fallon was shocked to see that nothing in there had changed since her last visit. Her patchwork quilt still covered the twin bed. Over the pillow hung a framed cross-stitch her foster mother, Nadine, had made for her.

FALLON DELU MADDOX

She set her olive green bag on the dark cherry rocker and touched the framed work. The thread was vibrant red and sat on a white background. A new wave of tears threatened.

Fallon turned a complete circle, pausing as she was met by her reflection. The dark brown eyes staring back at her seemed dull and lifeless. Looking intently at her image, Fallon touched her face. Funny, she didn't remember her face being that tired looking, there were bags under her eyes. Again tears threatened and this time she allowed them to escape. She was safe here. No need to be tough as nails. No one watched over her shoulder at how she behaved.

For the time being, she could be what her body needed to be. A child who had just lost a parent. Not a United States Marine. Not a hard-ass, take-no-shit instructor. Just a mourning child. A half-stumble landed her on her bed where she promptly curled up with her one-eyed doll. The sobs came and after a fashion so did the much needed sleep.

Voices woke her. Loud, angry voices. Fallon was instantly awake as she ascertained where the yelling was originating.

"Clay," she whispered, getting out of bed and going to the door.

She would recognize the graveled baritone of her brother's tone anywhere. The one she didn't recognize was the one in the discussion with him. Still that ripple of familiarity danced across her skin, just as it had at the cemetery. So, whoever it was, the same person had exchanged blows with her brother.

Pressing her ear to the door, she eavesdropped on the two men.

Her brother was yelling. "I don't give a flying fuck what bullshit story you told Herschel! I'm not buying. I want that report."

"It was a gang hit," a deep voice countered.

"Fuck you. That area is a neutral one, we both know it, and Herschel knows it as well."

"The whole place was shot up. It's just a case of wrong place, wrong time," the unknown male responded.

She heard her brother growl low before the sound of flesh against flesh reached her. "Oh Clay," she muttered, yanking open the door and moving swiftly down the hall.

Rounding the corner, she narrowed her eyes at the sight of her brother pressed up against the wall, unable to move an inch. There was a gun pressed against his back.

She reacted immediately. Within seconds, Fallon slammed the larger man to the floor, his gun skidding out of reach.

What the...?

Ian had no clue what just happened. One second he had Clayborne Maddox restrained and the next, pain unlike any he had experienced before flowed through his body. *Owned* his body.

He couldn't move. He was face down on the floor in the entryway of the Maddox home. Ian kept his mouth shut, knowing if he tried to speak, all that would come out would be a wail, a cry of extreme pain.

Breathing had become a chore. *What happened?* Ian had been face down before but this time it was different. Not only the heavy boot on the back of his neck. No, there was something more. A pressure point.

His arm was wrenched back, his thumb felt almost snapped off and there was pain emanating from a spot on his wrist.

"Move and I break it," a low raspy voice warned.

Warned?

No. It sounded like a promise. Ian remained motionless, hoping for the best, hoping he would be able to get the upper hand soon. Would Clayborne really let this person harm him? Probably.

He blinked back stinging tears of pain. His arm was going numb. *I'm gonna lock you up, you fuck!*

Cold air blasted over him as he heard footsteps coming near. "Well, well," a young man's voice said. "Who's the mutt?"

"Let him go." Clay's voice.

The boot at his neck increased its pressure as if in defiance and warning before it was gone. His arm was dropped and he barely contained the roar of pain that tried to erupt as the blood began to flow again. It was a good ten seconds before the pain was tolerable and he could move. Getting up, Ian glared at Clay and two other brothers, Shawn and Dylan. Eyes moved over their footwear. *Damn it!* They all wore big heavy boots.

"Who did it?" Ian demanded as he picked up his gun and shoved it back in its holster. No one made a sound. Three sets of eyes spat daggers at him and didn't back down. "You want me to arrest you all?"

"For what?" Clay asked. "You assaulted me in my own home without identifying who you were."

Ian stole a glance at the other two men there. There was Shawn Maddox, big strong man who'd played pro football for a few years until he

vanished. They had been friends at one time, but now, as he stared into his dark face, he saw nothing but distrust.

Dylan Maddox was the youngest of the clan and the most impetuous. His pale face bore the scars of a fire from a previous foster home. The child had been at many before becoming a Maddox. Still, he was loyal to a fault to his family.

The message he received from their unwavering glare was they would all have the same story. Despite them being on the wrong side of the law most times, even a fresh-faced public defender could get them off for that. He hadn't identified himself as an officer of the law. It didn't matter they knew him; *he* had personally failed to follow procedure.

Didn't the Maddox boys have a sister? Ian couldn't recall her name and her face was fuzzy to his memory as well. *I don't remember seeing a woman there today with them. Not other than Herschel's wife.*

Ian turned on his heel and headed for the door when he heard Clayborne.

"I want the report."

"The case is closed. The Maddox boys don't need to try and make trouble." Ian walked out, slamming the door behind him.

He didn't want to admit something didn't feel right to him about this, but orders were orders. There were some who wanted the Maddox clan gone, given their disregard for the law. Herschel was the "good" Maddox.

I need to look at that autopsy report. Ian drove to his favorite bar. A cop bar, owned and operated by a retired detective. The moment he entered the place that nagging feeling and earlier pain vanished. This was his family. The boys in blue.

"What the fuck do you mean they said it was gang-related and they were closing it?" Fallon thundered.

She had already been welcomed home by her brothers, including Herschel, who had shown up belatedly. Now they were discussing what happened. Fallon saw the shock on her family's faces. It wasn't normal behavior for her to swear.

"That's what Ian Cavanaugh told me." Herschel played with the spoon in his coffee mug, his eyes downcast, not meeting anyone's gaze.

“Ian...Ian Cavanaugh?” Her eyes cut over to Shawn who drank some beer. “Wasn’t he in your class?” When Shawn nodded, she continued her line of questioning. “Why is he on this?”

“He’s a homicide detective,” Clay supplied the information. “And he bleeds blue, so if this is a cover-up, we’re going to have to go at it ourselves.” A smile flitted across Clay’s handsome, tanned face. “Especially considering how fast our little mad dog slammed him to the floor.”

That was Ian Cavanaugh I did that to? Narrowing her eyes, she snapped, “I thought he was hurting you.”

Clay just laughed.

Shaking her head, Fallon stood. She was exhausted and had things to do before she could call it quits. Her body was still on a different time schedule, and according to its message, she needed more sleep.

“I’ll get that report tomorrow,” she said before kissing each brother on the cheek. “Right now, I’m going to bed.”

“Night, Fallon,” they hollered as she left the room. As she climbed into bed, the rain slammed against the windowpane. Fallon drifted asleep, burrowed deep under the covers of her childhood bed, her stuffed cyclops held close.

“I need to speak to Detective Cavanaugh.”

The voice, although feminine, had no trouble reaching his ear in the bullpen. Even though he was on the phone, Ian waved the officer escorting her over. His eyes travelled over her she moved closer.

She glided more than anything; Ian almost looked around his desk to see if her feet even touched the floor. *Graceful*. His mind wandered from the call he was on.

Her skin was the color of toasted nuts, the nice expensive ones that were almost like butter melting in your mouth. She wore a black bomber jacket, which hid her shirt and he could see blue jeans as well. No purse.

Her face was not stunning or beyond gorgeous, but she was attractive. The closer she got, the fuller her lips appeared and the larger her eyes became, a beautiful dark, chocolaty brown. The expression was almost perfectly serene, but he could see she was aware of more than she let on.

He was intrigued. He wasn’t sure what it was about her that captivated him, but it was there. Perhaps it was the way she carried

herself; most of the women he knew would look haughty if they attempted to hold themselves or walk the way she did. Not this woman. It was like staring at a person walking through a downpour and no moisture touched her. A calmness emanated from her that amazed him.

She stopped beside him, and stared at him for a moment before looking around. Ian felt dismissed. He also noticed that unlike most of the women who sought him out, he hadn't smelled any perfume on her. Normally he would be engulfed if they stood as close beside him as she did.

"Okay, good." Ian hung up the phone and looked over the woman still waiting silently. He glanced at her feet.

Motorcycle boots?

Combat boots?

He wasn't sure.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. *She has some long lashes.* There was no makeup on her face. "Miss?"

She glanced down at him, hands still in her jacket pockets. "I need a report."

He frowned and gestured to a chair near her. "Please sit. You want to report a homicide?" He picked up a pen in his right hand.

"No." Her voice never modulated. "I need a report. Not *to* report."

"And which report would that be?" Ian watched his partner move up behind her to listen in.

"The autopsy report for case #567321 Alpha." She barely blinked.

That sounded familiar to him. Why would she want it? Leaning back in his chair, he asked, "Why do you want it?"

"Case #567321A is closed according to this department. It should be available. It's not and I want it." She paused for a second. "I was told copies would be made available."

More detectives began to watch.

"Who's the vic?" Ian's partner, Bill questioned.

Ian noticed a twitch of emotion on her face before it was smoothed away.

A young clean-shaven officer walked up, holding a file. "Here you go, Detective Cavanaugh. This is the autopsy report for case #567321A. Someone will be by today to pick it up."

Yes. She's already here.

"Thank you." Ian took the folder and opened it. Gregory Maddox. His eyes flew up to meet the gaze of the woman still waiting.

She put out her hand. It was covered by a matte black leather glove.
“The file, please.”

“This is the jacket on Gregory Maddox’s case.” Ian closed it and set it on his desk.

“I know.”

“Who are you?” Bill asked, moving around to stand behind Ian.

“I’m his daughter, Fallon.” She took the file and opened it before either man seemed to realize what happened.

Fallon? Fallon Maddox? This woman was she? Ian didn’t know what to say. What could he say? More apologies? Probably not what she wanted to hear.

Chapter 2

Fallon seethed on the inside. Outwardly, she remained calm. Closing the file, she looked into the mercury gaze of Detective Ian Cavanaugh. *This man has stunning eyes.* “Where’s your boss?”

“Excuse me?” Ian frowned.

She knew he noticed the soft malice in her eyes, and she controlled herself. *No reason to let this man see me lose control.* “Your boss. Where is he?”

“Why?”

Fallon blinked once. “Never mind. I see him.” She walked off toward the room with a door. She entered without knocking.

“Who are you?” the pudgy man demanded. “Ian, get her out of here.”

Fallon knew Detective Cavanaugh was in the doorway, she’d heard him get up and follow her.

“I want the rest,” she insisted. “This file is incomplete. I was *assured* that we would be given the whole thing.”

“Fallon Maddox, I presume?” The sneer on her last name was hard to miss. For anyone.

“Yes. Your boss gave his word. I want the rest. I will make copies myself.” She pointed over her shoulder at a lurking Ian. “He can escort me.”

It was a struggle for her not to reach out smack that contemptuous look off the captain’s face. The way his nondescript, watery blue eyes stared at her like she was something filthy. She held his gaze, taking stock of the way his lip curled along with a distasteful expression on his face. *Like the man swallowed something foul.*

Fallon felt the man behind her approach closer, he moved softly, well balanced on his feet. Warmth radiated from his body as he stood behind her and it swallowed her up. Blinking again, Fallon reached for the file and took it. “Thank you for your cooperation.”

Turning, she found herself staring at a wall of flesh. Solid flesh. A dark blue crewneck stretched lovingly across his chest. A double shoulder harness succeeded in highlighting the rippling pectorals.

Holy crap!

Fallon licked her lips. Her eyes moved down first and roamed over the nice tight black jeans and white tennis shoes. Slowly, she brought her eyes back up the mouthwatering physique.

He's built better than some Marines I know.

A strong chin covered by light stubble bespoke a serious stubbornness. The angular face was handsome but he was not a pretty boy. Auburn hair, cut close to the nape of his neck, framed his face.

Gunmetal eyes waited for her. They told her this man was passionate about his job. Intelligence and yet interspaced within that she saw the exhaustion of one who had seen too much.

"I'll take you to an observation room where you can look over the file."

Damn! Ian Cavanaugh is even better looking up close.

"What you *can* do is escort me to the complete file, let me make sure it's all there, and then walk me to a photocopier. I'll make copies and then leave, getting out of your hair." Fallon stepped around him and headed to the door.

"I don't need the Maddox clan in the way!" Captain Rick DeVane snapped.

She swallowed and turned, making sure there was no emotion on her face. "In the way? Of what? You said it was basically an open-shut case."

Fallon caught the evasiveness of his gaze. The rapid swallowing and excessive clearing of his throat. She tilted her head slightly to the left and said, "While this may be just another case to you, this man was our father." *And if you keep stonewalling me, I'll call in every favor I have to.*

"I'll take care of this, Captain." Ian's voice split the tension.

Fallon clenched her teeth and spun around. She left the office and found much of the squad room staring in her direction.

Ian stopped beside her. "This way." He gestured to the left. Within a few moments, he was opening a door.

An interrogation room.

"I don't need an interrogation room. I just need the file." She could feel a headache coming. Fallon grimaced. She heard the sharpness in her tone and realized her hard-won control was dissolving. The little girl inside her wanted and needed to grieve.

"I'm having someone bring the file. Have a seat. Can I get you a drink? Anything?" His voice was deep and sensual and made her think of things she didn't want to think of at that moment.

"I would love to get the file." Fallon ignored everything in the room. The table. The chairs. Ian. Although that one was a bit more difficult. "Leave the door open," she ordered before he could shut it.

"At least have a seat," Ian said.

"I'm just fine, thank you." She had no intention of sitting.

Ian refused to sit also. He leaned in a corner, watched and waited. Fallon Maddox confused him. She was an enigma. The words "coldly polite" came to mind.

She didn't seem to care for him or his captain. She refused even the smallest of hospitalities, a chair and drink included, and wanted the door left open.

He observed her appearance. Her hands remained in her jacket pockets. Her black booted feet were braced shoulder-width apart and her stare remained zeroed in on the entryway of the room they occupied.

"I'm sorry for your loss," he blurted.

"Thank you." She didn't look at him.

"He was a good man."

Her jaw clenched for a fraction of a second. "He was a *great* man."

"Yes, yes of course he was," Ian agreed.

Silence reigned again.

Ian didn't know what to do. His normal calm at handling difficult situations seemed to vanish like ice in hell. He wanted her to talk to him, wanted her to engage him in conversation. Ian continued to watch her as they waited. He didn't recall much about Shawn's little sister. She had kept to herself a lot. He just remembered how protective her brothers were of her.

Ian hadn't seen her at her mom's funeral. He had been at a seminar when Nadine Maddox was buried. It had been over fifteen years since he had laid eyes on her. Over the years after high school, he and Shawn had grown further apart. Without football to unite them, he was a cop's son and Shawn...Shawn was Clayborne Maddox's partner-in-crime.

She is remarkably calm, considering her father was buried yesterday. Ian frowned. *Why hadn't she gone to the funeral or wake?*

He looked at her again. No change. Her face remained as if carved out of stone. There was no frustration, no anger, just what he could only describe as patience.

Endless patience.

The vibration of his phone snapped his attention away from her. “Cavanaugh.” His eyes drifted back to Fallon. Still no change.

The person on the other end was his captain.

“Report to me as soon as that Maddox woman is gone. I’m assuming *she’s* still here.” DeVane’s voice rang through the phone.

“Yes sir, she is.”

Ian frowned again. What possible reason could Captain Rick DeVane have for retaining such animosity toward Fallon Maddox? He was well aware of the tension between him and Clay, but Fallon? She hadn’t been around for years.

“As soon as she’s gone, Cavanaugh. My office.” The phone slammed down in his ear.

Ian shook his head. Something had rattled his normally controlled boss. He knew the captain had a temper, everyone did, but the blatant rudeness was new. He’d call his dad who had worked over at the one-five and hopefully get some answers.

Hooking his phone back on his belt, Ian looked up and froze. Fallon was gone.

What the hell? When did she go? He hadn’t been on the phone for very long.

He headed to the doorway of the room. Scanning the busy room, he caught sight of her walking out the door.

Ian headed after her. Halfway through the bullpen he heard a yell. “Cavanaugh! My office!”

Damn it. With one final glance at the retreating figure of Fallon Maddox, Ian sighed as he adjusted his course to see his captain. Even as he closed the office door behind him, Ian’s thoughts lingered on the ever stoic, Fallon Maddox.

The cold and rainy weather hit her hard as she left the police station. Fallon tightened her arm that kept the file in her jacket safe and dry.

Her strides lengthened as she moved up the street to the parking lot. Fallon used her right hand to unlock her father’s old Nova. Closing the door, she pulled out her cell phone and sent a text message consisting of two words. GOT IT!

On the drive back to the house she had grown up in, Fallon kept the file where it was, between her left arm and her side. The sight of the Space Needle lit against the background of the night sky made her smile.

I miss you, Pops.

The wind and rain had increased as she pulled into the driveway. Fallon reached into her jacket and touched the file folder. As the engine idled, her eyes closed as her fingers danced along the edge, almost like there was a message for her in Braille. Fallon withdrew her hand as a warm tear leaked from one eye and down her cheekbone. With an angry slash, she erased the evidence, zipped up her jacket, shut off the engine, and took a deep breath. Time to figure out what the plan was.

Fallon walked up the steps to the front door. Hand on the knob, she glanced back out over the Seattle skyline, even through the rain, it was beautiful. She had spent many nights out here, learning to love this city and all it offered. Even now, despite her rage at losing her parent to a senseless death, the serenity of the Pac Northwest reached out and embraced her.

It was good to be home.

They sat around the solid dark golden maple table. Photos and the reports were scattered across the uncovered wood. Beside Fallon sat a half-empty bottle of Samuel Adams Black Lager.

“This is a cover up,” Fallon stated, tapping her nail against the bottle. “Pops wasn’t killed in a random gang shootout. The shot in the back of his head did it. Pops was executed.”

Four sets of eyes stared at her. Disbelief. Anger. Clay’s blue eyes snapped with barely suppressed rage, his jaw clenched as he repeatedly flexed one hand into a fist. Herschel’s blue eyes weren’t as angry, more saddened, and disheartened. She could see her brother fighting not to lose his temper and become enraged. That was Herschel, ever the good boy. Shawn looked mad enough to take on an entire football team by himself, and she bet he would win. He spun his beer bottle on the tabletop as he too, tried to absorb what she’d just said. Then there was Dylan, the baby, even now, he seemed more lost and scared than anything. Sure there was anger, but Dylan didn’t get as upset as everyone else did. Fallon sipped her beer and took another look at a photo of her father’s autopsy.

The impression around the wound told her the barrel was pressed up against his skull. She followed the burn mark left by the gun with her gaze. Kicking into overdrive, her brain began streaming through weapon types; although her gut instinct told her it was in *no* way caused by an AK-47 like the rest of his wounds.

She explained her reasoning to her family. "This is the only one that doesn't match the others. The other wounds match the bullets that remained in his flesh and those were taken out of him. Except this one."

"Why would they do this to Pops? He didn't have any enemies," Dylan said before he drained the rest of his beer.

She looked him over. His face was flushed and two red spots flamed against his pale cheeks. She clamped her lips together to keep her comment to herself, drinking wasn't something Dylan did well.

Clayborne beat her to an answer. "Well, apparently he had some. And it's apparent enough that they would feed us lies to keep their crimes hidden." His tone overflowed with disgust and hatred.

"We have to be certain of this before we go saying 'cover-up' all over the city," Herschel interjected.

"God damn it, Herschel. Pops is dead!" Clayborne thundered. "Get off your fuckin' high horse and remember who you are."

Herschel's tanned face flushed deep red, a sure sign he was furious. "I *know* who I am, Clayborne. I'm the one who stayed behind while the rest of you went on to adventure." Clay opened his mouth but Herschel waved him off. "No, Clay. You need to listen to me. I want to catch the bastard responsible as much as anyone in this room. But we are Maddoxes. And here...that automatically puts us on the wrong side of the law."

Fallon watched silently as Clay narrowed his sapphire blue eyes at Herschel. Their second eldest brother reached for his beer and said, "Yes, Clay. Even me. I'm a husband and a father, but no matter what I've done, when push comes to shove...I'm still a Maddox."

Holding a list of her father's personal effects, as received from the coroner, Fallon frowned as she read. She, too, reached for her beer as her eyes ran over the inventory record again and again. Something didn't seem right.

Fallon set down the paper and half stood to locate the photo she sought. She placed it beside the report and stared at the items lying in the glossy picture.

The keys were wrong.

Without looking up, Fallon asked over her still arguing brothers. “Herschel. When you got Pops’ things back, did he still have that small key he always had when we were growing up?”

Silence fell in the Maddox kitchen. Fallon glanced up, waiting for her answer. All eyes were on Herschel. He waved for the photo and she slid it toward him.

“I don’t remember it, but according to this, he didn’t have it when they took pics of his items and it wasn’t on him at the scene, or so it says. There are six keys though, but one is not the right key.” Herschel dropped the photo. “Damn it. What the fuck is going on here?”

“You need to make sure about the key, Herschel. Make sure one of your girls didn’t get it from Pops.” Fallon gestured for Shawn to shove over the legal pad. She picked up a pen and tapped it on the yellow paper.

“What are you thinking, Fallon?” Shawn asked.

“Nothing yet, but it is time to get some answers.” Her fingers tightened around the brown bottle she held. Fallon stared at the papers before her until the words began to blur.

What did it all mean?

What am I missing?

As the night progressed, the five siblings, united by the mere fact they had been raised under the same roof, and all had become members of the Maddox clan, continued to discuss the possible meanings of what they’d discovered. Different backgrounds and different blood didn’t matter; they had spent a good portion of their lives together and they were family.

Ian entered his dark home. He dropped his bag by the door and walked further into the living room. His steps carried him down the hall to his bedroom. Turning on a lamp by a tall armless chair, he removed his leather jacket. Rolling his shoulders, Ian shrugged out of the double holster and hung it on a hook.

“I don’t understand what’s going on here,” he muttered as he pulled his shirt off. “I need to take another look at that file.” He removed his shoes, socks, and pants. “After my shower.”

Twenty minutes later, Ian was sitting on his tan microfiber couch, a plate with dinner untouched nearby as his eyes went over the file that Ms. Fallon Maddox had demanded to copy.

“What was she looking for?”

Ian ate a bite of his green and white fettuccine, arugula, goat cheese, and roasted peppers. He looked at the photos and frowned. Selecting one out of the group, he held it up. This one he hadn't seen before. But to anyone who could understand the photo, it was all wrong. Well, what was wrong was the explanation on the autopsy report.

Would Fallon understand that? "I need to dig up her information."

Ian couldn't let it go. Finally he gave up all attempts to eat and focused on the unpleasant thoughts of what a cover-up could mean.

Reaching for the phone, he made a call.

"Hello?" a gruff smoker's voice answered.

"Da, it's me. I need some help." Ian reached for his drink.

"What do you need, lad?"

Ian took another swallow. His father had been shot in the line of duty and when his right arm had been amputated just below the elbow, he had been medically retired. However, he still kept in touch with old friends and had provided Ian with lots of good advice over the years.

"I'm a bit confused and wondered if you could fill me in on some history."

"Well, I was about to get a snack," his father said.

Ian smiled. His father had always loved his nightly ice cream. "Want me to pick you up?"

"Yes. It's raining out. I'll be outside." Donal Cavanaugh hung up.

"Bye, Da," Ian said to the air as he hung up the phone.

He tugged a white shirt on over his bare chest, before slipping his guns into place. He grabbed his keys and his Seahawks jacket as he left his house and headed to his garage to get into his car.

Thirty minutes later, Ian sat across from his father at a small restaurant where he ate a large sundae. Ian stuck to a simple cup of coffee.

"What is it you need, son?"

"How are you doing, Da? Do you need anything?"

A sly grin crossed his father's face. "Grandchildren would be nice."

Ian shook his head. "Still looking for the right woman, Da." An image of Fallon Maddox flashed in front of him, shocking him to the point of almost dropping his mug of coffee.

"I'm not gettin' any younger, you know."

"Of course not, Da." Ian didn't want to be rehashing this with him.

"Fine. I'll let it go. I'm sure your *ma* bugs you enough about it. I'll stop."

Ian sighed. "I'm not getting in the middle of you two and your arguing." He paused. "She's fine by the way."

"I don't care." The answer came fast and harsh.

"Okay, Da. I'm not arguing."

"You're a good son. Now, what do you need?"

"What do you know about the animosity between Rick DeVane and the Maddox clan?"

Solemnity filled his father's face as he set the spoon in the half-empty dish. "Why do you ask?"

Uncertainty flickered through him. His father hadn't ever kept anything from him. "Fallon Maddox came to the precinct today. I've seen Captain DeVane be short, abrupt, and even cold to people. But the level of rudeness from him today, hatred even...I never thought he would act like that, especially considering she buried her foster father the previous afternoon."

"So Fallon has returned." Donal nodded and began eating his ice cream again.

Ian frowned. This was most strange. "Da, tell me about DeVane." Fallon wasn't what his father needed to latch onto. Perhaps later, but Rick DeVane was who he needed information on now.

"Why do you care how he treats her?"

Ian narrowed his gaze. "Because she didn't deserve it. She's a victim, not a perp. Da, there is something wrong with this."

"Wrong? What do you mean?"

Wrapping his fingers around the warm cup, Ian leaned forward and told his father what was bothering him.

Chapter 3

Fallon jogged through the park. The rain had ended, leaving behind puddles, and she splashed through them as she ran. Rays of morning's first light broke through the retreating night. Her breath was visible as she pounded up a flight of steps. Her body craved more, needed more mindless and repetitive motion. So she pressed on, tugging the hood around her head further forward. Fallon's mind was going over what she had seen, or rather what she *hadn't* seen in the report. What did it all mean? Would she ever find out the truth?

She rounded a corner on the path and almost stopped in her tracks. Her vantage point allowed her to see the sun's rays just beginning to spread out over the bay. Golden rays struck across the water in a brilliant and dazzling display. With snow-capped mountains off in the distance, that feeling of purity and being home fell about her again. Fallon began walking to cool down, keeping her gaze on the gorgeous sight. Using the park bench for support, Fallon stretched her muscles out. After she was done, she stood behind the bench, hands in her sweatshirt pocket and watched the water.

The image of her foster parents floated before her. Her eyes watched them as they smiled at her and vanished in the sunshine. Shifting slightly as the cold began settling in, Fallon vowed, "I will find out what happened."

Closing her eyes against the threatening tears, she pivoted and began walking back to the car. She kept her hood up as she made her way along the paved trail. Fallon turned on the heat as soon as the car started. She really needed to get some better clothing.

"At least better jogging clothes," she muttered.

Putting the car into gear, she headed for home. The house was still quiet when she entered. As she headed to her room for a shower and clean clothes, she hoped there was food for breakfast.

"Guys!" she hollered up the stairs once breakfast was ready. "Come get it." Fallon walked back to the kitchen table and began to pour the juice.

"Mornin' sis," Dylan said as he walked in.

“Morning,” she responded with a smile. Fallon noticed his drawn face. “How are you doing?”

“I hurt, Fallon. I don’t know what I’m going to do. I was just about to move home. It’s *not* easy out there for me.” He reached for a cigarette.

“Not in this house. You smoke outside.” She smiled again to lessen the sting of her words.

“Sorry.” He put it behind his ear.

“It’s not going to be easy for any of us, Dylan. But we’re family. We’ll stick together and find out the truth.”

“What’s going to happen to the house?”

Fallon looked at the youngest sibling. There was such fear and uncertainty in his eyes it broke her heart. “It’s ours, Dylan. When Mom passed, Pops made sure the house would remain ours when he died.”

“If you’re sure?” His voice still sounded so young.

“I am. Now, eat if you plan on getting any. I hear Shawn and Clay.”

“Thanks Fallon.”

She watched as he schooled his face and erased all trace of the scared little boy she knew still thrived within him.

Soon four out of the five Maddox siblings were eating breakfast. Fallon looked over her brothers as they made short work of the food she’d prepared.

Clayborne. The oldest and roughest of them all. He had a short fuse and a knack for finding trouble. Tanned, strong, blue-eyed, dark brown hair.

Shawn. Used to be a wide receiver for a pro football team, but his knee got blown. Dark-skinned, short hair, tightly clipped goatee, dark brown eyes. She and Shawn looked the closest thing to blood related siblings.

Dylan. Always pale. Light green eyes, strawberry blondish hair, scars on his face. He had a heart of gold.

She loved them all, even Herschel with his medium blue eyes and blond hair. But, trouble migrated toward them as if they wore a homing beacon.

“You guys clean up. I have something to do.” Fallon pushed away from the table.

“Do you need Pops’ car?” Clay asked. None of her brothers debated with her on cleaning up.

“No, I’m good.” She waved over her shoulder as she exited the kitchen. “Call if you need me.”

The skate park was pretty much empty. A few kids, who probably should have been in or on their way to school, were around. She ignored them; a particular destination in mind. She had memorized the photos of her father lying here and was looking for the place makers she used.

There.

Fallon walked over to the spot. Closing her eyes to help her focus, she could envision the position Pops had lain. When she opened her eyes, it was as if the scene was there before her.

Fresh.

The body. The bullets. *The blood.*

Fallon moved around, seeing things only her eyes could see. Finally, she knelt down beside her father's conjured image and reached out to touch him. She could feel him growing colder and she whimpered as his blood ran over her hand.

Shoving herself to her feet, Fallon gulped in the cold air. Her heart pounded erratically. That had been so real that she shivered, knowing it wasn't because of the day's chill.

"What am I missing?" She frowned as she cast a glance around. It was there. Whatever *it* was. Crying out for her to find it. But she couldn't see it. She just couldn't place it. Yet.

"Good morning, Ms. Maddox." A deep voice penetrated her concentration.

She spun around and couldn't stop the gasp. It wasn't fear, well, not any kind she wanted to consider.

Detective Ian Cavanaugh stood before her.

Ian couldn't believe it. He had been heading to the skate park, intending to see if he could figure out what seemed wrong to him. Much to his surprise, he had a lovely view of a woman pacing around the area. Fallon Maddox was there.

Standing back, he allowed himself to enjoy the vision of her dark-headed beauty. Her black hair was drawn back in a tight bun. She wore a military green jacket, dark blue BDUs, and wore combat boots.

He estimated her height to be about five-seven. Her movements were as graceful as they were the previous night at the precinct. Effortless. Flawless. Purity of motion.

“Detective.”

Ian sighed. The amount of warmth in her voice made the fall morning feel like the equator. “I believe ‘good morning’ is what one says in polite company.”

Her eyebrows rose at that. Fallon lifted one shoulder in a brief motion. “I didn’t know I was.”

He bristled. “Well, I was raised with manners.”

She muttered something too low for him to hear.

“What did you say?” Ian moved closer to her, again struck by the fact he wasn’t floored by a sickly sweet smell, like many women seemed to bathe in. She had a very subtle smell to her, it drifted into his nose and lingered, tantalizing him. He didn’t know what it was, but he liked it. A lot.

“I was just wondering how those manners stacked up when it came to the truth.” She watched him with emotionless eyes. “Or are you like the rest of the ‘boys in blue’ and lie to protect your own?” Fallon closed the distance between them. “Tell me, Ian Cavanaugh, are *you* out to screw the Maddox clan? What color do you bleed? Red, like me...or blue?”

The last sentence she spoke was so full of ice it staggered him. He towered over this woman by about eight inches and he would have sworn all power was in her hands.

“I don’t cover up for anyone,” he growled, one hand clenching in anger at the implication.

“Tell me then, *Detective*, when you looked at that report, were you okay with the findings?”

He hesitated. He *had* experienced doubts, but to admit it to a Maddox, even a good-looking one like her...he wasn’t sure he wanted to admit anything. A look crossed her face as she stepped back. Ian swore, it was as if he had just disappointed her.

“That’s what I thought.” Fallon sighed and shook her head slightly. “You bleed blue. Not a bad trait, but not always the best one.”

Ian was motionless as he watched her leave. He stared at the back of her head as she vanished from sight.

His phone rang.

“Detective Cavanaugh,” he responded automatically.

“Ian Rorke Keefe Cavanaugh!” The tone was shrill.

Mother.

“Morning, Ma.”

“Don’t you ‘morning ma’ me. Why have you been to see your father more than me?”

Ian wanted to weep. His parents were driving him crazy. “I needed some advice, Ma. That was it. We went for ice cream.”

“Advice? Advice!” she screamed. “I’m good enough to give you life but not good enough to give advice?”

“Not that at all, Ma.”

“I know it wasn’t about a girl. He couldn’t keep me. What advice is he going to give you about girls? Was it on a girl?”

Ian felt a headache coming on. He paused for a second. His mom must have taken his silence as an affirmation of her claim.

“I *don’t* believe you’d go to him for advice on a girl instead of me.” The sounds of crying reached him. “I’m...” *sniff*, “...your mother.”

Ian sat down heavily on the edge of a bench. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. *What did I do to deserve this?*

“Listen to me, Ma. It wasn’t about a girl. It was police business, okay?”

More sniffing. “Take me shopping, Ian,” she ordered.

“Ma, I can’t. I have to work on this case. I can meet you for lunch, but I can’t spend the day shopping.”

She whimpered. “Why is that more important than spending time with me?”

Running a frustrated hand over his eyes, Ian prayed for patience. “Ma, it’s what I do. I’m a homicide detective. When I get called, it’s because people are dead. Please don’t do this, not today. I’ll meet you at 1300 at Ruth’s Chris. I have to go. Love you, Ma.”

He hung up before she could say anything else.

His mood stayed low for the rest of the morning. Nothing seemed to work, no one remembered anything from that night. He had so many doors slammed in his face; he was ready to yell from the top of the Space Needle that all he wanted to do was solve a murder.

As he walked into the restaurant, his mind was on Fallon Maddox and the mystery that she had become to him. Something he couldn’t place existed between them. He thought about the supposed gang kill that led him to her.

“Who is she, Ian?” his mother asked as she ate a bite of her baked potato.

Ian chewed his steak slowly. His mother could be relentless. "There isn't a 'she,' Ma. I don't have time for a woman."

"The right one is probably right before your eyes. You just don't know it yet." She paused for a fraction of a second. "At least you would if you didn't work so much."

"Sure, Ma." Ian looked beyond his mother and tried not to chuckle. Big brown eyes were across the way, watching him. Fallon Maddox was there. There was a handsome black man beside her, but she was there. And her eyes were on him.

Fallon didn't understand the attraction she had for Ian Cavanaugh. By all rights, she should hate him for the mere fact he belonged to the "brotherhood" that bled blue. But there was something about him. Especially since she had realized he was the one she had put to the floor.

He kept popping into her mind. And now he was in the same dining place she was.

"You okay, Fallon?" her lunch date asked.

She nodded, looking away from Ian's mercurial ones. "I'm good, Jeremiah, I'm good." Fallon smiled at the marine beside her. He had been her CO at one point, now he was a trustworthy friend.

"Who's the guy?" he asked as he pulled out her chair.

She didn't want to answer, but she did. "He's a detective. One involved in the cover-up, you know?"

They ordered their meal and Fallon struggled not to look over her shoulder at Ian.

Jeremiah knew. "He's still watching you. Tell me what you need."

Reaching into her coat pocket, she pulled out a photo and set it between them. "Any idea what this is?"

He traced the outline as his brows furrowed. "Looks like a muzzle burn. What is it?"

"That's exactly what it is, but I don't know from which firearm. Can you help?"

Jeremiah reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He took a picture of her photo and pressed some buttons. "Give it a sec."

"Thanks, Colonel," Fallon said.

He flashed his handsome smile at her as he set the device to the side, making room for their food. "Thank you," he said to the waitress. Fallon

watched the blush run up the woman's face at Jeremiah's smile. She chuckled to herself. He was such a ladies' man.

Jeremiah didn't say anything else until the server was gone. "Okay, Fallon. Tell me something new about you. How have you been?"

They had a lighthearted lunch until his phone beeped. He picked it up and frowned before handing it across to Fallon.

Unsure, Fallon took it and looked at the screen. *What?* "Okay, this isn't what I would have expected. A Webley Mark V?"

Jeremiah took it back. "Or a Mark IV. I'll have to compare when I get back. Fallon, both of those are collector's guns. The Mark IV was only in production from 1899 till 1904 and the Mark V from 1913 to 1919. They are English service revolvers."

Fallon didn't know what to make of this. "I didn't see an old bullet; of course they could have hidden that as well, or it could have been washed away with the rains that night. And they wouldn't have casings either. Can you email that to my BlackBerry? I want to look into this further."

"Of course." He did. "Now, what are you going to do?"

"Eat my lunch and then get some warmer jogging clothes. I have to think about this."

"Well, the results are a most likely match. Those guns had a distinct barrel marking. I wish I could give you more."

Fallon ate a bite of her steak. "This is more than enough. Thanks for doing this much for me."

"You know you never have to wonder if I'm going to help you, Fallon." He winked at her and gave her a sexy grin.

"Excuse me," a male voice interrupted their lunch.

Fallon looked up and groaned softly. Ian Cavanaugh and an older woman stood there. "What, Detective? Is a Maddox not allowed to eat here?" She deliberately tried to goad him.

His gray eyes flashed before he turned to her lunch companion. "I'm Detective Cavanaugh. And you are?"

"Lieutenant Colonel Jeremiah Dubois, United States Marine Corps," Jeremiah responded, taking the same snotty tone as Ian.

"What do you want, Detective?" Fallon demanded, forcing him to look back at her.

"We need to talk." He looked pointedly between her and the enlarged photo on the table. "When can we meet?"

Suspicion surged through her. “What exactly do you feel we have to discuss? You agreed the case was closed.” Calmly she flipped the photo over, hiding it from Ian’s observant stare.

“Don’t talk to my son that way,” the older woman interjected.

“Ma—”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. But according to your son, my father’s *murder* has been solved. Gang activity. So excuse me if I don’t feel like he deserves any of my time.” Fallon forced out the polite words.

The woman turned to Ian. “Is this true? You quit the case? Why Ian? You never accepted ‘gang activity’ before. Why now?” She gasped and looked back to the table. “You...you’re Fallon Maddox.”

“Yes, I am.” *What the hell is going on here?*

“I’m sorry for your loss. Ian, I’ll be by the door when you’re ready to leave.” She walked away.

Fallon stared up at Ian. He looked so good, his clothes was molded to him, showcasing his powerful physique. *Damn him for looking so hot!* “Well?” she sniped when he remained, staring after his mother.

“When can we meet?” Ian asked again as his gaze returned to hers.

Flicking her eyes to Jeremiah, she hesitated. Once her friend nodded, she said, “Name the time and place and I’ll be there.”

“Anywhere?” Ian’s cocky voice challenged her to back down.

She narrowed her eyes. “Name it, *cop*. I’m not afraid of you or your kind.”

His eyes smoldered with anger. “Fine. Seven tonight at Pier 57.”

“I’ll be there.”

“We’ll see.” Ian walked off.

Jeremiah was silent for a while and then he laughed.

“Why are you laughing at me?” she growled at him.

“I’m thinkin’ you two should just knock boots and get it over with.”

Her eyes grew wide. “What?”

“Please, Fallon. Both of you are ignoring it, but it is obvious.” He batted his eyes. “What are you wearing tonight?”

“Ohhh, I should kick your—”

“Ah, ah, ah. I’m still a superior officer.”

She lifted her lip in a silent snarl. “Not mine.”

“Oh, technically, I still am, Gunny.”

“You want an apology?”

He chuckled. “Only if you really mean it.” Fallon held his gaze. Jeremiah sighed, “One day Fallon. You’ll actually mean it.”

“I know I’m a bitch. Besides, if I *had* apologized you wouldn’t have believed it anyway.”

Jeremiah grunted. A wave of remorse passed through her. She wasn’t normally so callous, but he upset her by indicating he could tell she lusted for Ian. Her anger was at herself, but still she let Jeremiah take the punch.

“I’m sorry for snapping. I seem to be unable to control my calm. I attacked Ian the first time I saw him.” Jeremiah’s eyes grew wide and filled to the brim with amusement. “I saw a man with a gun against Clay. I just reacted. My skin almost burned when I touched him.”

“Do you believe in destiny? Soul mates?”

Fallon shook her head and rolled her eyes. “You need a woman, Jeremiah, if you are spouting that crap. All that is, is a bunch of malarkey.”

“I’m Creole, *Chér*,” he said, as if that should explain it all. “You’ll believe soon enough. Keep me posted on the case and call me if you need anything.”

Jeremiah paid and walked her out. He pressed a kiss to her cheek and drove away.

Chapter 4

Ian was restless. It was two minutes to seven and there was no sign of Fallon. He looked down at his clothes; hiking boots, jeans, and a long sleeved shirt under his Seahawks jacket. He didn't want to overdress, but part of him had wanted to look good for her.

God, I'm acting like it's a date.

"What is all this about, Detective Cavanaugh?"

He almost jumped. One second she wasn't there, the next she was; materializing out of the air for all the noise she made.

"Good evening, Ms. Maddox."

His heart sped up as their gazes met. There was something about her. Ian watched her eyes, noting the emotionless gaze. There was no fear, which pleased him, but there was not anything there at all. That bothered him.

"I didn't come here for another of your lessons in manners, Detective. Your kind has nothing I wish to learn."

He looked at her. Hair pulled back in a bun, as opposed to lunch when it had flowed over her shoulders. Otherwise, she wore the same clothes.

"What do you mean *my kind*?" He knew she had three white brothers, so it couldn't be race, could it?

"Cops. You and your blue-blooded camaraderie that cover for each other." The contempt in her voice amply clarified her earlier statement.

He bristled. "So what, you prefer Marines to cops? Is that why your hair was down with him?"

"Is this what you wanted to discuss with me, Detective? My hair? Why I prefer the company of Marines to cops?"

Ian held up a gloved hand. "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said those things." He flinched when the wind picked up.

"Why am I here?"

"I wanted to talk to you about the case."

Fallon leaned back against the railing. "So talk."

Ian watched her face in the glow of the streetlights. The weather didn't seem to bother her; instead, it added a rosy tint to her beautiful dark skin. The horn from a ferry broke through the night.

“I think you’re right. There is something off about the report. I want to find the truth and I think if we can put aside our differences we could figure it out.” Ian waited. He frowned as amusement crossed her face.

“Is that what this is? An attempt to ferret out what I’ve learned?” She pushed away from the rails and closed the distance between herself and him. “And tell me, Detective. How far are you willing to go with this charade?”

Ian tried to ignore his body’s reaction to her nearness. He noted how the lights glowed in pinpoints off the gloss on her lips, calling him to taste them. He swallowed and tried to tell his rapidly hardening erection to behave.

“It’s not like that.”

Fallon moved closer still. “No?” Her voice got all low and throaty. “I want to know how far you’re going to go to make me happy in hopes I’ll tell you what I know.” Her hands left her pockets and slid up his chest.

Ian fisted his gloved hands at his side. He forced himself to remain standing in place. Neither into or away from her touch. His cock leapt to attention.

“Tell me, Detective. What have you been cleared to do? What’s the limit?” She wrapped her hands around his neck, pressing flush against him.

He gulped as her mouth moved closer.

Fallon’s fingers, covered by soft leather, teased the back of his neck. “Will you take me out?” She blinked once, slowly, her thick lashes falling and rising again. “Would you actually sleep with a Maddox?” Her lips were millimeters away from his, fanning his mouth with her warm breath.

Ian gave in with a low growl. He hauled her in close and covered her mouth with his.

Ah, hell, I’m in trouble. Fallon felt the ground fall out from under her as Ian’s lips mashed on hers. Her taunting little speech was supposed to get him to back off. She never expected him to call her bluff. She quivered as his touch turned tender, provocative, and sensual. His tongue slipped between her lips and coaxed hers out to play.

Her lower body trembled as her fingers wound into the hair at the back of his neck. She wanted to feel the texture of it on her bare skin. For the first time in longer than she wanted to admit, she burned with lust. Not

just a small amount, more like she wanted to jump his bones right there, no matter who saw, and with no regard for public laws.

Fallon purred as his tongue made love to her mouth. Her body felt like it was burning up. Her skin was hot and she wanted to tear his clothes off. His strong hands cupped her butt and lifted her off the ground. Fallon wrapped her arms around him and pressed her pelvis closer to his, locking her legs behind him. He smelled so good. Dangerous. Explosive. And some very cool scent.

He began kissing along her jaw line. "Fallon," he whispered, his voice a sexy timbre.

Fallon forced back an extremely vivid image of her nude body intertwined with the man who held her.

"I think you should put me down, Detective."

She watched as his eyes hardened. Then, to her surprise, they sparkled. "What if I like you in my arms? If I let you down, can we have a truce and go grab something to eat? We can talk over dinner."

An eyebrow rose. "What if I say no?" Heaven help her, she liked being in her arms.

"Then I keep you here and do this." Using one hand under her for support, his other brought her head closer to his and he kissed her again.

Fallon stopped her eyes from closing at his touch. She drew away from his mouth and unhooked her legs from his waist. She didn't fall, one strong arm still held her up.

"Fine. We have a truce." Her voice was heavy with desire. "Put me down."

"Are you sure?" His warm breath teased her throat.

"Put me down."

Ian did so without delay. "Shall we?" he asked, holding out his arm to her.

She missed his touch immediately, but wasn't about to touch him again for fear of jumping him. Instead she shoved her hands in her pockets and said, "Let's go."

Ian glanced at the woman beside him. He was glad his jacket covered the full-blown erection he sported. *What the hell was I thinking? I've never forced my attentions on a woman.*

She hadn't been mad at his actions. No. In fact, she responded to his touch like a lover. He groaned softly as the memory of her wrapping her legs around, pressing them together, surfaced in his mind. His cock throbbed, demanding attention.

He didn't know much about her, but one thing was certain. There was a volcanic heat in her that she kept buried beneath her calm demeanor. From her heated response, he knew she was as attracted to him as he was to her. But where to go from here?

Bed?

He grinned before sobering. Part of him realized she was not going to be a pushover. Her earlier question told him that.

Would he sleep with a Maddox?

Hell yeah, he would. But only one. Fallon Maddox.

"Where are we going?" Fallon asked.

"I thought Waterfront Seafood Grill or The Crabpot."

"Hmm. I bet you look pretty cute in a bib, The Crabpot sounds good to me."

One side of his mouth lifted. "Are you flirting with me, Ms. Maddox?" A chill flashed across her gaze and he added, "I hope so. I like that side of you."

"This is my third day back. I buried my father two days ago, Detective. I don't have much joy in me."

"I know. I just meant I like you joking, as opposed to that expressionless look." Ian hoped he hadn't ruined the evening.

She stared at him before her shoulders shrugged. "Feed me."

They were enjoying their dinner at The Crabpot. He had ordered The Alaskan, which consisted of crab, shrimp, clams, and mussels. Both of them wore bibs and had a mallet by one hand.

Fallon took a swig of her beer as she stared at the man across from her who was sucking crabmeat from a leg he had busted.

She relished the tight fit of his royal blue long sleeved shirt. Tonight he wasn't wearing his shoulder holsters, but she knew he had guns on him. She had felt one on his waist when her legs had been around him. Most cops she knew had a backup on their ankle. What drew her attention mostly was the way his mouth moved as he ate his food.

“What?” Ian asked. “Do I have food on my chin?” He reached for a napkin and wiped his face.

“No, nothing like that.”

“Whew. I was worried, considering how you were staring at me.” He smiled, melting her insides.

“I was just wondering when you were going to tell me what you knew,” she lied. Fallon wasn’t about to tell him she had been remembering how it felt to have his arms around her. Or his lips against hers.

“Really? I was thinking how good you tasted.” He held her gaze.

Her belly tightened and it took immense willpower not to squirm in her seat. “The case, Detective. What do you know that wasn’t in the report?”

Ian Cavanaugh fell silent for a moment. “Can you at least call me Ian?” His eyes cut to the side before he muttered, “Ah, shit.”

Fallon glanced in the direction Ian had, but her line of vision was filled with the body of Rick DeVane. Her body tightened with the possibility of a fight. She barely stopped her lip from curling into a snarl.

So much for all that training to control my emotions.

“Well, well, well. Surprised to see you here, Cavanaugh,” Captain DeVane said.

“Good evening, Captain,” Ian replied. “You remember, Ms. Maddox.”

Fallon turned in the booth so she faced DeVane. Her left hand tightened around the neck of her beer bottle.

“I remember her,” DeVane spat and looked back to Ian. “I thought you were working tonight, Cavanaugh.”

“I’m off tonight. I worked this morning.”

“Actually,” Fallon interrupted, “he is working. He’s trying to convince me to let my father’s death go. He’s been telling me that it was nothing more than what the reports said it was. How I should mourn my father’s passing and move on.”

“That’s sound advice.” DeVane nodded. “You should listen.” The man glared at her with cold eyes.

Stupid ass. Like I’m going to want to listen to you.

“We’ll see,” Fallon said. “It depends on how well he is in bed. If he can rock my world, I’ll drop it. If not...” She shrugged.

Ian choked on his drink and Fallon tried not to laugh at both men’s expressions. Her comment had slipped out. Their shock was well worth it.

“Yes...ah...well. Good night, then.” DeVane walked off.

Ian waved at his boss, but remained silent. He wiped his bow-shaped mouth with the napkin. "Rock your world?" The question sounded almost like a declaration.

Butterflies grew to rhinos and stamped through her belly. Her pussy clenched and let her know it was ready for some long overdue attention. Still, there was no expression on her face to let him know that.

"I figured he'd be okay with this dinner arrangement as long as you're trying to get me off the case."

Ian smiled. It was a predatory smile. One that said he didn't believe her at all. *Damn him for being so hot.* He made her toes curl. In a *very* good way.

"Is that what you need to tell yourself? All you need to tell me, sweets, is the time and place, 'cause I have no doubt I'll rock your world."

"How much have you had to drink, Detective?"

"Ian," he corrected.

"Whatever. I'm thinking you may be intoxicated."

The corners of his eyes crinkled and a dimple appeared in his left cheek. *So damn cute, boyish even.*

"Trust me, I'm not intoxicated. Are you finished? We still have dessert to get to before we find out if you leave the case alone."

She chuckled slightly as she drank some more of her beer. "Right."

Ian was content. The woman who sat across the table enchanted him.

She was different from other women. Her aura of quietude and strength called to him. He wasn't used to such restraint.

Ian had a volatile temper, and her handle on her emotions, considering what she was going through, was amazing.

That wasn't all. The explosive passion that erupted between them when they kissed... It was a feeling he believed warranted further exploration.

"Come on, whaddya say? A nice big dessert," he tempted. He smiled victoriously as he watched her gaze glaze over. "You already know what you want."

"Yes I do." Her eyes cleared and held his.

"And that would be?"

"A big pastry with Bavarian cream, whipped cream on top and drizzled with chocolate."

Ian waved for the bill. "You got it." He wasn't sure where he was going to find it, but if that's what it took to keep her there, he would get it for her.

He watched her finish off the rest of her beer. They stared into each other's eyes as the bill arrived. Not really paying attention, he left a tip and signed his name.

As he stood, Ian saw Rick watching him. There was suspicion in his stare. Nodding once, Ian returned his attention to Fallon as she slipped on her jacket. He wished it were summer so he could stare at her without a coat on.

"Gee," Fallon muttered. "Maybe you should carry me out so your boss stops glaring."

Spinning her into his body, Ian felt himself harden in response. "Is that what you want?" He lowered his mouth by her ear and allowed his tongue to trace the outer edge. "I will if you want. Trust me, I would love to have you in my arms."

She shuddered slightly before she stiffened.

"I've been walking on my own for a while now." She pulled back.

"I guess so."

Ian allowed her to turn and take a step away from him. Grabbing the sleeve of her coat, he spun her around again to be met by his lips. All rational thoughts fled as their mouths melded together. He forgot about his boss, he forgot everything aside from the woman in his arms. Her response was hot-blooded and pure, just like the previous time they kissed. He felt all his hair stand on end. His cock roared to life, demanding attention.

Despite all that, Ian moved slowly. He made a slow, thorough perusal of her mouth. She tasted like beer and seafood, and behind that, he could still identify Fallon's own taste. Slow deep strokes swept him around the warmth of her mouth. His hands gathered her in so one held the back of her head and the other ran over her butt and squeezed.

A low rumble of approval rippled from his throat as her hands settled on his ass, holding them tighter together. Approval turned to frustration as she backed away. Ian gloated inside as he witnessed the raw lust swirling in her brown eyes.

Damn, I want this woman.

Her hands moved around to the front of his coat. "Let's go."

"Dessert, right." His voice was graveled. Ian stared down at her, his fingers teasing the back of her hair. Something passed between them at that moment. A connection.

"I think your boss should be appeased. Going by that kiss, he probably thinks I'll let it go." Fallon carefully removed his hands from her body.

He didn't appreciate how that sounded. Had she only done that as a show for his boss? Was she still trying to see how far he'd take the charade? It was a thought that left a sick quiver in his belly.

Forcing back any emotion, he agreed. "Let's go."

Fallon could feel the tension radiating from him. He almost acted hurt by her words. *Get a grip, Fallon. He bleeds blue; ultimately, he wants you to lay off the case. Or just lay you.*

The large man beside her held her arm like a gentleman, yet remained silent as he led them to a parking lot.

"Where are you taking me?" Fallon queried.

"For dessert."

Soundless she watched him lead them through the parked cars. He unlocked the door of his vehicle.

"This is a sweet ride."

This time his smile was unforced. "This is my baby. 1968 Ford 428 Cobra Jet Mustang." Pride filled his voice.

Fallon gazed at the muscle car. Silver blue finish with a black racing stripe up the middle of the hood. It was gorgeous. It fit him.

"You have a gorgeous car. Bet you get a lot of women with it."

He shrugged as he helped her into the car. "I guess."

I bet you've done more than guess in this car.

She buckled her belt as his large frame filled the driver's side. He removed his jacket and set it in the back. Fallon swallowed. Watching him at the restaurant had been hard. Hell, behaving herself had been a very difficult chore since she met him at Pier 57. *And that went sooo well.* Remembering the kiss, she flushed. She'd been in his arms, could that really and truly be wrong?

Fallon cast a sideways glance at him as he started the powerful engine. Strength, power and a lot of fuck potential. Both the car and the man. She shifted on the seat as ribbons of desire wove through her.

"Where are we going for dessert?"

Ian looked at her as he drove them through Seattle. "My place."

Her eyes grew wide as her heart rate tripled. "Really?"

“You said you would go wherever.” He tossed her words back at her. “You’re not backing down, are you?”

“Not at all.” She settled more firmly back against the seat. Fallon licked her lips as her body grew damp. “I hope you have what I want.”

Chapter 5

Ian almost let go of the wheel at the double *entendre*. He gripped the wheel as his pants grew uncomfortably tight.

The image of Fallon spread across his bed, naked and waiting for him, came to mind. Her firm body moving in tandem with his as they traversed the planes of euphoria. He bit back a moan. His erection throbbed painfully.

Down boy. This woman is going to kill me. A smile crossed his face as he pulled into his garage. *But damn, what a way to go.*

“Ready for dessert?” he asked as he got out and shut the garage door.

“Bring on the chocolate and whipped cream.” Fallon got out as well and waited by the door.

“Welcome to my home, Fallon Maddox,” Ian whispered in her ear as she walked past him.

Five minutes later, Ian sat across from Fallon at his kitchen table. Unfortunately, he hadn’t had the desert she’d truly wanted. Before her he placed an apple turnover he had heated and then drizzled some chocolate on. It had been the only thing he had in the house. One apple and one cherry. Luckily, her eyes lit up as he told her the options.

“Time’s running out, Cavanaugh. Tell me what you know.”

Ian hesitated a moment, pleased she didn’t call him detective, but wishing it was his first name rolling off her tongue. Her tongue, that sent shivers through him. Delicious ones.

“I know I want you in my bed,” he admitted.

“Planning on taking this all the way, I see.” Fallon shrugged. “You can always tell him I left here a blissfully happy woman.”

Her eyes drifted to his as her mouth cleaned off the fork. He shifted, trying to ease his discomfort. *This woman should teach the art of seduction.*

Ian held her stare. “You feel it, too. It’s there between us. Heat.” He pushed back from the table. “Explosive, unrelenting heat.” He prowled closer. “I want you, Fallon. It has nothing to do with any other fact than I’m attracted to you.”

Ian grabbed her chair and spun it so she faced him. He reached behind her and pulled the pins out of her hair. The soft strands poured over his skin like black silk. Her natural scent floated about him and infused itself within his soul. Ian crouched before her. Placed his hands on her thighs and asked, "Fallon?"

Her mouth was dry like Death Valley. The juncture between her legs flowed like Niagara Falls.

She nearly fell back, spread her legs and said, "Take me, I'm yours," as he stalked towards her, looking like a dangerous predator. He moved with such purpose, such determination. The way his argent gaze bore into her made her feel special, feminine, and his. All his. Only his. His eyes roved over her body, the intensity burned away her clothes, leaving her bare before him.

Holding those molten orbs with her own, she leaned forward and touched her mouth to his. Fallon brought her hands up to cradle his angular face. Her eyes closed as she swept her tongue through his mouth. Her pussy pulsed with longing as her senses were overtaken by the presence of the man before her. She could taste the remnants of cherry from his turnover and coffee.

I want this man.

Duty overrode personal desires, however unfortunate it may be. With great reluctance, Fallon ended the kiss and opened her eyes. He watched her. Not judging, just waiting to see what was to happen next.

"I can't do this," Fallon said. She moved his hands off her thighs.

"Too fast?" Ian asked in a sinfully seductive tone.

"Bad timing." One hand reached out to touch his hair, slipping through the softness. "I just buried my father. I need to find his killer." Fallon withdrew her hand, but Ian grabbed it and laced their fingers.

"Does that mean you put your life on hold?"

Ignoring the tremors racing through her at his touch, she responded, "Yes. And you, Detective Ian Cavanaugh, are a distraction of the worst kind."

His firm lips placed kisses on the back of her hand. "Why is that?"

"Because of the way my body reacts around you and the fact you are a cop." Pulling her hand free, she looked at the man crouched in front of

her. She still saw passion in his eyes but there was also understanding. "I'm sorry for teasing you, but my focus has to remain on this case."

He understood. Didn't like it. But he understood. Ian felt hard enough to split wood. Once he had Ms. Fallon Maddox, there wasn't going to be any excuse she could give which would take away from what they would be sharing.

He stood before her, not hiding the hard ridge in his jeans. A smile snaked across his face as he watched her eyes darken as they stared at him.

I will be between those gorgeous legs of yours, Fallon.

"Fine, you want to work on the case, we will." He walked to his living room and grabbed the file he had brought home. Ian tossed it down before her and sat across from her.

He stared at her while she sat there, leafing through the file and eating the rest of her turnover. Although he was still aroused, it was controllable. Ian admitted the thought of spending more time with Fallon was very acceptable.

She had such a look of concentration as she moved through the photos. His gaze kept drifting to her full lips and the way her thick lashes framed her dark sepia eyes. That calmness or serenity he had seen on her face at the station was back.

He took a drink of his lukewarm coffee. The storm rattling the window momentarily grabbed his attention.

"Where's the .45 slug?" Fallon's question brought his head back to face her.

"What .45 slug?"

"The one that killed him." She met his gaze as she pushed a picture toward him.

"How do you know it was a .45 that made this?" Ian hadn't seen anything about a .45 anywhere. He had been at the scene when the coroner had loaded the body, and Parsons hadn't said anything to him then.

Fallon moved her empty plate to the side. Ian stared at her as she chewed on her lower lip. He waited for a response, but was surprised with her answer.

"I just do."

He began to get upset. "I thought we were working together. I tell you but you withhold? That's not right, Fallon."

“Technically, all you did was show me a file I have copies of.” The eyes that met his were dispassionate. Cold.

So unlike the woman that was kissing me earlier. More of the Fallon Maddox mystery.

“Okay, so you have a point, but somewhere we have to trust each other.” Ian got up to refill their coffees.

“Perhaps this was a bad idea. I don’t trust that you won’t take what—if anything—I find out and share with you back to your boys in blue so they can erase it.”

Ian was beyond insulted. “So you don’t trust me, but you were going to sleep with me?” He bit out the question.

She shrugged. “Seemed as though you’d be a good fuck.”

He scoffed. “Maddoxes.” The single word was tinged with a sneer. Ian witnessed a brief flash of rage in her eyes before her veil of indifference masked it.

Fallon stood, carried her dishes to his sink, and rinsed them off. “Thanks for dinner and dessert, Detective.” Grabbing her jacket, she was out his door before he knew what happened.

“What the fuck!” Ian ran to it, yanked it open, and was met by wind and rain. There was no sign of Fallon.

Reentering his house, Ian slumped against the wall. What was wrong with him? Fallon Maddox had gotten under his skin. So much so, he wanted her to trust him. Ian had heard “fuck buddies” in the subtext of her explanation and it curdled his stomach to imagine Fallon like that. Especially with someone else. But for him to be that rude was uncalled for. At one point in his life he *had* gotten along with a Maddox. Had his mind been soured on them because most of the force didn’t like them? Had Fallon Maddox hit a nerve in accusing him of bleeding blue?

“Damn woman!” he muttered as he stomped back to the table and the file that lay there. Even as he sat down, he began combing through the notes searching for information on a .45 slug. Two minutes later, he got up and left.

Damn man! Fallon thought as she walked through the night. She had gone from the prospect of having sex with one hot-ass man to walking through the rainy Seattle streets.

“At least he gave me some dessert.” She avoided a puddle and kept on her present course.

Her mind replayed the surprise in his voice as he asked about the slug. Could he have not known? Was it possible he could be an ally? He was born to a cop family. Some bonds were hard to break. Honestly, Fallon didn’t remember much about Ian. He and Shawn ran together and were on the same football team, but she never really spoke to him.

Maybe I should ask Shawn about him.

“I would have driven you home,” Ian’s voice reached her. “Get in the car.”

Fallon turned her head to the left and saw Ian’s Cobra Jet keeping pace with her. He leaned across the seat and opened the door. She walked toward him. “Sure you want a Maddox in your car?”

“Just get in the goddamn car.” He arched a brow at her.

Though it galled her to do so, Fallon climbed in and shut the door. He tossed a towel at her. She looked at the man behind the wheel and fought a shudder. She felt his anger rolling from him in waves.

“That was a stupid thing to do. Going off like that. I’ve been driving all over, looking for you.”

Fallon rolled her eyes. “You want me to apologize for you doing something I didn’t ask you to do?”

Ian whipped the car into a deserted parking lot, parked them in a dark corner, and faced her. “You are being insensitive. Did it occur to you I could have been worried?”

She snorted. *Was this man for real?* “Considering the scorn in your voice before I left your house, no, that wasn’t a thought going through my head.”

Fallon watched through the darkness as he clenched his jaw. The faint glow from the instrument panel highlighted the grim set of his face. He looked angry.

“Well it should’ve been. It’s night, it’s raining and you don’t have a car.” He sounded surly.

Wiping her hands off again on the towel, Fallon expanded her seatbelt and leaned across the interior of his car. She kissed him briefly and said, “Thank you for being worried enough to come find me.”

As she moved back, he grabbed her chin and held her against him. Fallon purred as the kiss grew deeper. Her nails dug into her palms as his tongue stroked along hers.

“You are infuriating, woman,” he groaned into her mouth.

“Likewise, Cavanaugh,” she growled back.

“I’d better take you home.” Ian righted himself in his seat, turned up the defrost, and stared out the windshield.

“Probably. I’m getting your seat wet. The towel helped, but didn’t take care of everything.”

His voice dropped a few octaves lower. “I want you wet.”

Her skin flushed and prickled as a wave of moisture pooled between her thighs. “Take me home before we mess up the interior of your vintage mustang.”

A throaty laugh erupted from him. “Yeah, we wouldn’t want that.”

Fallon watched him out of the corner of her eyes. Her nipples were tight, craving his touch. Her body wanted his with an intensity she hadn’t felt before...ever.

“Tell me something about you, Fallon.”

She stared at the Space Needle as they drove and licked her lips. “What do you want to know?”

His hands flexed on the wheel. “Tell me something, Fallon. Anything. Before I lose what control I have, park us somewhere, and fuck you like a goddamn horny teen.”

Fallon couldn’t help it. She grinned, although erotic shivers jolted through her. His admission made her long to giggle like a schoolgirl, and yet part of her wanted him to make good on his promise.

“What a proposition,” she teased. “Think you’d get written up for parking?”

“It’d be well worth it.”

Fallon heard the lightheartedness in his tone that didn’t quite hide the sexual desire. “Yes,” she muttered, wringing her hands in the towel. “Yes it would.”

Normal nerves of steel were shaking like a tree in a hurricane. *What is it about him that makes my training and discipline vanish?* She remained silent, unsure of the words that would come out of her mouth.

“Here you go, Ms. Maddox. Delivered home safely.” Ian put his car in neutral and set the brake.

“Thank you. For everything.” Fallon left the car and ran up the steps without a look back. She released a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. She slid through the shadows and entered her room as Dylan called her name.

Shit! I was so close, too.

Ian normally loved to drive his car. Tonight, however, was a different story all together. He drove back home with a raging hard-on and hormones running rampant.

He groaned as the touch of her lips on his flashed through his memory banks. “Damn it. Why’d I let her go?”

Ian shifted against the seat as he tried to find a comfortable position for the erection that pressed against the jean material of his pants.

Deep within Fallon would be comfortable.

He struggled to pay attention to the road. It was a long and uncomfortable ride home.

Once he was home, Ian took a long shower, hoping to ease the tension emanating from him. A bright white smile against medium brown skin kept popping into his mind.

How would she taste? Her thick cream. Her cries of pleasure as he drove home deep between her thighs until neither of them had energy to move. One hand curled around his throbbing erection. Ian closed his eyes and began to stroke himself. He conjured up images of him and Fallon Maddox.

His hand moved faster, fingers giving him increased snugness; Fallon’s sultry eyes seemed to encourage his release. She stared unblinkingly. He closed his eyes as his balls tightened. Faster and faster he fisted his engorged cock. With a low shout he erupted and shot a load of come all over his shower wall.

Later, as he slid naked into bed, her big eyes still hovered in his mind’s eye. Watching him with endless patience.

“What happened, Spike?” Fallon asked the leader of The Rapiers. It was just the two of them in the room. A member of his crew had frisked her before even they allowed her into his house. She looked at the man who lounged in his chair. His olive skin, smooth jet-black hair, and suspicious eyes.

He stretched one linen clad leg out and looked dispassionately at her over the mahogany desk. “That’s what you have to say to me? What happened? You demand to see me, and when you get in that’s how you greet me?”

“Be happy I *asked* to see you, Bartholomew.” She shifted her weight and met his stare head-on. Bartholomew Lee Kim, aka, Spike, leader of The Rapiers.

A sardonic smile lifted half of his mouth. “Still not one to mince words, are you? I could just call for my men.” It sounded like a warning.

She didn’t like warnings. Fallon struggled to tap down the growl of anger that threatened to erupt. *Keep your calm, Fallon. You know he’s just trying to goad you.*

“You could,” she drawled, moving closer to the desk, “but you won’t.”

Understanding filled his gaze. Followed by sympathy. “None of my crew was there. That is a neutral zone. Perhaps the Double Z’s broke that code, but we didn’t.” He walked over to her side of the desk and sat on the solid wood. “No one in my crew would do your father anyway. You’re family.”

Fallon searched his face before nodding. The one thing she knew was that despite their unlikely and sometimes volatile relationship, Fallon could trust him not to lie to her. It was an unspoken pact between them. Never lie to the other.

“Have you heard anything about that night?” Fallon heard the desperation in her voice, but ignored it. She would walk through hell to find the truth.

Spike pushed up from the desk and walked to a wall safe. He spoke as he entered in the combination. “I’m sorry, no. I will have our ears out and let you know.” He pulled out some money and shut the safe. “What are you thinking?”

“The cops are lying. If they can blame it on the gangs, maybe there will be retribution.”

He sat down. “Okay, I could see that. Those damn pigs aren’t trustworthy.”

Her mind honed in on the ever-present image of Ian Cavanaugh. “Look, I should get going before my brothers come looking for me. Let me know if anything pops up on your radar.”

Spike rose from his chair again and walked to stand beside her. Fallon smiled as she met his black eyes.

“That’s right, they never liked me.”

Kissing his cheek, Fallon shook her head. “They never liked any man for me. But before I ruin your reputation, I’m outta here.”

He pulled her into his arms for a brief embrace. "Yeah, I don't want that. I'll call if I hear anything."

"Peace." Fallon returned the hug, headed for the door, and walked out.

A cold Saturday morning found Fallon sipping her peppermint hot chocolate as she waited for her brothers to meet her at Pike's Market near the pig statue. As she glanced around at the people walking about, she recognized a face in the crowd.

I know him from somewhere.

The man strolled around, pretending to be a shopper, but he watched her all the time. A futile effort; once she spotted him, she kept him in sight.

"Hey sis," Shawn said as he and her other brothers walked up.

"Hey back." She saw that Herschel's whole family was with him. "Hello Laura," she said with a smile. "Good to see you."

"Hi Fallon," she returned. "I'm so sorry about your father."

"He was yours as well, but thank you." Fallon looked at the twins and smiled at them. "Hello, Kaitlyn, hello Kylie." She kept her smile even though they shied away from her. They didn't really know their aunt, so there was no offense taken.

As her family moved through Pike's Market, Fallon still saw the guy from earlier. He shadowed them everywhere they went. Fallon walked into African Treasures and perused through the scarves, clothes, baskets, and other knickknacks that filled the small room.

This was one of her favorite shops throughout Pike's Market. She picked some cloths she wanted and a basket for a friend. Happy, Fallon headed out of the store to catch up with her family.

Clay fell into step beside her as they strolled. "Are you sticking around?" he asked, taking her bag from her.

"For a while." Fallon tucked her arm through his. "At least until I get this figured out."

"What about Ian?"

She frowned. "Umm, what do you mean? What about him?"

"What'd he tell you?"

Relief washed over her. He didn't know about her intimate exchange with Ian. "He didn't know about the .45. I don't know if he's in on the cover-up. His surprise seemed genuine."

A harsh laugh fell from her eldest brother. "Don't let him fool you."

“Don’t worry. I know he’s fishing for info. When I was at lunch with Jeremiah he saw the photo and said we needed to talk.”

“What happened?” Clay stopped to look at the t-shirts near him.

We kissed and I almost screwed him. “Not much. I told him I didn’t trust him and he got mad. So I left.”

A wry smile crossed his face. “Does he know it was you who put him on the floor?”

“Nope.” She laughed and her heart lightened as Clay joined in.

“Hey, I almost forgot. We got a match this afternoon, you in?”

Football with the guys. Fallon nodded. “I’m in.” She loved it.

The rest of the time at Pike’s Market was fun. A reprieve for all the Maddoxes from the devastation that struck their family.

Chapter 6

The late afternoon was perfect. Crisp air and slightly misty. The ground had not totally dried up since the last rains, and was a sloppy mess. The adults on the open field played as if they had been transported back in time to childhood.

Fallon ran with the guys, sticking to her man as the football was thrown. These were guys she had known growing up, guys her brothers had known. It was all about camaraderie and enjoying the day.

As her opponent fumbled, Fallon scooped up the ball and began to run as shouts of encouragement from her team resounded through her head, her legs pumping up towards the goal.

Whack!

Two guys tackled her and she went down. She grunted as more weight piled on top of her. *Oh, that hurts.* Fallon was laughing and spitting out dirt as she felt more people pile on.

“Come on, get off,” her muffled voice cried.

Slowly, they did. Fallon shoved the football away from her gut and shook her head. Using her arms, she pushed herself up off the muddy ground. She wiped the back of her hand across her face and sighed at the feel of the mud sliding over her skin.

Dried and fresh mud caked her clothes, her breath visible in the early evening air. “Was there any reason everyone felt the need to pile on me?” she asked as both sides approached the line of scrimmage.

The man facing her on the line, Charlie, a muscular black man winked. “We liked being on top of you.”

She narrowed her eyes at the laughter that filled the field. “I see how it is,” Fallon spat. Pointing at the man across from her, she bared her teeth. “Let’s play.”

Ian watched the rough, muddy, and fun-filled game of football. The game was a tradition, the last Saturday of the month; everyone who was

around came to play. These were guys he had gone to school with, yet he still held back.

His gaze skimmed over the guys he knew well. Then he stared at the male Maddoxes before resting his regard upon Fallon. Fallon who looked nothing like he pictured her in his head. She wore jeans, a sweatshirt, and tennis shoes. She wasn't just dirty, the woman was downright filthy.

But that wasn't all. Not only was she caked from head to toe with mud, but she had a smile on her face. His knees knocked at the effect that smile had on him. Such a simple act made her so intensely gorgeous to him. The more he watched, the more enamored he knew he was becoming with her. True, there were other women playing, but none could begin to compare to her, in his opinion. Her movements, her grace. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

"Cavanaugh!" a voice hollered. Ian recognized it as Shawn's. "You playin' or are you to good to play with a Maddox?" Ian reluctantly looked away from Fallon.

"I'll play," he shouted back.

"Good. I've been waiting a long time for this." Shawn cracked his knuckles and rolled his head around. "You can be across from me."

Ian nodded sharply as he took his place across from Shawn Maddox. *This man could pummel me.* Crouching forward, he waited for the snap. His eyes drifted down to where Fallon was.

WHAM!

Ian was flat on his back, looking up at a smirking group of Maddox men. *Ouch. That's gonna hurt.* Taking the offered hand, he stood and tried to work out the kink.

"Should pay attention to the game, Cavanaugh," Clay warned.

This time he'd be ready. "Yes, I should." His voice was low.

A few snaps later, Ian was in the mud for the fourth time. While he'd been blocking Shawn, Clayborne had tackled him, delivering a knee to his groin on the way down.

Stars flickered before his eyes. Ian grunted as he hit the ground. Clay maybe shorter but he was built like a brick shithouse.

"You okay, Cavanaugh, or do you need a doughnut break?" Clay sneered.

Ian could feel the rumble growing in his chest. *Enough of this shit.* He didn't understand why it bothered him so much to see Fallon act pleased that her brothers were singling him out. Yet, he couldn't help but admire the twinkle in her eyes. *Damn, I've got it bad.*

He frowned as a blonde woman was set opposite him. He didn't recognize her, but knew it was meant as an insult from the Maddox men. Apparently the men were too much for him to handle.

"Hi," she said.

"Hey," Ian replied as he waited for the snap.

"You single?" she asked. "Who cares? Wanna fuck?"

Ian didn't believe his ears. "What?" he stuttered. And just like that, Ian almost missed another snap. Almost being the key word. All the blonde offered vanished like a puff of smoke the second he watched Herschel hand the ball off to Fallon.

In a flash he was after her. *Damn, she's fast.* With determination, Ian poured on the speed. As she glanced behind her and saw him, she grinned mockingly and ran faster.

Not this time. Ian charged up the field after her and dove for her. He hit her square and tried to turn them so he's take the brunt of the contact with the ground. It didn't work, she hit first.

"Umph!" she grunted after she landed.

Momentarily, Ian remained where he was on top of her. He liked this. *Woman feels great beneath me.*

"You okay?" he asked as he rolled off her. She got up slow, still holding the ball.

"Yeah." She grimaced. "You're no lightweight, that's for sure."

"Sorry. I tried to roll but it didn't work."

The rest of the group came up. Her brothers surrounded her. Ian noticed they teased her about not being able to outrun him.

Again, Ian was bothered by the fact Fallon Maddox seemed content to ignore him. She tossed the ball to the center and retook her position.

Ian focused on the game. It got rough, stayed fun, but he sensed the undertone of anger that rolled in his direction from the Maddox males. Each brother got in cheap shots, but Ian wasn't a punk, he delivered a few of his own as well.

Tired, cold, wet, and sore when it ended, Ian stole glances at Fallon who stood with three others, chatting like there wasn't mud all over her body and in her hair.

"Cavanaugh." A voice drew his attention from Fallon.

It was Shawn.

"Shawn," Ian said. "Good game."

Dark, shrewd eyes observed him. "Yeah. Tell me something," Shawn ordered as he stood beside him. "Is it the blonde or my sister that you keep looking at?"

Ian brushed off his hands. "Is that any of your business?"

"Yes."

Ian shook his head. "I don't think so." He began to walk away.

Shawn clamped a strong hand around his arm to stop him. "Listen to me, Ian. I'm telling you this as the only warning. We heard about The Crabpot and your captain. Next time we won't be so polite about our displeasure."

Abruptly he was released and the ex-pro football player walked off.

So polite? He would swear he'd been run over by a convoy of eighteen-wheelers. *Damn it all. I'm a grown man and I'm not about to cower to a woman's brothers.*

Suddenly the animosity between cops and the Maddox clan appeared even less appealing. Dealing with overprotective brothers would be bad in a normal situation. However, adding the hatred between his brothers in blue and her family only compounded and added fuel to the already raging flames.

It's like the damn Capulets and Montagues.

Ian grinned. He was stubborn, hardheaded, and a slew of other things. Scared wasn't one of them. He headed over to where Fallon stood. He needed to talk to her, partially due to pride and the desire to provoke her family, but also because he couldn't stay away.

"Fallon," Ian said, watching her face.

Fallon looked up at the handsome man who seemed hell-bent on getting her attention. "What, Detective?" she asked.

Intense gray eyes stared at her. Smears of drying mud streaked his face and clothes and yet he looked delicious. The mist highlighted his dark hair so it shone and sparkled in the fading light. The cold caused a healthy flush to his skin. The man still wore a short-sleeved shirt and the cuffs hugged his biceps like a lover. Fallon wanted to shift her body as wetness flowed between her thighs.

"A word please."

"I'll catch up with you guys." Fallon waved as they left her alone with a temptation that looked better and better each time she saw him. "What do you want?"

"I was just wondering how you were doing? I haven't seen you since...that night."

It had been four days since Fallon had seen him. She was touched by his concern, and flattered.

"What are you trying to do? Find out what I've learned?"

His eyes narrowed before a grin filled his face. "Nope, I want to piss off your brothers."

That was intriguing.

Hands on hips, she asked, "How are you going to do that?"

His gaze scorched her body, and made her believe she was near the equator instead of winter in the Pac Norwest. Heat filled his eyes until they swirled like molten mercury. Ian pulled her into his embrace and covered her mouth with his. Like a storm, he swept through her mouth. One arm wound around her as he bent her back, never once ceasing his dominating sweeps.

Oh shit! I want him.

Her nerves were a jumbled mess. There was an insistent throb between her legs that almost lost made her lose control of her limbs. Fingers curled into her palms as she struggled not to wrap her arms around him.

Ian broke the kiss. He stared into her eyes. "That ought to do it." He stood her upright and dropped his arm. "Have a great night." Then he winked, saluted her with two fingers, and walked away to grab his jacket off a bench.

Fallon couldn't stop the amused chuckle that burst from her. She had to admit it, he had balls.

"What the hell was that about?" Clay thundered. "What the fuck is going on with you two?"

One shoulder lifted as she turned away from a retreating Ian. "He said something about wanting to piss you off."

"Well it worked," Clay rumbled as he glared after Ian.

Ian stepped into his shower with the grin still on his face. It may not have worked out exactly how he planned it. Fallon's soft lips was so

enticing, he had to kiss her. He had to force himself to stop before he screwed her in front of her family and friends, right there in the mud.

He braced his hands on the wall of his shower and allowed the hot water to ease his sore muscles and wash away the grime. When he felt better, Ian climbed out and wrapped a towel around his waist. A quick towel to his head and Ian padded to his bedroom.

Something was wrong.

Ian couldn't put his finger on it, but something was definitely abnormal. Grabbing his Glock from its holster he carefully crept up the hallway to his living room.

He heard his music, but still he didn't let his guard down. Slow measured steps took him up to the end of the short corridor.

Ian didn't see anything and he crept toward the kitchen. Nothing. The back of his neck prickled and he spun around, gun ready to fire.

It almost fell from his fingers. Sitting on a chair in the corner, beautiful in the glow from the lamp near her, sat Fallon Maddox.

How the hell did she get in here? Without me knowing it?

Ian flipped the safety on his gun. His throat grew dry as his cock grew harder. He lowered his gun to attempt to hide his growing erection.

A grin flickered across her face. She crossed her legs before picking at something on her cargo pants. "Never figured you for a classical music kind of guy."

"What are you doing in here?"

She placed her hands on the armrests. "I believe 'good evening' is what one says in polite company."

"And breaking and entering puts you in polite company?"

"Well, you told me you were raised well." Fallon held his gaze, apparently undeterred by his mood.

"I could have shot you." He put his gun down on the coffee table before striding over to her. "It was a foolish thing to break into my house." His gut churned as she shrugged it away. "Fallon, I mean it."

"Fallon I mean it," she mimicked. "Look here, Detective. I wasn't looking for a father. And from the tent in your towel, you aren't thinking like one. So let's cut the protective crap."

Ian refused to glance down at the erection he knew he had. "I never hid my attraction to you."

"Not hiding it now, either." Her gaze traveled over him. The light was low, but he was sure he witnessed desire and lust in it.

Crossing his arms over his bare chest, Ian demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"Am I making you nervous, Detective Cavanaugh?"

Hell yes! Ian swallowed hard as her teasing words sent spirals of pleasure through him. "Fallon," he growled. "Tell me."

A husky chuckle trickled from her. "How long have you been a detective? I thought it would be clear what I was doing here." She stood up. "I want you."

Ian's body shivered at those words. His heart rate sped up, his palms grew damp, and his cock throbbed. Immediately he closed the distance between them, his hands clasped her upper arms, holding her against him. A sultry look filled her face.

"Make sure you know what you're saying, Fallon."

"I don't have a stutter, Detective." She slid her arms up his bare chest, fingers slipping through his chest hair.

"Mine, Fallon. You're mine," Ian vowed as he thrust his hips forward and lowered his mouth over hers.

Fallon reached up and kissed the man holding her. His substantial erection prodded her belly. The feel of his warm, hard, almost naked body made her even more wet and ready.

He smelled so crisp and clean. Pure male. Her pussy pulsed with anticipation.

It had been a spur of the moment idea for her to go to his house. She still couldn't fully explain it. But after that kiss at the football field, she knew he was an overwhelming distraction and that she had to get him out of her system. So she came here and broke in.

When he had appeared, brandishing the gun, she had wanted to drool. The man looked so hot and sexy wearing only a towel and carrying his gun. Like sculpted marble, his body was even more impressive without clothes. His moves were powerful and athletic. She ogled the muscles in his arms, the stunning pectorals, and his eight pack abdominals. Men were not supposed to be beautiful, but the one before her, wrapped in a dark gray towel, was.

Handsome, beautiful, dangerous, mouthwatering, and a whole bunch of other things.

They explored each other's mouths, bodies pressed tightly against one another. Fallon's insides rollercoasted as Ian's hands moved over her. He slid one hand up under her shirt. Each touch of his callused palm on her skin sent waves of current through her. She laced her fingers behind his head as his second hand joined the first under her top.

"Your skin is like silk," he murmured in her ear, before tracing the outer edge with his tongue.

She could feel the wetness begin to run down her inner thigh. His mouth moved down her jaw and along her neck. He licked, nibbled, and sucked until her eyes were rolling back.

I am going to die. He hasn't even moved his hands yet.

Ian held her around the waist, strong fingers splayed over her ribcage. Her breasts ached for his touch.

That ain't the only thing, girl. This man has started a fire in you unlike any other. As if she didn't know that.

Fallon arched against him. Her head dropped back to allow better access for his wicked mouth. The stubble on his face stung as he rubbed against her sensitive skin. He nuzzled behind one ear before he bit her gently. She trembled as her nerves grew tighter. Release was what she needed. His touch. His kisses. Him.

Ian dropped a hand from her waist, only to sweep her up into his arms and carry her. She smiled at the possessive edge to his gaze as they entered his lit bedroom.

"Undress." He issued the command as he placed her on her feet.

The intensity and palpable lust in his gaze sent her insides on yet another ride. *I'm surprised there isn't a damn puddle at my feet.* She took another hungry look at his body. Damp hair, amazing chest, strong legs, and one impressive tent in the only thing he wore. A towel as gray as his eyes.

His brow arched, with impatience or challenge, she didn't know.

Fallon brought her fingers up to the dark khaki, button down and unfastened the top button. As if there was all the time in the world, she slowly slipped each pearled khaki button through its hole, watching him the entire time. The clenching of his jaw, the way his Adam's apple moved as he swallowed, his hands balling into fists, all of it made her experience a sense of power unlike any before. The fact she could turn this tall, strong, handsome detective into a lusty man, was a heady aphrodisiac. As she undid the last button, he licked his lips and moved his gaze to her breasts, as if unwrapping a gift and he was anxious to see what

it was. Fallon rolled her shoulders and shed the shirt, allowing it to fall in a pile behind her.

Ian's loud groan filled the room.

Chapter 7

Sweet Jesus! Ian had to force himself to remain still. Here he was, still trying to be somewhat of a gentleman and not toss her on the bed like a sack of potatoes. But...damn it, she made it hard.

That's not all she made hard.

He had watched like a starving wolf as she unbuttoned her shirt. As it fell away, he lost his breath. She wore a turquoise bra, the color vibrant against her rich nut-brown skin. Her breasts were firm, not huge, and not small. Perfect. None would be overflowing his hands. His cock surged at the idea of suckling on her.

He wanted to see them. Lick them. Suckle them.

What would they look like? Taste like?

Shoving down his lust, he skimmed over her flat stomach. She had a nice six-pack that in no way diminished her femininity. He saw her black cargo pants riding low on her curved hips. A lovely form. She toed off her tennis shoes, as her fingers pulled on the ties of her pants.

Be this heaven or hell, I'm here for the long haul.

Could she move any slower? Ian wanted to rip off the remainder of her clothes. He sighed in anticipation as she lowered her pants, only to gulp for air as she shimmied the pants off her hips. His breath hitched as she pushed her pants over her thighs and down her calves. Fallon stepped out of her socks and ran her hands up her torso, brushing her breasts and releasing her hair. Ian bit the inside of his cheek as her hair fell down around her. It made her look soft. He could feel his balls tighten. *Damn woman almost has me coming just by removing her clothes and letting her hair down.*

She wore high-cut bikini underwear matching her bra. Her legs were long, smooth, and made his mouth water. He noticed marks around her hips. It was a tattoo of a link belt. *Sexy.*

"Fallon," he said.

"Yes, Cavanaugh?" She reached around to the back of her bra.

"Stop." He stood before her, almost touching her beautiful body. His hands mimicked her body shape, leaving a scant distance between them. "Let me finish," he whispered.

When her hands dropped to her sides, he wanted to cry out in pleasure. One hand reached for her hair. His fingers trailed along her it. "So soft." He brushed it back from her ear and kissed her.

Ian held her gently despite the primal need to dominate. At that moment, something happened inside him, a change in how he regarded to the woman in his arms. He explored her succulent mouth as his hands splayed across her back. Up and down they moved, until one hand halted on her bra clasp. As he unhooked it, Ian felt her body quiver. Releasing her mouth, he pressed his lips to her temple as he removed her bra. It hit the floor and he pulled back to look at her.

Stare. Gawk. Lust.

She had large nipples. Dark brown, like chocolate. The pebbled nubs pointed at him and Ian cupped her breasts in his hands. "I was right," he said, "a perfect fit."

Fallon whimpered as his thumbs teased the tips. Ian bent forward and ran his tongue down the globe of her breast and over her areola before he sucked it into his mouth.

This time Fallon gasped. Ian carried her to the bed where his mouth began feasting on her breast again. He used his other hand to tease and torment her other breast.

Ian's cock pulsed as he alternated suckling breasts. He laved a path between the chocolate treats and up her sternum to her neck. Then back again.

The woman beneath him had her fingers clenched in his bedspread, one knee bent and a string of mewls erupting from her throat. He loved it.

He began moving down her torso, his tongue tracing her strong abs before dipping into her belly button.

"Ohhh, Jesus," she moaned, forgoing the blanket and grabbing his hair.

Ian could smell her arousal and his body responded with a jerk. *Patience*, he told himself. He pushed her bent leg down to the mattress and used one hand to lightly trace the links of her tattoo. It looked like it actually went all the way around her waist. On the left side, two links hung down and he could see written in the top link, in an Old English looking script, the word "MAD." Below that was written "DOG."

He rose up on his knees and gazed at Fallon. She watched him, her eyes hooded, sultry, and unwavering.

Ian glanced at her breasts, observed as the points hardened under his stare, her chest moved up and down as she breathed. He reached for the

waistband of her panties and maneuvered them down over her hips and down her satiny legs. As he gathered them in his hand, he could feel the dampness from her arousal. His cock bobbed as he envisioned sliding between her toned brown thighs. Haunting strands of Strauss played in the background as he looked at the naked body before him. Her pussy was bald except for a small triangle of black hair pointing toward her slit. Showing him the way to where he wanted to go. The bald lips glistened and he could see her clit peeking out.

Damn this woman is beautiful.

His hands skimmed over her thighs as he settled between her legs. He nuzzled her taut belly and licked his way lower. Ian's cock felt ready to burst, but he wanted to linger over the bounty before him. Scooting so he was off the bed, Ian knelt on the carpet and pulled her down the bed, placed her legs over his shoulders. Her scent filled his mind and drove him crazy. Blinded with passion he latched his mouth to her heated core.

“Oh God!” Fallon screamed.

Fire flowed through her veins as Ian ate her pussy. The experience was mind blowing. She shuddered. Her eyes wanted to roll back in her head. His mouth was magic. His thick tongue swept up and down the wet cleft, circling her clit. Her hands moved down her torso before grabbing his hair and pressing him closer. His scruff abraded the tender skin of her inner thighs. Her legs clamped like a vice around his ears. She arched closer to him as he sucked and nibbled on her clit and dipped his tongue within her. Spasms rocketed throughout her as she came...hard. He lapped up the cream her body produced.

Stars flickered before her gaze as her orgasm shot through her. “Ahhhhh!” she moaned as she floated down from the pleasure plane. Her body jerked as he stabbed his tongue deep inside her. “Fuck,” she bit out.

He opened her legs to release him and slowly kissed his way back up her body. Fallon loved how gentle he was. She experienced euphoria. He paid homage to her breasts until she was once again writhing beneath his masterful touch. Suddenly, he was staring down into her eyes. The passion had darkened his irises to almost black. He threaded his strong hands with hers and lowered his mouth. Fallon could taste her essence on him. Another wave of wetness poured to her core. She sucked on his tongue as her hands moved down the muscled expanse of his back. When she

reached the towel, she pulled, anxious to feel his naked body pressing into hers.

“Wait,” he mumbled, his tone deep and sensual.

Wait? Is he fucking kidding?

She grumbled, but as she watched him, he reached into a drawer beside the bed and pulled out a condom.

Smart man.

She stared at his stiff erection, jutting out from a nest of dark hair. It was large and bobbed at her. On the head were drops of pre-cum. He tore open the packet, but halted when she said, “Let me do it.”

Ian met her gaze and handed her the condom. She maneuvered closer to him and when her hand curled around him, she saw his eyes pulse with passion.

It didn’t take long for her to sheath him.

Ian pressed her back against the bed and settled between her spread legs. One hand slipped between them and covered her pussy, two fingers sliding easily into her wet channel.

“Ohh,” she moaned as her body gripped him.

“Jesus, you’re tight.” He moved his fingers a few times before stopping. He bit his lip and Fallon tightened her muscles around him.

“Inside,” she commanded, her fingers wrapping around his cock.

He listened to her as if unable to resist the need to be joined with her any longer. With one stroke he filled her completely. A groan of ecstasy escaped her and Ian echoed it.

“You feel so tight. I love how your body holds me.” He pulled back and pushed forward. “You okay?”

Was she okay?

Hell yeah! Sensations unlike any before coursed her body. Liquid fire ran through her.

“Oh yeah,” she said on a purr.

“Good,” he said.

His hips moved slowly, stretching her, filling her. In and out. It was a calm, consistent rhythm, which set her afire. She squirmed beneath him, wanting something more, craving more. Fallon lost herself over to the experience of making love with Detective Ian Cavanaugh. The way he kissed her, touched her, never leaving any part neglected. It was bliss. He began moving faster, slow and sensual giving way to primal and intense. His hand slipped between them again and he played with her swollen clit. With a loud scream, Fallon went over the edge.

“Ahhh!” Her back arched, legs tightened around him as she kept him buried deep within her.

Ian pumped his hips twice more before a guttural growl erupted from him. She watched as the cords in his neck bulged, the sweat on his body, and the way his jaw clenched before he fell forward onto her. Their pounding hearts slowly settled into a calmer rhythm. Exhausted from the intensity of what she had just experienced with Ian, Fallon didn't have any complaints when he pulled out of her, shut off the light and gathered her into his embrace.

Ian woke slowly. It *was* Sunday after all. He blinked a few times and stretched. He had made love to Fallon a few more times throughout the night. Each time, her spirit was imprinted deeper on his. Fallon Maddox was an explosive lover. After the first time, the sex had become even more primal. The scratch marks on his back were proof of her intensity. He grinned as he felt the sting of his wounds, and then turned his head to the spot next to him. Empty.

Eyes opened wide as he rose up on his elbows. Glancing down at the empty place beside him, he scanned his bedroom. It was without the woman he looked for. Ian tossed the blankets back and climbed out of bed. He padded naked to his chest of drawers, pulled on a pair of SPD sweats, and headed to check the rest of his house.

There was no sign of her anywhere.

“Did I dream that?” He rolled his shoulders and leaned against the cool countertop.

Where'd she go? A scowl filled his face. Her words ‘seemed as thought you'd be a good fuck’ echoed through his head. Was that all it meant to her? Had he filled her need for a fuck buddy? Fixing a pot of coffee, Ian thought over the previous night. Had anything *ever* felt so right before?

Once his coffee was ready, Ian took his mug and walked to his couch. The file was there and he tried to ignore it, only to find his attention drawn to it. Expelling a sigh, he gave in, reached for it, and began to read. He read words already committed to memory, given how often he'd gone over it. Nothing jumped out at him.

“I need to talk to Parsons again.” He drained the rest of his coffee.

I need to see Fallon again. Shaking off that thought, he began to get off the couch. The shrill ring of his phone broke the silence. Reaching over the arm of his sofa, he picked up the receiver. "Cavanaugh."

"I need you in my office, ASAP," Captain DeVane commanded.

"What's going on, Cap?" he asked. He rose and put his cup in the sink before heading toward his bedroom.

Muffled voices reached him. "Cap?" he asked.

"ASAP, Cavanaugh. Get here now." A loud dial tone buzzed in his ear.

Ian dropped the phone on his bed, showered and dressed in record time. He shoved his arms into his jacket as he ran for his garage.

So much for a peaceful Sunday.

He strode into the precinct, tossed out a few hellos, and made a beeline for the captain's office. DeVane waved Ian in seconds after he knocked.

"Morning, Captain."

"Took you long enough, Cavanaugh," Rick DeVane snarled. "Shut the door behind you."

He did and remained standing. "Something you needed, Cap?"

"I thought you were silencing that Maddox woman."

Silencing? "Meaning?"

"Why the fuck am I still getting pressure from higher up?"

What had she found out? "I don't know, sir. Miss Maddox hasn't told me anything."

Rick DeVane glared at him. His eyes brimmed with hatred. "Find out everything you can about her. All of them. I wanna know who she's fuckin' upstairs to keep them asking questions and breathing down my neck."

Why was the captain put out by that? Sure, pressure from upstairs was a pain, but he seemed to be taking it personally. Very personally.

"Can I ask why the concern? Everything was done by the book so we have nothing to hide."

"No!" DeVane snapped. "Don't ask, Cavanaugh. Just do as you're told. The only person you should pump for info is the Maddox chick." He laughed lewdly. "And from how you were the other night, I doubt that'll be much of a problem."

Ian maintained a straight face, but it was very difficult. He envisioned his fist landing on DeVane's nose, blood spurting everywhere.

"You are dismissed, Cavanaugh."

Without a word, Ian left. He sat at his desk, called up the files for each of the Maddox children, and sent each file to the printer. As he walked toward the printer, Ian decided to call his father. One way or another he would find out the reason for the animosity. Gathering the printouts, Ian shook his head at all the lines on Clayborne's file. *I bet it will be interesting reading.* He decided not to look at the others until after he returned to his desk.

As he wove through the metal desks of the squad room, he noticed his partner at his desk.

"Morning, Bill," he said, striding up to his own gray desk and setting down the papers.

"Cavanaugh," Bill responded. "You got called in as well?"

"Yeah." He sat down and looked up at his partner. Bill O'Neill. Bill was a lanky Irishman, with pale cheeks that seemed to be tinged red as if he'd been drinking. Ian liked Bill and loved having him as a partner. The man was fifteen years older and his green eyes showed the strain of his job.

"What's that?" Bill jutted his chin toward the stack of papers.

"History on the Maddoxes. Pulled up their records."

A gleam filled Bill's eyes. "Especially that filly, Fallon. What's her file say?"

Ian bit back a grumble. "Why would you say that?"

Bill sat and arched a brow. "Really? Are you kidding me? I know you aren't seriously asking me that. I'm older, but not blind." He chuckled. "Not to mention she didn't give you a second's notice."

Trying to ignore the flush he felt in his face, Ian shook his head and asked. "What do you know about the Maddoxes and the captain?"

As it had been when he posed the question to his father, all expression faded from Bill's face. His eyes filled with some kind of silent warning. "I can't tell you anything about that."

"Bill," Ian said, suddenly exasperated. *What the hell was up with everyone saying nothing to him?*

"No, Ian. Leave it alone." He cast a glance toward the captain's office. "Just leave it alone."

"O'Neill!" DeVane's bullish voice filled the room. "My office. Now!"

Bill tried for a smile, but failed. "Later, Cavanaugh." He stood, grabbed his coffee and said, "Don't forget what I said." Then he walked off.

Ian didn't say a word, just offered a short wave of acknowledgement. His phone rang the second his hand reached for Clayborne Maddox's file.

"Detective Cavanaugh."

"You think you solved the Maddox case? You're wrong. You'd better find out the truth before more innocents lose their lives." The voice was deep, but sounded digitally altered.

"Who's this?" he demanded, grabbing a pen and finding a scratch pad.

"There was no gang shooting."

"How do you know this? Who *are* you? Sir, what's your name?" Ian grabbed another detective's attention and signaled for a trace.

"No more will the innocents be silenced by the terror of men in blue."

"What are you talking about?" His pulse accelerated. *Who was this person?* "Can we meet and talk about this?"

"No."

Click.

Just like that, the voice was gone.

He immediately glanced to the man who'd called for the trace on his phone. Ian swore, replacing the handset of his phone as he watched Miles shake his head.

"Sorry, Cavanaugh. They weren't on long enough and before you ask, the number they called from was a prepaid cell."

"Damn it." He glanced down at his notes and made sure he had everything that was said. "Did you get a general area?"

"South district," Miles responded. "Nothing more concrete."

"Thanks, Miles."

Miles waved briefly before Ian dipped his head and looked at the information on the cluttered desk. *Could the call have been made by a Maddox?* Ian didn't think so, but he wasn't positive.

There was lots of animosity in the caller's voice. This was getting more and more confusing.

Ripping off the paper, he stuck it in his pocket. Then he sat back to look over the Maddox files. So much for reading it later. With his coffee close at hand, he grabbed the top one. Clayborne Maddox.

All of the brothers had something on their record, although Herschel's cleaned up after he hit twenty. The others had a long list between them.

He paused with his hand on Fallon's. Why was he hesitating? The coldness and distrust in her eyes flashed in his mind's eye. He stretched his legs out before him and opened it.

FALLON DELU MADDOX

Ht: 67in. Wt: 135lbs Race: AA Hair: Blk Eyes: Brn

Marital Status: Divorced Sex: F

No Priors

Served 10 yrs in the USMC

Achieved rank of Gunnery Sergeant

Current occupation: unknown

Current residence: unknown

Ian scowled. Most reports at least told what the person had done in the service of their country. His eyes scanned it again. It hit him. Fallon was divorced? He picked up his cell and called a friend at NCIS, Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

“Hey Paul,” Ian said as his call was answered.

“Ian Cavanaugh. Long time, no hear. What’s up, man?”

“Got some time for coffee in the near future?” Ian looked around, noticing how his captain seemed to be working very hard at not appearing to watch him. When DeVane stood in his doorway, he was hard to miss.

“Sure. I’m actually in Seattle today. Can we meet now?”

He grinned. “Yes. Where are you? I’ll come to you.” Ian got the name of his location and ran off before anyone could ask him more questions.

Chapter 8

Paul was waiting as Ian walked into the corner coffee shop. “Hey man.”

“Good to see you, Ian. What’s up?” They shook hands and sat down at a booth. When the waitress stopped by, Paul ordered breakfast and coffee. Ian just ordered coffee.

They chatted about what they’d been doing while they waited for the food to arrive. Then Paul ate in silence before asking again, “What’s up?”

“I need information on someone.”

Paul frowned. “Why come to me?”

“She was a marine. Ten years, but the file I have says nothing about what she did.”

“Did you bring the file?”

Ian slid it across the table to him. Paul shoved his empty plate to the side and opened the manila folder.

“Can you get me some more on her?” Ian asked as his friend looked at the skimpy file.

“I know her,” Paul blurted out. That grabbed Ian’s attention.

Ian’s eyes snapped to his face. Paul’s gaze seemed glued to the photo. As Ian watched, Paul touched the black and white image of Fallon.

“Paul?” Ian snapped, not wanting his friend to look at her that way. Even if it was only a picture.

Jolted out of whatever spell held him, Paul met Ian’s gaze. Shaking his head, he pushed the folder back across the table. “There isn’t anything else on her.”

“Where do you know her from?” Ian demanded. Why did Paul’s words fill him with jealousy?

“We met on a case I worked a while back.” Paul sighed. “Look, I’m telling you there is nothing more on her. Just let it go.”

“I can’t. I need to know.” Ian took another drink of his coffee. “Well, what about her ex-husband. Would it tell me who that was? Maybe he could answer my questions.”

“Nope. I’m sorry, Ian. You won’t get her file.”

“Someone has to know. I mean a unit she served in, or something.”

Paul cocked his head to the side. "Why are you so interested in her?" he demanded.

Ian arched a brow at his friend's tone. "Her foster father was killed and I don't think she buys it was an accident."

"Gregory's dead?" Paul's dark skin paled.

Ian's brows drew together. "How did you know Gregory?"

Paul frowned. "Is Fallon here?" He shook his head. "Of course she is." Paul opened his wallet, pulled out a twenty, and tossed it on the table. Shoving his arms into his jacket, he stood quickly. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to help. Goodbye, Ian."

"Wait, Paul. What is she to you? Why are you protecting her?"

Paul stopped by the door and met Ian's eyes. "I'm the ex. Fallon's my ex-wife." Then he walked out.

Ian didn't know what to think. All he wanted was to find out more about Fallon Maddox. Well, he had found out. Found out his friend had been married to her. The thought of Fallon and Paul in bed together made him want to smash something. Paul for one. He couldn't explain it, but he acknowledged he was feeling possessive over Fallon. Possibly because he'd had the pleasure of experiencing Fallon in bed.

He wanted the ice in her eyes to melt and warm when they looked at him. He wanted to feel her lips against his again. He didn't want another man touching her. Suddenly frustrated, Ian stood and dropped money to cover his end of the bill before walking out into the late Seattle morning.

Ian strolled into the station. For the first time ever, he looked at the other officers and detectives who mingled about without total trust. Fallon's words and that mysterious phone call resonated through him.

Did the men he trusted with his life play a part in covering up a murder? Who could it be? Him? Him? What about her?

With a harsh mental chastising, Ian strode to his desk. He scooped up the Maddox files, cast a glance to DeVane's office, saw him watching, and held his gaze for a moment. His partner, Bill, was still in there.

After a stare down, Ian swept his eyes back over his desk and made sure he had everything he needed and then left.

As he sat behind the wheel of his car, he put the folder on the passenger seat. Before he thought about it and changed his mind, he started his car and drove off.

The doorbell chimed. Fallon waved Dylan back to the seat on the couch and went over to answer it. "Yes?" she asked as she swung it open.

Her eyes grew wide as she absorbed who the person on the other side was.

"Hello, Fallon." His voice was just as deep and comforting as she recalled.

She couldn't believe it. Silent, she stepped back and waved him in before she closed the door on the cold day. He looked at her over his shoulder. His dark eyes were warm and assessing. "Not even a hello?"

"Hello." She gazed at him. He looked amazing. Time had been nothing but kind to him. Going on five years now, and he still made her heart skip a beat. "What brings you here?" she asked.

Paul hung his coat on a hook and faced her. "I heard about Pops." His expression softened. "I'm so sorry."

Fallon gave him a sad smile. "Thank you. I know he would have been happy to see you." She cocked her head to the side. "How'd you hear about it?"

"Who's at the door, Fallon?" Dylan yelled.

Fallon just stared at the man in the entryway of her home. Part of her was still unsure she was seeing who she thought she was. He didn't look any different. Staring at her, he pulled off his black leather gloves.

"Oh," Dylan said. "Hi Paul." The men shook hands.

Paul Hanson. Tall, muscular, dark skin, sexy brown eyes. Her ex-husband.

"Leave us, Dylan," Fallon ordered. Her youngest sibling looked at her and walked back to the couch. Looking back to Paul, she took his hand and entwined their fingers. The touch of his warm skin against hers made her feel safe and protected.

He squeezed her hand and followed her silently into the kitchen.

"Sit down, Paul." Fallon set the coffeemaker up to make some fresh java.

"You're looking good, Fallon. Real good."

She leaned against the counter, crossed her arms over her chest, and stared at him. "You too, Paul. Really, you do. How've you been?"

Part of her longed to let him hold her and offer comfort as he had when they were married. Aside from family, he had been the one man she allowed to see her vulnerabilities. She didn't succumb to the desire to comfort. All the comfort she would accept had been given long ago.

"I've been fine."

Fallon poured the coffee and set a mug before him. "How'd you hear about Pops?"

Paul hesitated and for a moment, the only noise they had was the mumblings of whatever show Dylan watched in the other room.

"Well?" Fallon added sugar to her coffee.

"Ian Cavanaugh called me."

What the fuck? Who told him that Paul was my ex?

"What did you say?" she asked in a calm tone.

"He pulled your file. Since it doesn't give much information about you, he called, requesting more information."

Her jaw clenched with anger. Checking up on her, was he? Wanted her record?

She forced her emotions under control. "Why'd he call you?"

"We've been friends for a while and he knows I'm at NCIS. So when your file said Marines, but not much else, he came to me."

"And what did you tell him?"

"That there wasn't any more info to be found on you." Paul winked. "And that you were my ex-wife. He didn't seem too pleased with that bit of intel."

She shrugged with more nonchalance than she felt. "Don't know why he would care."

"Please. I know you, Fallon. Perhaps better than you know yourself. And we both know why he cares."

Fallon couldn't argue with him. Paul did indeed have a bead on her emotions. She waved off his comment and drank from her cup. She studied him over the rim of her mug. *The perfect man and yet I couldn't make it work with him.* It was just not meant to be. She and Paul had always been better as friends than a couple. They had almost ruined a great friendship by being married.

"Got any cookies or brownies in the house?" Paul asked. His expression told her he knew what path her thoughts had taken.

"I can make some." She stood. "Have to anyway."

"Perfect." His dark eyes twinkled as he rolled up the sleeves on his shirt. "I'll help. I love fresh cookies."

"So do we," Clay said from the entrance. Dylan and Shawn stood beside him.

Fallon finished off her drink. This was what she loved. Family spending time together. Briefly the image of Ian Cavanaugh materialized

before her. His gray eyes gentle and sensual as he stared at her. *How he looked the night I spent with him.*

She tried to contain the shudder that followed her mental image. Her mouth was suddenly dry and her palms damp.

Attempting to ignore her reaction, she began directing her brothers and ex in what to grab. Paul winked but remained silent, and Fallon knew he had noticed her shudder. Still, she glared at him as an extra warning.

As more cookies and brownies baked, the group discussed the loss of Pops.

"I have a meeting tomorrow with Truc of the Double Z's," Fallon interrupted as she smacked Shawn's hand away from the fresh cookies. "Take from over there, Shawn." She pointed toward a plate of cooled ones.

Silence fell. The men stared at her. She knew what they were doing. Going back and forth in their minds between seeing her as a sister or a woman who could take care of herself.

Shawn nodded. "You'll be careful."

It was a statement.

It was a command.

Whichever, it definitely wasn't a question.

"What about Herschel?" Dylan asked.

"He has another family now," Fallon said. "We can't ask him to risk them if the cops are in on this." She met each brother's eyes. "We keep him protected."

"Agreed." Clayborne nodded. "Are you cooking thanksgiving dinner?" He looked at her.

"Why you lookin' at me?" Fallon queried. "I ain't the only one in this room who can cook."

Smirks filled their faces. Glaring at them, she cocked a brow and waited for Paul to say something.

He held up his hands in surrender. He lifted one shoulder as he moved to stand by her at the island center. "Sorry guys. By default I agree with Fallon."

"Wimp," Dylan said.

"Fucker," Clay admonished.

"Pussy," Shawn grumbled as he shook his head.

Paul grinned. "I married her. I know what's safest."

"You aren't married anymore," Dylan reminded him.

“That’s true, but I also bet she’s just as quick to lay a man out on the floor if they upset her.” Paul kissed her cheek.

Clay laughed. “Yes, she still earns her ‘Mad Dog’ title. Put Cavanaugh on the floor her first night back.”

Paul joined in on the joviality that filled the room.

“You know what?” Fallon shoved Paul away. “You will be making your own food if you keep this up.”

“Spoil sport,” Shawn chided playfully.

Paul shook with laughter, which earned him a sock in the shoulder from her. Damn man didn’t even give her the satisfaction of a flinch.

He looked at her with teasing brown eyes. Humor lit his dark face as he reached for a warm cookie. Fallon read the challenge in his eyes but ignored it. He wanted her to stop him, she knew it.

“I hope you burn your mouth,” Fallon snapped.

He batted his lashes at her. Lashes she envied for their length and thickness.

“Will you kiss it and make it better if I do?” he asked in a throaty voice.

All she could do was shake her head. She didn’t trust her mouth.

Her brothers groaned collectively.

Paul winked again.

Fallon turned her attention back to the task at hand. Making more cookies.

“Hey, Fallon,” Shawn said as he stirred up some frosting. “You are still coming down to the youth center to help out today, right?”

“Why else would I be making so many cookies?”

“Because you love us, of course,” Clayborne added.

She scoffed. “So says you. Don’t worry, Shawn. I’ll be there by 1300.”

“Fallon, you’ve got company,” Dylan announced over the music and voices.

“Well, I’m a bit busy here, Dylan. Show whoever it is into the kitchen.” She focused on sprinkling flour to roll out the cookie dough.

As she rolled out some more dough, all conversation stopped. Curious, Fallon glanced up. Across the room, withstanding hardened stares from her brothers and an assessing one from Paul, stood Ian.

Ian Cavanaugh. Homicide detective. The man she had slept with last night. He looked delicious. Snug blue jeans molded against his powerful thighs. His brown leather jacket was wet with rain, as was his hair.

His eyes smoldered, but he maintained a blank expression as he stared at her. "I need a moment of your time, Ms. Maddox."

She shivered, her pussy throbbed, and her breasts cried out for his touch.

Shoving back her physical reaction, Fallon continued what she was doing. "Say your piece, Detective. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

He walked further into the room. "Sounds wonderful. It's nasty outside today." His jacket was hung over the back of the chair and she noticed his dark gray button-down shirt.

"Should've stayed home then," Clay snapped.

"Grab a seat, Detective." Fallon glared at her brother, wiped her hands, and poured Ian a cup. "Whaddya need?"

You.

Ian had been prepared for the mistrustful looks he received from the Maddox men. He had *not* been ready for his reaction at seeing Fallon.

He wanted to grab her, pull her to him and kiss her senseless. Ian wanted to know why she left him without a word. And why she and Paul still seemed so damn chummy.

It rankled him severely to see his friend there. The feeling was made worse by the knowledge Paul was Fallon's ex-husband. Not just a boyfriend. A husband. A man she had taken vows with, shared a life with.

Ian allowed his gaze to travel over Fallon. She wore a pair of white cotton pants, a cut off Seahawks sweatshirt and dark socks. Her hair was loosely gathered at the base of her neck. A few wayward wisps hung around her face.

With her hands working in the dough, she appeared gentle and at ease...this was how he remembered her in his bed. Soft. But this time, her ex-husband was beside her. And that was a very unpleasant experience for him.

"Detective?" She raised a brow at him.

Ian bought some time by taking a sip of coffee. The rich brew slid down his throat, warming him. "Thank you for the coffee."

"State your business, Cavanaugh," Clay demanded.

Ian looked at the four men in the room, all extremely protective of Fallon. Three of them family, and one ex. At least Herschel wasn't there as well.

“Can any of you explain to me why there is such animosity between you all and Captain DeVane?” Only Paul’s eyes didn’t narrow. Holding up his hands, Ian explained further, “Look. I am trying to figure all this out. You gotta give me something here. I’m trying to help.”

“Why say you need a moment of Fallon’s time if that’s your question?” Shawn demanded.

Ian wet his lower lip. “Because as of right now, she seems to be the only one willing to even talk to me in a semi-polite manner.” The censure was obvious.

He contemplated Fallon. She appeared almost indifferent to him. Was she sorry about last night? Was she comparing him to Paul in bed?

“Why should we believe you, Detective?” Fallon asked, breaking into his train of thought.

“You may not believe me, but I actually liked your father. I respected him.” Ian glared. “I’ve not threatened you. I’m just trying to do my damn job.” *I am getting so tired of this treatment.*

“Thought you said it was a gang shooting. Wrong place, wrong time kind of thing, right?” Clayborne said.

“Not anymore,” he responded solemnly. Ian looked back at Fallon and to his surprise she was watching him. “I really need to speak to you, Fallon.”

She shrugged. “Well, I’m here now. You can talk to me while I finish with this.” Pointing to a plate of frosted cookies and a pan of brownies she added, “Dylan, take these to Herschel’s house.”

“What about the center?” Shawn asked while he continued to shoot daggers at Ian.

“He can drop me off. Right, Detective?”

Ian cleared his throat. He’d been watching her lips and had lost track of the conversation. “Drop you off?”

“Can you drop me off at the youth center on Fourth?” Fallon lifted her eyebrow at him.

“Yeah. Sure, no prob.” He took his empty cup to the sink.

Ian nodded to the brothers as they all left after kissing their sister and glaring at him. He watched in silence as Paul made dinner plans with her and took his leave along with a not-so-innocent peck on her lips.

When it was just the two of them in the house, he pushed away from the counter he leaned against and trapped Fallon between him and the cooking island.

Settling his hands at her waist, he whispered in her ear, "I missed you this morning." He trailed his tongue along the shape of her ear and smiled at her shuddering reaction. "Do you know how hard it was for me to watch you and not touch you?"

He tightened his grip on her hips and pressed their bodies together. She smelled like cookies. The strands of her hair brushed against him.

"I thought you wanted to talk, Detective."

Was it his imagination or did her voice sound a little breathless? "Call me Ian," he ordered.

"No," she said. "Just talk. I thought you wanted to talk to me about something."

"I did. I do. But," he nipped the skin behind her earlobe, "you have a way of distracting me." He could feel her shiver that time.

Fallon spun in his arms, keeping her floured hands behind her. Her big eyes smoldered with desire. "Is that what you came over here for, Cavanaugh? Wanted a repeat of last night?" Her mouth was inches from his.

Ian swallowed. His cock pressed insistently against the zipper of his jeans. For a second he'd thought he had the upper hand. The second had since passed.

Lightly, she allowed their lips to touch. Ian wanted to yank down her pants, bend her over the island, and fuck her until she screamed his name to the heavens. Her breasts teased him as they pressed into his chest. It was as if there were no clothes between them. Her heat seeped into him. He longed to slip into her.

"Is that it, Cavanaugh?" she asked against his mouth.

"Fallon," he muttered as he moved his fingers down to rest on her ass. His erection throbbed. He wanted her so bad.

"Or perhaps," she pulled back so their eyes met, "you wanted to know more about me and Paul." A furrow developed between her eyes. "Is that it?"

Ian witnessed the change in her gaze. It went from desire to empty. His silence got misinterpreted.

"Yes. Paul told me you were asking about my past. What for?"

There were many proper things to say at that moment. Unfortunately for Ian all he said was, "Why didn't you tell me you had been married?"

"Get your hands off my ass!" There was obvious anger in her tone.

He did, but he refused to back up. Instead he remained pressed against her, allowing her to feel his hard cock.

“Answer my question, Fallon. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It wasn’t any of your business.” She spun around and began attacking the remaining dough before her.

“Tell me what you did in the Marines.” Ian reached around her and covered her hands with his as she used the rolling pin.

Chapter 9

Fallon wanted to melt through the floor. Ian Cavanaugh was a force to be reckoned with. He pressed up against her back, his warm breath by her ear, rigid cock against her ass, and his hands on hers.

She could feel the sweat trailing down between her breasts. He smelled clean and masculine. There was a slight hint of leather to him as well. Every inhalation he took rubbed his chest against her.

Torture.

It was lucky that he hadn't been part of her "torture" training, as she would never have successfully completed the course. This man made her long to toss out the rulebook.

Each touch, every whisper made the rest of the world fade into oblivion. The only thing she craved was more.

More of his touch.

More of him.

Apparently last night didn't cleanse my system of this need I'm feeling for him.

"Enough!" she snapped. "Get away from me."

Immediately he did just that. "Look at me, Fallon." She did. "I would never hurt you."

"I'm not scared of you, Cavanaugh. You're distracting me and you damn well know it. So just...just keep the island between us. Say what you need to from over there." She waved a floury hand.

She felt his chuckle as much as she heard it. Fallon met his gaze head-on despite the continuous tremors inside her.

She ignored visions of a naked Ian. How he'd made her feel in his arms, his bed. She shoved all those memories to the side.

Find your focus, Fallon.

Oh, she'd like to focus all right. On how good he tasted, how wonderful his skin smelled. She shifted her weight in hopes of calming the fire he had built within her. The expression on his face told her he knew how she felt...and he was enjoying it.

"Wipe that look of your face, Detective," she hissed.

"Can't a man be proud when a beautiful woman finds him desirable?"

Longing rose up inside her. With a groan, she shoved it back down where it belonged. *He's going to make me lose my sanity.*

"Your questions?" Fallon pushed the issue. She kept an eye on him as she put the last batch in the oven and set the timer.

"Going to ignore what's between us, Fallon?" He prowled closer to the island.

Pure sex poured from this man. There was no other way to explain it.

She grabbed up dirty dishes and put them in the sink. As she turned with a dishrag, Ian was right there. Blocking her escape. "Detective," she said. "Don't push my patience."

"Answer my question and I'll back away."

I don't want you to. I want you to take me in the kitchen. Fill me with you cock. Make me cry out in pleasure.

"Unless you like me this close," he purred, his lips by her ear.

"I have things to do." Fallon tried very hard to sound unaffected. She called upon all her long hours of training to remain in control of her emotions.

"There's something I *have* to do as well." His voice was a deep silvery timbre and it sent waves of lust through her. Over and over again.

"Really?"

"Yes, really." He stepped closer, overwhelming her senses with the scent that defined him to her.

She knew she shouldn't ask.

She knew she wanted to.

Fallon gave into the devil.

"And what would that be?" she goaded.

"This," he whispered as he covered her mouth with his.

Liquid heat flowed through her veins. Leaning into him, Fallon wrapped her arms around his waist and deepened the kiss.

Their tongues dueled with one another and she could feel the hard ridge of his penis digging into her. Swarmed by intense emotions, Fallon gave herself over to the kiss.

Ian knew the second she surrendered. The kiss became explosive. Their kisses were always such, but he could tell she had held part of herself back.

As she sank into him, he anchored one arm around her waist and threaded his other hand into her hair. She had so much passion inside her. Ian wanted to be able to tell the world he was the man destined to be with her. Her passion was for him, and only for him.

He longed to make love to her, but as the chime of the timer went off, he helped steady her back on her feet before reluctantly releasing her lips.

She stared at him, her eyes glazed with desire. She blinked them a few times before her usual focus returned.

"The cookies," she stammered.

"Yes baby, the cookies." Ian brushed his thumb over her kiss-swollen lower lip.

Fallon smiled almost shyly and moved away to the oven.

Ian walked over to the table and sat. His gaze remained on Fallon. Her grace still amazed him; it was beyond almost anything he could recall seeing. Every movement flowed effortlessly.

"Tell me about the .45," he ordered.

She stopped packing cookies into a box and looked at him. "The imprint that was left on his skull matched that of a Mark IV revolver. I don't know where the slug is but like you know, revolvers don't have casings."

Ian was astounded. He hadn't even given any thought to there not being any brass left over. The assumption he had made had been a foolish one, given the rain they had experienced the night the shooting occurred.

"How did you get that?"

"I took the image to a friend who verified it. Those guns are antiques." She paid attention to loading the dishwasher.

"The man you were at Ruth's Chris with?"

"Jeremiah? Yes." She started the dishwasher with a simple push of a button.

"Tell me how you came to the decision to follow up. Are you a gun fanatic? Is that why?"

A short chuckle burst from her. "No, I hate guns. But I have had lots of experience with them." She began putting more cooled cookies into containers.

"In the Corps."

"Yes, in the Corps."

"What did you do in the marines, Fallon?"

She licked her lips as she placed a lid on the final canister. She hesitated and then said solemnly, "I served my country."

Ian realized she wasn't going to expand on that. He placed his curiosity to the side. "Tell me more about what you found."

"I don't think so, Cavanaugh. Why don't you share with me?"

"Anytime, anyplace, sweetheart." He couldn't resist the comment.

One side of her adorable mouth quirked up. "Funny, Cavanaugh. Funny." She wiped off the island and counters and soon the kitchen was clean.

"I'm not laughing, sweetheart. I'm dead serious." Ian became conscious of the truthfulness of his words at the moment he spoke them. As he stood there in the kitchen with Fallon, he knew he wanted it all with her.

"Let's go. I have to get to the center."

Not wishing to be away from her, Ian tried to find a way to prolong their time together. "What do you do at the center?"

Fallon felt a rush of warmth as the man in her kitchen observed her with those intense mercurial eyes. For a mere second she allowed herself to be affected by it.

With a glance at her Citizen Eco-Drive Black Eagle Skyhawk, she shoved the tenderness aside. Stacking the containers, she pointed at them and said, "These need to go. Come on, I don't want to be late." She smiled inwardly as he didn't argue, just slipped his jacket back on and gathered the five bins.

"This conversation isn't done, Fallon," he told her as he headed for the door.

Right on his heels, Fallon watched his ass as he walked. His jeans seemed to mold right to his body. *Damn, that's a nice sight.* She grabbed a bag and her jacket off the bench and opened the door for him.

"I don't talk about my past, Cavanaugh. That's just a fact you'll have to accept."

He juggled the items in his hand as he opened the trunk. The rain had begun to pick up and as he shut the trunk, he looked at her. Fallon was bombarded by a rush of desire to jump into his arms and kiss him until neither of them knew what day it was.

The man staring at her appeared almost mystical. Raindrops hung on his hair and eyelashes. A trickle ran down his lean face and the longing to lick it away flared inside her.

“Coming?” he asked.

Just about. “Yes,” she said as she hastened to the passenger door.

As she buckled her belt, Fallon snuck another glance at him. *What is it about him that makes me unable to stop thinking about him?* She noticed a small scar behind his right ear. She had to busy her hands with her bag to make sure she didn’t reach out and touch it. *This is getting ridiculous.* After another mental shake, she relaxed against the seat.

“Tell me, Ms. Fallon Maddox, what do you do at the center?”

“Ms. Fallon Maddox?” She watched him drive through the wet streets of Seattle. “I spend time with kids in hopes they will stay out of trouble.”

“Look, I know you don’t trust me, but I am trying to help.” He sounded frustrated.

She cocked a brow as she stared at him. “Listen. We’ve already gone over this. And what are you doing to help? Trying to keep you captain happy by keeping me away from the case?”

He stopped at a light and returned her glare. “That’s not fair.”

“And what is? Me telling you all my suspicions, so you and your *boys* can make evidence disappear? Not from where I’m sitting.”

BAM!

He smacked his hand on the steering wheel. “Damn it! I have never destroyed evidence.” Jaw clenched, Ian drove into the lot of the center.

Fallon could see her words had hurt. But how else was she to explain the cover-up? It was *her* father who had been murdered. Not his.

“That may be, Detective. I’m trying to find my father’s murderer and your ‘family’ is covering something up. I’m protecting mine and I’m assuming you’d do the same.” Fallon got out and stood by the back of his car. Ian shut it off and joined her. He opened the trunk and she said, “Thanks, I got them. Thanks for the lift.”

Adjusting her bag on her shoulder, she walked inside the building without looking back at him. Her body screamed for his touch but it was outvoted by her need to give her family some closure. So she planned on ignoring the part of her which felt bad for suspecting him and the part that longed to offer him comfort to ease the sting of her words.

Ian, her mind cried as she heard the whoosh of the door closing behind her.

Ian was furious.

"I'm sick and tired of her accusations," he swore as he climbed back in the dry interior of his car.

Why am I so upset? he wondered.

Many suspects had accused him of planting evidence on them or saying there was a conspiracy going on. Those had never bothered him, so why did the words of Fallon Maddox strike so deep?

Did he care so much for her? Had he begun to doubt some of his brothers in blue based on the evidence he'd seen, and not seen? The animosity his captain had for Fallon roused Ian's protective instincts like nothing else ever had.

He sat in a parking space in front of the youth center and tried to figure out his confusion. Unfortunately, all he could think about was a mysterious brown-skinned nymph.

Before he knew what happened, Ian was striding through the door of Seattle's Youth Center. He went to the front counter.

Numerous kids ran around. There were some behind the counter as well.

A young black man looked up and asked, "Can I help you, sir?"

"I was looking for Fallon Maddox."

"Let me see," the young man glanced at something in front of him, "okay, she's in Room 401. Go down the hall to the end and go left. It's the third set of doors on your right. Her class will be over in forty minutes."

Her class?

"Thank you." Ian headed in the direction he'd been told to go.

The halls weren't empty; fresh happy faces moved past him. Ian stopped before the door that had 401 on it. He hesitated a moment before pulling it open.

He knew his jaw dropped. Fallon stood at the front of a class of about thirty. She wore a karate gi. The purity of white was sliced by the onyx black of her belt.

She's a black belt. Everyone in the room held a staff in their hands.

Ian entered the room fully and leaned against the wall to observe. She was walking the class through a set of moves.

He'd seen her glance at him briefly, but her attention never wavered from the class of serious-faced students.

"*Jun nigiri*," she ordered and all thirty made the same movement. Ian was impressed.

"*Gyaku nigiri*." They changed to a different position.

Fallon moved through the group and fixed hands and stances each time.

“*Yose nigiri*,” her command rang.

The class answered by changing and offering a loud *kee-yah*.

“*Hasami nigiri*.” As one the class changed again.

Fallon repeated the words as she made sure all the students got it right. Then she changed the order and made them do it again.

Ian had a smile on his face as she strode back to the front of the room. This made sense to him. Fallon moved with such fluidity of motion, martial arts made a lot of sense.

He remained in the same position for the remainder of the class. She broke it up and had some students sparring while some with white belts learned more basic moves.

She spoke clearly and without hesitation. As she explained some positions, another student performed them. The class recited something to her at the end of class, Ian figured it was in Japanese, but whatever it was, he didn’t understand it.

All the equipment was put away and he witnessed as she spoke to each kid as they left. He nodded to each inquisitive stare he got but held his tongue.

When the door shut on the final child, Ian pushed away from the wall and moved toward her.

“No shoes on the mat, Cavanaugh,” she said right before he stepped on it.

“I didn’t know you taught the staff. Or that you were a black belt. Impressive.”

“This is a Bo. I’m merely subbing for someone.” Fallon walked off the mat without sparing him another glance. “What are you doing here?” Her dark eyes found him. “Arresting someone?”

Ian wasn’t sure what to say. Why *was* he there?

“I wanted to know what you taught. It’s not like you’ve been very forthcoming with your answers.”

Fallon turned away; he stared at her as she moved across the room. He licked his lips before following her, making sure to skirt the mat.

“I hardly see why my life is any of your business.”

She shrugged out of the top of her outfit. Underneath she wore a white, spaghetti strapped tank top.

Ian wasn't fast enough to stop the groan from escaping. She looked so damn hot. Then he looked closer. The night he had been allowed to enjoy her body, he must have missed the tattoo on her left shoulder.

A bundle of white and purple flowers marred her supple skin. There was a Dior bow with two tails hanging down from it. Each cream-colored section of the ribbon had a word on it.

Cocking his head, Ian read the horizontal word first. It was all caps and gold. SEMPER. The words on the tails were also capitalized. One was done in red and read, FIDELIS. And the other a dark color, blue perhaps. It read FORTIS.

As quick as it had been bared, Fallon covered her upper half with a large sweatshirt. She faced him, arms crossed, and stared. "Did you say something?"

A myriad of responses occurred to him. All sexual. "Just that I'm curious about you."

"Why?" She sounded so serious.

"Wouldn't you be if you were me?"

Ian watched her expression. He wasn't sure what he searched for, but whatever it was, he didn't get it. Not even a flicker crossed her face.

"Nope." She folded up her top and put it in her bag.

His mouth grew dry as she shucked off the pants. True, she wore a pair of shorts, a tight pair that accented her gorgeous toned, smooth brown legs. It took less than two seconds for all the blood to rush to the erection pressing hard against the material of his pants. All he could see was her limbs wrapped around him as he drove deep inside her intoxicating heat. The passionate moans her luscious mouth would release. The scorching fire created by her skin on his.

"Damn," he uttered as she tugged on a pair of gray sweatpants.

"Is there a reason I shouldn't kick your ass for ogling *my* sister, Cavanaugh?" Shawn's angry voice vibrated in his ear.

Ian was relieved his coat hid the blatant ridge of his swollen cock. Still he bristled at Shawn's attitude.

"Fallon is a very beautiful woman." He never took his eyes off her. "I'm not dead."

"It could be arranged," Shawn spat.

Rolling his shoulders, Ian glanced at the man beside him. "You threatening me, Maddox?"

"Wow. And here I thought all cops were stupid. Guess you're not as stupid as the rest."

Ian bit back his instinctive retort. He knew Shawn wanted to get a rise out of him. Still, he could needle Shawn. "What's the matter Maddox? Bother you that your sister could find me attractive?"

Shawn expelled a short unamused bark of laughter. "I'm not worried. Fallon can more than take care of herself."

Ian let his gaze drift back to Fallon. She wasn't paying them any attention. She sat at a desk in the back and made some notes. "Then why the attitude?"

"Aside from the fact you've got drool running out of your mouth? And how you look like a damn horny teen staring at her?" Contempt filled his voice. "You're a cop."

Shawn's final sentence dripped with disdain. That got a reaction from him. Ian spun to square off with Shawn, the stood toe-to-toe, nostrils flaring. "What's your fucking problem with me, Shawn?"

"Perhaps I gave you too much credit earlier," Shawn sneered. "Maybe you aren't anything other than a dumb cop."

"Name the time and place, Shawn. I'm not afraid of you or your damn attitude."

"Of course not. You'd hide behind your badge."

"I don't need to the badge to deal with a man who couldn't make it in pro ball."

Shawn's lips curled and he stepped closer to Ian. "Keep going down that road, Cavanaugh, and you'll find out just how much you *need* that badge."

Ian didn't back down. He could feel the anger radiating off the man before him. He was taller, but Ian honestly didn't know if he would be able to take Shawn. All he knew was that Shawn had left the NFL surrounded by rumors of drugs and attitude, but Ian didn't know anything for sure.

"Gentlemen," Fallon's husky voice interrupted, "put your cocks away. You are at the youth center and the doors are open. Be good examples for the teens watching." Her tone grew ice cold. "Or I will make both of you sorry."

He hadn't realized she'd moved. Ian flicked a glance at Shawn. There was a hint of shame on his face. He felt it himself. They should be setting good examples instead of bristling at each other.

"Sorry," he said to Fallon, even as he sent a silent glare over her head to Shawn.

“Then stop giving that look to my brother.” She walked toward the open door, bag in hand. “Shawn?” Fallon questioned without stopping.

“This will be continued,” Shawn’s deep voice said as he headed after his sister.

You can bet on it. Ian remained mute, deciding instead to watch Fallon move. Until Shawn placed his large body in the way. Before he disappeared out the door, Shawn sent him another dagger-like stare.

Holding the angry gaze, Ian took his badge and shoved it in his pocket before lifting a shoulder. *Any day Shawn.* Ian left the center with one lingering glance at Fallon as she stood behind the food line, helping to keep the kids moving.

Sitting behind the wheel of his car, Ian found himself chuckling. It had been a very strange day. The only thing he was still certain of was his increasing feelings for Ms. Fallon Maddox.

Chapter 10

“He drove her to the youth center. He was alone with her in her home!” the voice hollered.

“What was he doing?” a man sitting behind a desk asked.

“What was he doing? How the hell should I know? Maybe he went over to fuck her.”

“This needs to be stopped,” the graveled words filled the room.

A liver-spotted hand reached for the drink before him. “Meaning?”

“Meaning, it needs to be ended. He’s already questioning the finding.”

“Who the fuck does this bitch know to have the Chief of Police start breathing down our necks? Do they know what we’re searching for? Or has she found it already?”

“Not yet, no. At least it doesn’t look like it. Shall I bug the home?”

“Yes.” Runny eyes narrowed. “If they have it or know where it is, I want to know. I *need* that location.”

“Yes sir. It’ll be done. What about the detective?”

“I don’t know yet. Bring him in. I need to know what he does.” One hand waved in dismissal and the younger man left without out argument.

Eyes were watching her.

Fallon knew that without a doubt. The unmistakable sensation surrounded her as she jogged through the park.

Instinctively she bristled. *Cowards*, her mind screamed. She hated the feeling of being hunted. Whoever watched was searching for something. There was a huge difference in being casually observed and being stalked.

The Corps had taught her that. And it had saved her life. Numerous times.

More alert to things, Fallon continued along the trail. The early morning rays were barely making it through the heavy cloud cover that had been lurking for a while.

The air was thick with the smell of impending rain. The crisp smell of pre-dawn filled her nose as she wound around the lake. Ahead, a figure used a bench along the trail for stretching.

Whoever it was wore sweats and a hooded sweatshirt. Alert, Fallon never slowed, just kept jogging along.

A chuckle bubbled out as Ian Cavanaugh fell into step with her as she passed the bench. *What is he doing here?* She kept her question contained and focused on the path before her.

It took self-control for her not to glance sideways at the strong man beside her. She didn't want to know how the sweats molded around his firm ass as he moved next to her.

"Morning," he said between breaths.

"Detective." Fallon lengthened her stride a bit, determined her eyes wouldn't linger on his fine-ass body.

"How far you going?" he asked.

"Why? How far are you?" His loud breathing filled her ears.

"Just a few miles," he explained.

Fallon laughed, she couldn't help it. "How often do you jog, Detective?" She adjusted her pace until his breathing evened out a bit.

"Enough," he said, with a bite to his tone.

I'm sure you do, but not at the pace I'm used to. "Right." Fallon let it go. Two miles passed in silence. She controlled her gait so he could keep up easier, not wanting to cause him to pass out or cramp up.

Girl, please. You know you'd love rubbing any part of him. Over and over again. All that firm, hard flesh, her mind taunted.

So vivid was the image, she stumbled over her feet and would have eaten the pavement if not for Ian's strong arms holding her.

"You okay there, sweets?" he asked in a heavy drawl.

"Fine," she grumbled, embarrassed and angry with herself.

"Do this a lot on your runs?" his voice teased.

Grinding her teeth, Fallon regained her motion. She found her normal step and soon the labored breathing of the man beside her and the slap-slap of their combined footfalls were the only noises interrupting the newfound morning.

"Jesus, Fallon," he panted. "Where's the fire?"

She faced him and ran in place. "Look, Detective. I didn't ask for you to attempt to keep up. I run fifteen miles daily and was going slower out of courtesy for you. I'm done. Have a good one." Fallon began to head off.

Ian reached out, clamped down on her arm, and spun her back to his stock-still frame. His mouth caught her gasp of outrage.

Electricity rocketed through her body. *Damn this man!* She melted into him, arms sliding around his waist.

Fallon responded to the kisses, moisture pooling within her. Her heart quadrupled in speed, her breathing grew ragged as if she had completed fifteen miles in a dead run.

Ian closed steel-like arms around her. She could feel his erection poking her and she trembled even more.

I shouldn't be doing this!

Rhyme and reason flew away as his fingers lightly caressed the curve of her butt. The pressure encouraged by his touch brought their pelvises closer together. He lessened the intensity of the kiss, teasing her, enticing her to press the advantage. She did. Fallon tightened her grip on the fleece of his sweatshirt and pulled herself closer to the heat emanating from him.

"Fallon," he mumbled.

Her breasts ached. "Shush, Cavanaugh," she commanded. She rubbed against him, needing somehow to subdue the raging need within her.

She gripped his firm ass cheeks and squeezed. Flames licked up and down her body. Half of her longed to extinguish the longing and yet somewhere deep in a corner of her mind, Fallon knew the man creating the desire was the one who could extinguish it. The only one.

Releasing his mouth, Fallon licked her lips, trying to capture the last of his taste. "What are we doing?"

His thumb skimmed her lower lip, eliminating any remaining moisture. "What we feel is right."

She knew she should push him away and continue her jog. She *knew* it. Yet here she stood, sinking further into the granite-like chest of Detective Ian Cavanaugh. Fallon reached up and tugged him closer. Their lips met with a fury that hadn't been there before. She yelped in surprise as Ian lifted her off the ground and walked with her in his arms. Peeking through lowered lids, she saw he had taken them off the path and into a secluded area. Ian set her down before reaching around for her derriere to yank her closer.

"Fallon," he moaned into her mouth. His hands slid under her sweatshirt.

She shivered from the cold even as her hands moved under his top.

Ian stroked his tongue along hers before he pulled back and yanked his sweatshirt off and placed it on the ground. Fallon found herself set on it as he lowered her pants and panties. One leg remained covered.

Their mouths met in a passionate blaze as he lowered himself on top of her. She whimpered as she felt the tip of his erection settle at the entrance of her wet core. Simultaneous moans escaped as he filled her with his hard cock.

She bit back her moan as he moved within her. Suddenly the cold didn't matter, the fact they were in a public park didn't either. The only important thing was the man hand-delivering her to ecstasy. His strokes were deep and slow. He nibbled along her chin before covering her mouth with his own. With his tongue, he made love to her mouth, keeping in time with his continuous motion of his hips. Fallon closed her eyes and allowed herself to be swept away by the depth of emotion she felt when with this man. Detective Ian Cavanaugh. It went way beyond the physical and she knew that.

Her nails dug into his shoulders as his hips moved faster. His mouth settled into the curve of her neck as she tightened herself around him. One. Two. Three more powerful thrusts and he exploded deep into her body, triggering her own release.

Turning her face into his hair, she groaned as her world shattered around her, erupting into a brilliant display of light and stars. They lay there as their hearts slowed. Ian pressed a tender kiss to her lips and pulled out of her. Fallon quickly put her clothing back on and watched as Ian straightened up his attire as well.

She felt like a teen, sneaking off and having a quickie in the barn. And it didn't matter when he gazed at her with his intense gray eyes. Despite the cold morning, she felt her body flush all over again. He lingered over her with his burning gaze. She licked her lips and reveled in the flare of heat that popped up in his twin orbs.

"Well, so much for my run," she said.

"Complaining?" he asked as he pulled her up against his chest.

"Not at all, but this can't continue to happen."

He frowned. "Why not?"

"For one, it's not safe. I can't keep going around having unprotected sex with you."

He shrugged easily. "So, I carry around more condoms."

Fallon arched a brow. "More?"

A flush crossed his skin and she laughed at his expression.

“I have to get back. I need to finish part of my run.”

“Can I accompany you?” he questioned.

“Here to keep me safe, Detective?” she teased as they stepped back onto the paved pathway.

“Yes. Of course, it could be I’m hoping you’ll be going home with me later on.”

She laughed again. “Nope. Not happening. I have things to do today. Lots of them, which is why I really need to get going.”

They were silent as they began a slow jog, gradually picking up speed until they were at the pace they had been before the unplanned rendezvous behind the bushes.

Fallon didn’t push him hard, she knew he couldn’t keep up with her usual pace and she wanted him with her. She liked the comfort that surrounded her when he was with her. A lot.

Ian watched her drive off in her father’s old beat-up vehicle. He had wanted to ask her to stay with him. And not just for the day. For much, much longer than that.

Ian realized his feelings for her were growing daily. She ruled his thoughts. He wanted nothing more than to be with her.

Climbing into his car, Ian headed home to shower and change before going into work. Bill was there already with a cup of coffee waiting for him.

“Let’s go, Cavanaugh. Got trouble.”

Holding the hot brew, he allowed the scent to wash over him.

“What kind of trouble? And, good morning.”

“Another murder and they say multiple bodies. Plus there is a witness. However he is a Rapier and not very forthcoming.”

Great, more gang activity. With a nod, Ian followed him out into the morning and got in their car. He shut the passenger door as the first fat drops of rain began to fall.

Gotta love Seattle.

They flashed their badges and the officer lifted the crime tape. Ian began looking around. Three bodies lay there and Parsons knelt beside one.

Crouching beside Parsons, he said, “Whadda we got?”

Parsons met his gaze as he waved for his assistants to come get the body. "All three were shot in the back of the head. Two were through-and-through. One—this one here—only has an entrance wound. From the stippling, whoever did this was no more than two feet away. These were executions."

A triple homicide.

"Detective!" a CSU technician hollered. "I think you're gonna want to see this."

Standing with a single fluid motion, Ian headed toward the slim Latina woman holding an evidence bag out toward him.

"Whaddya got, Cortez?"

"A note. It was stuck on the door."

"Thanks." He took the bag and looked at the note. It was hard to decipher, courtesy of the blood smear across the paper, but not impossible. Ian read it.

These Rapiers killed Mr. Maddox.

Justice has been served

No signature.

Shit! Ian handed the note back and said, "Let me know if you get prints."

Cortez winked. "No doubt. Will I finally get a date if I ask nicely?"

"Oh, Cortez. I'm not even close to your league. I'm not the..." a flash off to the side caught his attention, "man for you."

She chuckled and got back to work. Ian skimmed over the crowd and his eyes narrowed as he zeroed in on Fallon Maddox. She was there, it hadn't been his imagination. Why? Why was she there?

Fallon wasn't up front with the main throng of onlookers; in fact, she wasn't looking in his direction at all. Her attention appeared to be focused on the man beside her.

Who was he? And why was he standing so close to Fallon?

The man was familiar to him, but he couldn't recall where from.

Leaving the crime area, he shoved through the crowd, heading toward her. He was within feet of her and her companion when her head tilted up and she held his gaze.

His stomach fluttered with emotion as her brown eyes watched him. Who knew that less than three hours before he had been buried balls deep in her, along the jogging path, barely hidden from view.

Two seconds later, he felt angered as she dismissed him as if he was nothing and walked off quickly with the man beside her.

“Wait. Wait!” he shouted and pressed forward. It was too late. When he rounded the corner, they were lost to sight.

“Damn it,” he swore.

“Detective Cavanaugh!” a voice hollered from behind him.

“Yeah?” he shouted back. *What are you up to, Fallon?*

“Your partner is lookin’ for you.”

With one final look in the direction he believed Fallon may have gone he sighed, before heading back to the taped off crime scene.

“Everything okay, Ian?” Bill asked.

“Yeah, man. Just thought I saw another member of The Rapiers.”

Bill nodded. “Let’s go see what our witness has to say.”

“Good idea. Did you see the note?”

“Yes. Guess it should make the Maddox family happy.”

A cloud of doubt settled in his belly. He wouldn’t go popping the cork on the champagne just yet. Ian seriously doubted the Maddox crew would let it go that easy.

He climbed in the car and ran a hand over his eyes as Bill drove. There was a feeling of dread that hovered around him. The swishing of the wipers seemed to chant, *trou-ble, trou-ble, trou-ble*.

Fallon breathed a sigh of relief as she shut the large door behind her and Spike, shrouding them in the dim light that snuck in through the small, dirty windows high up. They had been meeting here earlier when they had heard the shots ring out.

Three of them. Pop. Pop. Pop.

As they made their way through the rain to the scene, they saw there were two police cars and a large crowd. She’d had to stop Spike from barreling in there as he saw one of his members standing under the watchful eye of an officer.

“Don’t give them a reason, Spike,” she warned, holding his arm.

“That’s Stacey,” he said in a low voice.

Stacey Kee, his woman. Everyone knew it.

“You go in there this angry and they’ll arrest you.”

“Damn it, Fallon!” he yelled. “You don’t get it. This has nothing to do with you.” Spike pulled on his arm.

She refused to let go. "I may not be one of your gang members, but I *know* what loyalty is. Listen, they are whispering that it was the Double Z who did this."

"I'll kill them all," he vowed.

Fallon lifted her head and found herself staring into gray eyes that never seemed to leave her mind. Ian had arrived on the scene. And he had honed in on her. She watched as he headed toward her.

"We need to go."

"What?" Spike demanded.

"Now, just trust me."

She tugged on him, grateful when he followed. So now, they were back where they had originally been when the shots first rang out.

"Calm down, Spike. It didn't look like she was under arrest. She could be a witness."

"Great, so the Double Z's will be looking for her because of that."

Fallon had to agree. It may not be good any way they looked at it. "I'll go down and see. If she's arrested, I'll see if I can post bail for her."

"She wouldn't kill Rapiers."

Again, Fallon agreed. It was uncommon for gang members to kill their own. It happened, but it was rare.

"I'll see what's up."

"As will I."

In silence, they went toward opposite doors in the warehouse. Fallon knew he had his own way to find out what happened, but then, so did she. Taking in her surroundings, she slipped out into the increasing rain and blended into the background as best she could.

In a roundabout way, Fallon made her way back to the crime scene. There was only one police car there and she hovered in the vicinity along with the remaining few observers and watched.

Her cell phone rang. "Maddox," she said.

"Can you come down town?" Ian asked.

"What do you need, Detective?"

"We have a lead in your father's case."

His words tripled her heart rate. *Was this shooting linked to her father?* "I'll be right there."

"Good," he paused, "and Fallon, I'll be wantin' to know why you didn't want to talk to me at the scene."

She hung up without saying a word. Closing her eyes, she plotted the best way for her to get down to Homicide.

It was as if he waited for her. Ian was in her face before she even got through the door.

“What the hell were you doing there today?” he demanded, latching onto her arm and pulling her off to the side and out of the way of the pedestrians going in and out of the building.

“Good afternoon, Detective. Care to tell me why I’m being manhandled?”

“Don’t play games with me, Fallon. If you know something about this triple homicide, then tell me now,” he growled from the back of his throat.

“What am I supposed to know? You have a witness, don’t you? I didn’t see what went down.”

“I *will* arrest you for obstruction, Fallon.”

She tipped her head to the side and stared up at him. *He’s really upset about this.* Still the threat didn’t sit well with her. “I don’t know, Detective. I have no idea what happened. So unless you plan on arresting everyone who was there for obstruction, I think you shouldn’t make idle threats.”

“Did you hear it was the Double Z?”

“I heard the rumor yes. Will you tell me why you called me down here?”

“Come with me to my desk.”

Fallon frowned. “Can’t you just tell me now?”

“No.” His voice gentled. “I think we should go in.”

Ian placed his hand on her back and led her to the door. Once they were inside, he dropped his hand but stayed close to her.

She missed his touch immediately. Fallon noticed how the noise seemed to lessen as they moved by. Many eyes watched them. She schooled her features and sat quietly in the chair Ian held for her. He sat down at his desk and looked long and hard across the gray surface at her. Then his eyes flickered to all those watching with a warning stare.

“Detective?”

“We found a note by the bodies today.”

Fallon held his gaze. Waiting. When he remained silent, she raised her brows. “Okay. And that has what to do with me?”

“It claims those three members of The Rapiers murdered your father. So we’ll be closing your father’s case, officially.”

Yeah right. Her bullshit meter was ringing off the charts.

She blinked and sighed. “I guess that’s it then.”

“Yes. Well, I’m sorry for your loss.”

Fallon stood, her movements slower than normal. "Thank you for telling me."

"Let me give you a ride home," Ian suggested.

"Okay," Fallon said. Still digesting the information she'd received she didn't think to argue with him.

"Just give me a sec."

She remained still and only listened half-heartedly as he told Bill where he was going. Fallon moved when he placed a hand against her back.

Chapter 11

Within moments, it was just the two of them in his car. Ian started it and glanced at her. He hated seeing her look so lifeless.

“Are you okay, Fallon?”

“Fine. I just need to get home.”

“Okay, baby,” he said without thinking.

During the drive, he glanced at her often, but it was as if she had been cast in stone. No change. At all. The whole trip.

He stopped before her house. The windshield wipers sliced through the silence. Placing the car in neutral and setting the brake, Ian faced her.

“Look at me, Fallon.”

Deadpan eyes latched onto his. He reached out with one hand and cupped the side of her face. “Call me if you need anything.”

“Okay. Thanks for the lift.” She got out and walked away, uncaring of the steadily pouring rain. Fallon never looked back.

Ian drove away after the door closed behind her. His phone rang.

“Detective Cavanaugh.”

“My office, Cavanaugh. Now!” DeVane yelled in his ear before slamming the phone and ending the call.

“Great,” he muttered as he returned his attention to the wet streets of Seattle, Washington.

Ian parked and headed into the captain’s office. Rain dripped off his coat, reaching out with one hand he knocked once and entered when he was told. Captain DeVane sat behind his desk, watery eyes narrowed into tiny slits.

“What took you so long to get here?”

“Sorry. I was taking Ms. Maddox home.”

“Her? Why? What was *she* doing here?”

“I told her about the note found with the bodies.” Some of the stiffness left his captain. A gleam lit his eyes.

“So she knows we’re officially closing the case?”

Ian ran his tongue over his teeth. “Yes. I believe she understands now.”

The relief on his captain's face was palpable. Ian shoved down his desire to demand answers.

"Good!" DeVane snapped. "Now tell me everything you've talked about with her." With a wave of one hand, DeVane ordered, "Close my door and sit down."

Doing as he'd been instructed, Ian waited for his captain to say something else.

"Don't just sit there, Cavanaugh. I want to know what she said."

With a sigh, Ian settled back and told him a few of the things he and Fallon had discussed. Just a few. He was still feeling leery of some things himself.

Fallon closed the front door behind her and let out a tortured scream full of pain and betrayal.

"What the hell?" Shawn thundered as he ran into view. "Fallon?"

Biting back a second cry of frustration, she just held up a hand to keep him silent. Squeezing her eyes shut, Fallon tried to calm her rage.

"Fallon. You need to talk to me," Shawn commanded.

"Just give me a sec, Shawn, damn." She took a few deep breaths and slowly opened her eyes. He stood there arms crossed and thunderheads brewing in his gaze.

"Talk. Now!"

"You heard about the triple homicide?"

"Yes," he answered warily.

"Apparently there was a note with the bodies stating that those three were responsible for Pops' death. They were Rapiers. So now his case is officially closed."

His dark gaze narrowed. "I'll fuckin' kill Spike and his crew."

Fallon moved forward and placed a hand on his arm. "No. Listen to me. I've spoken with Spike. He promised me none of his crew would have done it."

Shawn scoffed. "And you believe him?"

"Yes." She tightened her grip on his arm. "Shawn, he's never lied to me. I have no reason not to believe him."

"I never liked him."

"I know that. Nevertheless, I do and I trust him. This is just wrong all the way around." Fallon started pacing.

“Meaning what?”

“There were rumors of it being a Double Z hit. I hardly think they would execute three Rapiers to avenge Pops. Much less leave a note.”

“Okay,” Shawn agreed. “Keep talking.”

Going into the kitchen, Fallon resumed her pacing. Shawn grabbed a chair and shoved it toward her. “Sit down,” he ordered.

She did. Opening her mouth to continue, she stopped when they heard the door open. Soon Dylan and Clay were there.

Fallon told them of her conversation with both Spike and Truc of the Double Z.

“We are going to meet in private and see if we can’t work this out. It seems like the cops want to start a gang war.”

Her brothers frowned.

“Just the three of you?” Clay asked.

“Yes. It will be fine. Negotiations have to start or this city will turn into a war zone.”

“We should go with you,” Shawn announced.

“No. I’m going by myself. I’ll be fine.”

“Will you tell us when and where you’re meeting?” Clay asked.

She chuckled, knowing without a doubt if she did so her brothers would show up. “Not a chance.” Fallon stood. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m taking my nieces to the Aquarium.”

Fallon watched her nieces move from exhibit to exhibit. Kylie was more outgoing than Kaitlyn, but both girls had been very excited to go with her on this trip to the Aquarium.

At the moment they were at a display of sea urchin and starfish.

“Look at this, Auntie Fallon,” Kylie said excitedly, gesturing with her arms.

“What do we have here?” she asked, crouching down where Kylie pointed.

“It’s prickly,” Kylie announced.

Fallon smiled. “Yes, it certainly is. This is a sea anemone.”

Kylie smiled and kept staring at the sea life. A nudge on her side, brought Fallon’s attention to Kaitlyn.

“Yes, Kaitlyn?”

“Is it true?” Kaitlyn questioned, holding her arm.

“Is what true?”

“Daddy says you are a soldier and go to war,” Kaitlyn responded.

Fallon sighed, and bit back her immediate response to the soldier label. "Let's sit down over there for a moment. Kylie, you come too." She led them to a bench and had one girl on each side of her.

"Well?" Kylie insisted. "Is it?"

"I was in the military. Now I am hired on occasion to work with them but I'm not going off to any war."

"Are you strong? I don't know many strong girls," Kaitlyn whispered.

"What did your daddy say?"

"That girls could do anything. He always told us that you did things people said was man's work. And you were good at it," Kylie spoke up.

"No, Kylie. Daddy said 'damn good' and then he and momma got in a fight," Kaitlyn corrected.

A fight? Why? "So why are you asking?"

"Daddy said maybe you would teach us martial arts," Kaitlyn stated, wringing her small hands.

"Of course," Fallon said immediately. "I would love to."

"Auntie Fallon?"

"Yes, Kaitlyn?"

"Do you protect people? Isn't that what soldiers do?"

"What's wrong, Kaitlyn? Is someone hurting you?" Fallon forced an eye connection with her niece. The fear in the big blue eyes drove into the pit of her stomach. The little girl pursed her lips and looked around her to stare at her twin. Fallon saw Kylie's small nod and she looked back at Kaitlyn.

"Kaitlyn?" Fallon queried.

"Sometimes," she said in a very low voice, "there's these two guys that follow us around. Everywhere."

Fallon's blood ran cold. "Have you told your daddy?"

"No." Her blonde head hung in quiet shame.

Lifting Kaitlyn onto one leg, Fallon gestured for Kylie to climb on the other. Her arms went around them, her face lowered to between their innocent ones.

"I will do my best to keep you two safe. I promise. Now, what do you say we do some more looking around?"

"I wanna see the sharks," Kylie informed everyone around within hearing distance.

Fallon smiled. Forcing a lighthearted tone, she asked, "Sound good, Kaitlyn?"

"Yes," the elder twin mumbled.

Pressing a quick kiss to girl's cheek, she set them on their feet. Taking their hands, she led them off to observe the sharks. Inside her mind digested Kaitlyn's words.

Fallon kept glancing back at the two slumbering girls as she drove back to their house. They were exhausted. After the aquarium they had gone to Pike's Market and walked around a bit more.

Kylie was full of sass and fire. She was also the protector despite being the youngest. Kaitlyn had held her hand the rest of the day unless it was necessary to let go.

She pulled into Herschel's driveway and looked up at her brother's brick house. He had done well for himself. Shutting off the engine, she turned toward the back and said, "Wake up girls. We're back."

Kylie opened her eyes and grinned. "Will you teach us some today?"

Fallon chuckled. It was as if the child had dreamt about martial arts. "We'll see about it. Come on, let's get inside before the rain picks up again."

The girls got out, ran up the path to the door, and waited for her to get there and let them in.

Herschel and Laura were having a date day. She had volunteered to watch the girls, wishing to get to know them better. The first two hours had been hard, but now all was going great.

The twins scampered to the large open kitchen and pulled themselves up onto the chairs by the breakfast bar. Slipping to the other side, Fallon winked at them. "And what can I get you lovely ladies?"

"Ice cream," they both answered with resounding clarity.

"Okay, ice cream for the both of you," she paused, "on one condition."

The girls frowned before Kylie nodded. "Okay."

"Promise you'll eat all of your dinner."

"Deal."

With a smile, Fallon dished them up some ice cream and cut up an apple for herself.

"Da. No more jerking me around. I need to know what you know."

Ian's father scratched his amputated arm. "The case is closed, why are you pursuing this?"

Ian narrowed his eyes. "How'd you know the case was closed?"

"I do have friends in the department, you know. Since when have you questioned me?"

"Please, Da. This is important. DeVane's been questioning what I've been doing."

An ugly sneer flashed across his father's face. "I heard about you spending time and being nice to that Maddox woman."

Ian couldn't believe it. "Well, hell. Excuse me for being nice to a victim's family member. I didn't realize I was supposed to ostracize her for her last name."

"Watch your tone with me, lad."

His whole body trembled. "I'm beginning to think she may have a point about this cover-up." With a slash of one hand, he stomped to the door, hesitated and glanced back at his father, before shaking his head and walking out.

"Ian!" his father bellowed. "Get back here."

Not this time, Da. He closed the door softly behind him, despite his anger and strode down the hall without looking back. His cell phone began to ring even before he got behind the wheel of his car.

"Cavanaugh."

"What'd you go stompin' off for?" his father demanded.

"I'm sick of being stonewalled, Da." He climbed into his car. "I have enough obstacles in my way without adding you into the mix."

"It's not any of your concern, Ian. Just let it—"

Ian hung up on him and started the powerful engine. There would probably be hell to pay for his actions, but at the moment, he didn't give a damn.

Something was wrong. He felt it deep in his bones. He knew, without a doubt, that Fallon didn't buy the explanation he had given her either. She had been *way* too unemotional after hearing that news.

He pulled away from the curb and headed for home, the early evening shadows beginning to form. His phone rang again and looking at the caller id, he ignored the call. It was his mother this time.

As the door to his garage closed behind him, he shut his eyes and leaned against the headrest. *Could things get any worse?*

Banging his head a few times, he let out a frustrated moan. Things weren't cooperating; Ian loved it when things fell perfectly into place.

Like pieces to a puzzle.

With a sigh, he climbed out of his vehicle and went inside his house. He turned on some big band music. He loved the era of crooners, swing,

big band, and more. It helped him relax, especially after a difficult day at work, which of late had become more and more frequent.

He smiled as Bobby Darin came on and headed for the kitchen to make himself some dinner. He draped his leather trench over the back of a chair on his way. Ian watched some television while he ate, did his dishes, and went back to watch some more football.

It was almost eleven when his phone rang. His home phone. "Cavanaugh."

The voice froze him. He wouldn't have expected the person on the other end to ask for a face to face.

"Come on over," he said, proud his voice didn't waver. "My door's open."

The moment he hung up the phone, he began straightening up.

Fallon smiled at her brother. "They're great kids, Herschel."

"Thanks for giving us some time together. Laura and I both appreciate it."

"No problem. We had a great time." She sat on the edge of his bay window seat. Her hands curled around a hot cup of tea.

"What gives, sis?" Herschel sat beside her.

"Your girls asked me today if I'd teach them martial arts."

He chuckled. "They have been talking about that for a while now. Do you not want to teach them? We can pay you if you want."

"No. that's not it. I don't mind teaching them at all."

"So, it's something else."

"Tell me about Kaitlyn," she said by way of an answer.

"Kaitlyn? She's the quieter of the two. Didn't used to be, but it has become that way." He nudged her. "Why?"

"She asked me if I protected people."

"What?" His surprise was obvious.

"Something is scaring her. She said there are two guys who follow them around."

He started to get up and Fallon clamped a hand on his arm.

"What?" he demanded. "I need to find out what they meant."

"Herschel, they're sleeping. She's not going to tell you anything right now. She barely answered my question. You have to go slow."

"It's *my* daughter, Fallon. Don't tell me to calm down."

She winced at the venom in his tone. Swallowing back her sharp response, she said calmly, "She didn't tell you. You need to go easy."

His fist clenched but he seemed to relax. "I'll ask her in the morning."

"Why don't you let me ask? I'll come by in the morning and start teaching them."

"I...I...okay. But you have to tell me what she says."

Fallon realized how hard it was for Herschel to concede this to her. He was right, they were his kids, but she may be able to get more information from the scared little girl.

"I won't push her hard, Hersh, promise."

"I trust you, sis."

Herschel's wife came into the room and hesitated as her blue eyes focused on them.

"She still doesn't like me, does she?" Fallon asked.

"You make her nervous."

Fallon made a noncommittal noise. Draining the rest of her tea, she stood up and kissed him on the cheek. "I have to go. I'll be by in the morning."

"I'll walk you to the door." Herschel rose and took her mug.

"Goodnight, Laura," Fallon said.

"Thank you for watching my girls today," Laura spoke softly.

"My pleasure. Have a great night."

Fallon walked to the door, kissed her brother again and headed for her vehicle. She'd purchased a Nissan Xterra for herself, seeing as she was going to be in Seattle for a while and it didn't make much sense to share one vehicle between the four of them. As the door closed behind her, she pulled out her cell and placed a call.

Twenty minutes later, she knocked on a door, surrounded by night's dark cloak. Her breath hitched as she stared into a pair of quicksilver gray eyes. Ian stood before her, bathed by the gentle light behind him.

"Hey," he said.

"Thanks for agreeing to see me."

He scrutinized her and she suppressed a shiver.

"Come on in."

Once the door closed, Fallon tugged the hood away from her face. "Sorry, I called so late. But there's about to be trouble on the streets."

Ian gestured to his living room. Fallon sat on the edge of his couch and waited for him to sit as well.

"Start from the beginning," Ian ordered.

"I know they said the case was closed and I know you resent it when I say something bad about your fraternal order. But today's incident was staged."

Fallon watched his face carefully. She could tell he was weighing her words.

"Prove it to me."

Well, at least he is willing to hear me out. "The leaders of both gangs swear their people didn't do either attack."

He curled his lip and scoffed. "They're gang members. I'm not trusting them over cops." He shook his head and looked at her. "Who gave you this information?"

"They did." Fallon stretched out one leg and watched his eyes follow her motion.

Ian leaned forward, elbows on his knees. "What do you mean, they did?"

She blinked once. "It's a very simple statement, Detective. I don't know how else to explain it."

"Let me rephrase then. Why the hell would you talk to the leaders of those gangs?"

"Answers."

Answers. Ian wanted to roar with frustration. Was she kidding? Would she really risk her life to talk to gang leaders? He had not been expecting to hear that when she had asked for a meeting with him. And now that he heard it, he wished he hadn't.

"And what answers did you hope to find?"

"The ones about my father's death. Look, Detective, I know that to you they are members, leaders even, of these gangs. But to me, I don't see them that way. I know they won't lie to me."

"You know them," he stated.

She nodded. "I trust they won't lie to me."

Ian groaned. The woman on his couch mystified him. She sat near him shrouded in dark clothing and although she exuded an overall picture of serenity, he knew it a lie for her eyes had begun to show signs of strain.

"Continue," he commanded, unwilling to let his personal feelings interrupt the stream of information.

"Both of them have sworn they didn't do it and the leader of the Double Z's, Truc, said his people wouldn't have done that triple homicide. Much less leave a note. They said that revenge for Pops would be left to us."

Ian heard the conviction in her tone and knew she believed what she said. It made sense; leaving notes weren't usually a gang's MO. The killing style was the signature. Yet, in this case, there was a note, which wasn't typical of either The Rapiers or The Double Zs.

"Okay, tell me more." He settled back against his seat.

"We've been meeting in secret, trying to find ways to forge a truce between them."

Ian was floored. He hadn't even heard a peep of this from guys on the gang task force. Could it be true? "Are their crews on board?" And why was she involved in this?

"No one knows. Well, except now you do. You can't mention a single word of this to anyone."

He silently agreed. This didn't need to be advertised until things solidified between the two crews.

"Okay then, Fallon. What are you saying happened?" He was proud of not demanding she stop doing foolish and dangerous things.

"Easy. The cops did it." She held up a hand as if warding off his interruption. "I don't know why yet, but they seem damn quick to say it was gang related."

Another good point.

Ian leaned back against his chair. "So where does that leave us?"

"I don't know. I wish I did." One hand moved over her face. "Maybe you should figure something out on it."

Ian stood and moved around to sit on his coffee table, their knees touched. He rested his hands on the black material of her pants.

"Are you getting enough rest, Fallon?"

He stared back at her as her eyes blinked a few times. "In spite of what I've been dealing with, no. I most definitely am not." Her head dropped forward and one hand rubbed her neck. "I'll be fine."

He heard the yawn and without another thought reached under her legs and behind her back to scoop her up off the couch. She started and struggled against him for a few seconds. Ian smiled when her body relaxed against him. He opened the door to his room with a subtle nudge of his foot. Carefully, he lay her down on his bed and made short work of removing her shoes and socks. The light from the hall allowed him to see her eyes open and stare up at him.

"Get some sleep, superwoman." He covered her with the comforter that lay folded at the foot of his bed. "Pleasant dreams, beautiful."

"Night, Detective." Her words were slurred and soft.

Ian brushed a kiss over her lips and left the room silently, closing the door behind him. He wanted to lie beside her, smell the slight yet powerful scent of her skin.

He went back to the living room, grabbed a new case file, and began to read. Thirty minutes later, he locked up his house, then walked back to his bed and the woman sleeping in it. Ian slid in beside her and groaned in pleasure as she curled up around him. Her hand landed on his crotch and he felt himself stir in his boxers and sweats.

This is going to be a long night.

As her hips ground against him, he bit the inside of his cheek.

One hell of a long night!

Like the previous time he had fallen asleep with Ms. Fallon Maddox, Ian awoke the sole occupant, not just in his bed, but also in his house. He knew it the second he woke.

She was gone.

Chapter 12

“What more do you want? The damn case is closed.”

“Perhaps, but I still want what’s in that box.”

The men in the room stared at each other. One was withered with age. The other’s face was pinched and drawn as if he’d never smiled a day in his life.

One liver-spotted hand pressed a button on the intercom.

“Yes?” a young feminine voice filled the room.

“Bring us some bourbon.”

“Right away, sir.”

They were silent until there was a slight knock on the door and in walked a tall, statuesque redhead who wore a short black skirt and a vibrant green shirt.

Each man present was offered a blatant view of her creamy white breasts as she bent over and served their drinks. The man who had called her for the refreshment stuck his hand up her skirt as she sat on his desk, legs spread, and facing him.

The pinched-face man drained his drink and stood. “I’ll keep you posted.”

He left the room after he got a nod from the one behind the desk. There was no reason to speak to the woman, so he didn’t. Once outside, he straightened his coat and placed his hat on his head.

His driver had waited and opened his door for him. The young officer looked at him and asked, “Where to, sir?”

“Back to the precinct, officer.”

“Yes, sir.”

Fallon stood in Herschel’s back yard watching the girls unroll the mats she’d brought with her. They were both in sweats and thin long-sleeved shirts.

Her brother moved up beside her and draped one arm over her shoulders. “They look mighty excited about this,” he said.

“You should get them enrolled down at the youth center. There are some great programs.”

“They need something. Kaitlyn’s becoming more withdrawn.”

Fallon remained silent.

“So,” Herschel cleared his throat, “what are you going to teach them?”

“Nothing too hard. They’re starting a new Karate class next week at the center. If I signed them up would you take them?”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Please. If they want to learn, it would be my pleasure.”

“I’m sure Laura and I could work it out. I would think she could take them.”

“Okay. I’ll put their names down today when I go.”

“You are the best sister.” He kissed her cheek.

She snorted. “I’m your *only* sister.”

“We’re ready, Auntie Fallon,” Kylie hollered over to her.

With a smile she said, “Guess it’s time for me to get to work.”

A while later, Fallon was out with Herschel and his family. They were at Cold Stone Creamery for dessert. Before her stood a Cold Stone signature creation of Mint Chocolate Chip. She was getting stuffed. Fallon sat by the window with Kaitlyn on her free side.

Glancing down at the young girl, she smiled. “Yours looks really good.”

“I like ice cream,” she said after she swallowed her bite.

“I can tell.” Kaitlyn tugged on her sleeve. “What, Kaitlyn?”

Her niece pulled her down so she could whisper in her ear. “That man by the door is one that follows us around.”

“Okay. Let me worry about him. You just concentrate on that slab of ice cream in front of you. Will you trust me to do that, Kaitlyn?”

“Yes,” she said quietly and dug back into her dessert.

Fallon swept her gaze over the man quickly as he took a seat. She recognized him as the man who had been following them at Pike’s Market.

Her phone vibrated. “Maddox.” It was Dylan. He needed her to come home and fast. Trouble.

Hanging up, she kissed the girls. “I’m sorry, I have to run. Thanks for the ice cream.”

“Fallon?” Herschel asked. “Is everything okay?”

"I don't know. I'll call you. Bye." She left at a run and headed to the car she drove.

She screeched to a halt and ran up to the house. "Dylan!" she hollered as her body flew into the entryway and there she slammed to a halt.

Dylan stood in the center of the living room, his face bloody and bruised. The house had been tossed. Pictures were broken, cushions slashed open, and stuffing all over.

Her youngest brother had tears in his eyes as he looked at her. He seemed so lost and helpless. Her protective mother-hen instincts rushed to the surface, followed by the feeling of intense anger at those who dared harm her family. Dylan was fragile and seeing him like that ignited the fire in her blood. She wanted revenge.

Fallon opened her arms and her own tears threatened as he entered her embrace. "Who did this to you, Dylan?" Her gaze moved around the house more. Even the kitchen had been torn up. She could see her mother's prized dishes in pieces on the floor.

"I don't know. They burst in while I was sleeping on the couch. Three of them. Couldn't make out faces."

"You need me to take you to get looked at?" Fallon asked as another wave of fury rose within her.

"No, I'll be okay."

She wanted to argue with him, but decided to let it go. If he didn't want to go, she wouldn't make him. "Why don't you go get cleaned up. I'll call Clay and Shawn so we can start cleaning this up."

"I'm sorry I couldn't stop them."

She kissed his forehead gently. "I'd rather have you alive than dead. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I've had better days," he mumbled before kissing her back and heading off for the bathroom.

Alone in the room, Fallon took several deep breaths and tried to rein in her rapidly deteriorating control. When she knew she could talk without shouting, she called her brothers, including Herschel, and it wasn't long before they had all gathered and were beginning to clean up the mess.

Shawn got to work removing the broken windows while Herschel went out to get their replacements. Clay worked on the busted front door, while she started in the kitchen. Sinking to the floor on her knees, Fallon gathered larger pieces of the china and began to place it in the garbage bag beside her.

Ian frowned as he pulled up along the street before the Maddox house. Clayborne and Shawn were hanging a door. Something about the situation felt off. Shutting off his engine, he grabbed the bag of items that Fallon didn't take with her from the precinct. Her father's items; now that the case was "officially" closed they could have them back.

Deep in his gut, Ian knew it was just an excuse to see her again. He didn't wish to wait for her to seek him out again. Fallon was a very stubborn and proud woman. He was willing to go to her. The Maddox men seemed oblivious of the rain coming down as they worked. Ian got out and jogged up the steps.

"Can I help?" he asked as the door wobbled a bit.

Clay looked him over from head to toe before he nodded. "Grab that side."

Ian placed the bag out of the rain and held where instructed. It didn't take long for them to get the door up and working right.

Clay's dark blue eyes were angry and suspicious when he glanced back at him. "Fallon's inside. Come on, Shawn, let's get those windows up, here comes Herschel."

Both men strode off without another word. *Strange*. Going through the newly hung door, Ian gasped at the path of destruction that met him.

It looked like a volcano had erupted and puked out one hell of a mess. To his left he could see the busted windows the brothers were working on. All except Dylan.

A noise tore his attention off Shawn climbing in the open window. Ian saw Dylan standing at the foot of the stairs looking at him. His face looked like it had gone through a meat grinder. The youngest Maddox stared and headed off silently to help his brothers.

Ian headed toward the kitchen. He stopped in the doorway and found his quarry. Fallon Maddox. She was bent over the dustpan as she swept up small particles.

"What the hell happened here, Fallon?"

Her tone was bland and emotionless. "What does it look like, Detective? The house was vandalized."

Anger ran through him. "Who did this?" he demanded.

Fallon emptied the dustpan and stared at him. Her hair was loose and fell over her face. One hand shoved it back with an impatient gesture. Her eyes were blank.

"I don't know." She leaned the broom up against the island, rolled her shoulders, and asked, "What are you doing here?"

There was no censure in her tone, no inflection of any kind. He didn't like it one bit. In that second he longed for the cutting and sharp edge her voice usually acquired when talking to him. Or at him.

Gesturing to the bag in his hand, he answered. "I'm dropping off your father's things. You know, since the case is closed."

"Thank you." She tied off the trash bag and set it next to another one there, and grabbed the broom again. Fallon didn't take the bag from him.

"Did you report this? Or what happened to Dylan?" he asked as he placed the bag down on the countertop.

"Why? The cops don't like us anyway."

Defeated. That was how she sounded.

"Your brother was attacked," he stuttered.

Fallon dumped more dish and glass shards into the trash without hesitating. "He'll be okay."

Ian looked at her. Really looked. White shirt, green cargo pants, and tennis shoes. Her movements were still flawless. She seemed "together" despite the chaos around her.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"Those trash bags can be taken out back."

Ian did that. When he came back inside, she was working on fixing the table leg that had been broken. He knelt beside her and helped. Together they set it upright. Ian's eyes followed the tender movement of her hand across the dark golden tabletop. He felt lower than a snake's belly. He hadn't been able to protect her. Ian accompanied her to the living room where he helped again. He saw the wary looks from her brothers, but Fallon didn't say a word to anyone. Just cleaned. He watched her carefully extract photos from the broken glass. Ian picked up the larger pieces and disposed of them.

Clay and Herschel entered the house, wet from the rain. "What are you doing here, Cavanaugh?" Clay demanded.

Ian stood up to face the angry sibling. "I came to drop off the items from your father." *Stay calm, Ian. They are going through a rough patch.*

"Not to see your handiwork?" Clay's face grew ugly with rage.

Wait a minute. "Hey, I didn't have anything to do with this."

"Did you see what they did to my brother?" Clay thundered.

"Be careful with those accusations, Clayborne." Ian clenched his fist.

"Or what? Gonna try and beat me up, too?"

Ian took a step toward him. "I didn't come lookin' for a fight."

"Shouldn't have come at all, Cavanaugh," Clay forced the words between clenched teeth.

"Stop it." A low voice grabbed his attention from Clay. "Just stop it."

Fallon was looking at them both, disbelief obvious in her gaze.

"He's a goddamn pig, Fallon," Clay hissed.

"Enough, Clay." Her words were sharp. "Just stop this. He's here and he's helping. That's what we need. Have you looked at this place?"

Ian heard the emotion in her voice. He still didn't like it.

Fallon glanced around. "This was Momma and Pops' house. They gave *us* a home. How can you stand there amidst everything and pick a pointless fight? Everything is ripped apart. Every room. The whole house. *Your brother's face.*"

Ian dropped his gaze and his breath caught in his throat. Blood dripped from her hand to the floor. In her fist was a chunk of glass.

He moved toward her. "Drop the glass, Fallon, you're bleeding."

Her brown eyes honed in on him and took a minute to focus. Ian took her hand and opened it carefully to see what the damage was. The sliver sat embedded in her palm. He led her to the kitchen and turned on the water. Holding her palm steady with one hand, he removed the glass with the other.

Her hand was under the warm water and he asked her, "Are you okay, baby?"

Ian could hear her brothers rushing up behind him but all his attention was on Fallon. She gave him a strained smile but didn't take her hand from his. Her brothers crowded around them; Ian stood firm, he held his ground and refused to be edged out. He noticed the smiles she gave her brothers were bigger than the one she gave him. It bothered him that she still kept part of herself from him.

He wanted it all. That intense realization broadsided him and he almost dropped her hand. Ian swallowed a few times and fought for moisture in his mouth. Fallon was pulling on her hand. He met her gaze.

"What?"

"I think the wound has been thoroughly flushed. Can I have my hand back please?"

He let go. Reluctantly.

His gut churned with something akin to jealousy as Shawn took her hand and carefully dried it off before bandaging it up. It didn't make sense, these men were her brothers. However, he still didn't want to see

them touching her. Ian wanted to carry her away to his house and shut out the outside world.

"I'm fine," Fallon said. "Let's get back to cleaning this up." She looked at him. "Thanks, Detective."

Dealing with the problem directly, Ian said, "Let me stay and help."

Fallon cocked her head to the side and studied him. She shrugged. "If you want to stay and help, do so. There's a lot to be done."

Ian waited for her brothers to argue with her, but none of them said a word. They just turned and headed off to different destinations.

That left him alone in the kitchen with Fallon, a situation he liked very well. Ian closed the distance between them as she stood by the sink. She held her ground, but he didn't miss the slight flare of her nose. *Such a cute nose.*

"I don't like you injuring yourself, Fallon. Do you have any idea what went through my mind when I saw the blood dripping down your hand?"

A slight smile flitted across her face. "It wasn't serious, but if you think I may still be in shock or faint, don't stray far. I may need mouth to mouth."

Their relationship *had* changed. His body reacted powerfully to the not-so-subtle meaning of her statement. He pressed closer, looming over her. Slowly his mouth descended toward hers. Her sexy scent wove around him and settled into his skin. His cock hardened and pressed insistently against the confines of his clothing.

Her breath slipped between her full lips on a sigh. Fallon's thick lashes lowered, hiding her eyes and giving her even more of a sultry look. He had to taste her. Bracing one hand on the cool counter, he used his other to thread through her hair and bring her closer to his waiting mouth. A groan of pleasure escaped as their mouths met tenderly. Tasting her lips, Ian ran his tongue along her lower lip before seeking entrance into her warm haven. Fallon opened for him and stepped nearer to him, allowing her breasts to press against his chest. Her hands rested at his waist, fingers curling into his shirt.

He deepened the kiss, and moved his hand from the counter to splay across the small of her back. She released a small mewl and the purr in his throat answered.

"I think my sister's tonsils are clean enough, Cavanaugh." Herschel's voice shattered through their private world.

Ian had expected Fallon to jerk away from him at her brother's words. He was so pleased when she did nothing of the sort. Instead, she used her newly bandaged hand to touch his cheek.

"Yes. He did a wonderful job," she said lightly.

"Oh God, Fallon. I didn't need to hear that," Herschel complained.

Ian chuckled when Fallon winked at him before stepping away and going toward her brother. Ian turned in time to see Herschel whisper something in her ear. Fallon chuckled and went to the living room.

Herschel glared at him for a few seconds before he jerked his head and said, "Let's go, Cavanaugh. There's still a lot of mess to clean."

Fallon rubbed a hand across the back of her neck. She was beat. Controlling her emotions after seeing her childhood home in shambles and her brother beaten had drained her. She wanted revenge. And she would get it. Just not tonight. Only an idiot went off half-cocked when you weren't in full command of yourself.

She walked into her room and shuddered. Her hand throbbed but it was minor compared to the feeling that coursed through her at seeing the destruction. Whoever had done this went through the entire room and her personal items. Biting back a gasp of horror, she moved to the head of the bed.

The framed cross-stitch, ripped from the wall, now lay torn on the bed. She reached for it slowly, wary of the broken glass.

Her fear subsided as it dawned on her that it had just been dismantled and the material itself was still intact. Fallon touched the blood red letters with reverence as she reassembled her favorite work of art.

The room was in shambles. All the drawers were in some stage of openness. Her clothes hung over the wood and in piles on the floor. Ignoring the mess for a moment, Fallon repositioned the frame and made sure it was perfect.

She felt his presence before he said a word. Fallon looked over her shoulder at him and her breath caught in her throat. Ian Cavanaugh. He was so damn handsome.

There was a sheen of sweat on his face and she knew he'd been working hard with her brothers at cleaning up the mess in the living room. His hair was tousled and unruly. She wanted to sink her fingers in the

thick, silky auburn strands. She longed to feel his arms around her, letting her know it was okay, and that he would protect her.

His white shirt molded to his torso like a second skin. Her eyes ran over the outline of his abs. The way his clothes molded to his body should be a sin. Or she should be the one making love to his rock-hard physique instead of his clothing.

Slow movement took her gaze south. He wore a nice pair of dark blue slacks. As if he wore nothing at all, her mind envisioned his cock and the hardness of his muscular thighs. A flash of wetness coursed through her.

"You okay?" he asked, using his forearm to wipe his forehead.

The tenderness in his eyes was almost her undoing. She forced a nonchalant shrug. "I'm okay."

He prowled closer and her body reacted to being in such close proximity to him. Hell, thinking of him could affect her, but it magnified when he was there in person.

"Let me in, Fallon. You don't have to keep everyone at arm's length." He reached out with one hand and wrapped it around her bare arm. Volts of electricity shot across her kin. Her insides shook at his heated and passionate stare.

She smiled and knew it was more of a grimace. He didn't comment, just continued to watch her unblinkingly.

"It's just been a rough day," she murmured, dropping her gaze to the mess on her bedroom floor.

Ian reached out and touched her cheek using the knuckles on his hand. A look of sorrow filled his eyes before he drew her in close to him.

Fallon struggled, but he refused to loosen his arms one iota.

"Don't, Fallon," he ordered. "Let me hold you. Just let go of your damn control for once."

He felt so good. Fallon closed her eyes, laid her head on his hard chest, and did as he told her. Deep breaths brought the rugged smell of Ian to her senses.

His breath teased her ear as he whispered, "I swear I'd make this all better if I could."

In that moment, Fallon believed him. He wasn't the opposition; he wasn't part of the blue fraternity. No, right then he was just a man. No, Ian Cavanaugh could never be *just* a man. He was the man she wanted comfort from.

Her hands moved to his upper arms and she gripped the muscles. She held him tight, her fingers digging into his flesh. Ian rested his chin on her

head and pressed even closer. His strong hands splayed across her back. He didn't say a word and she was grateful. They stood together for no more than two minutes but Fallon felt much better. She felt rejuvenated.

"Well, well. Isn't this cozy," a voice commented from the doorway. Shawn.

Fallon felt Ian stiffen at the intrusion. She tightened her left hand on his arm, the one her brother couldn't see. Her body sank further into Ian's as his powerful one relaxed with her silent message.

Opening her eyes, Fallon saw the look of censure in her brother's face. She arched an eyebrow at him, daring him to say a word.

Making a sound of disgust, Shawn shook his head but remained silent. Composing her face, Fallon stepped away from Ian's touch.

"Living room done?" she asked her overprotective brother.

Shawn kept his gaze on Ian but answered her. "Yes. Dylan's crashed in his room. He took something for the pain and Clay and I will keep an eye out tonight. Herschel went home."

"Okay." Fallon went to Shawn and hugged him. "Call me if you need me."

"What are you going to be doing?" he asked.

"Cleaning my room and getting some sleep. What did you think I'd be doing?"

Shawn grumbled, "Not sure, considering how much time you seem to spend in *his* arms."

Fallon arched a brow at her brother. "Well, it's a good thing we're both consenting adults then, isn't it?" She wasn't going to let them bully her about her blossoming relationship with Ian. If there was one between them, it was the business of two people only. She and Ian.

Shawn sighed. "I don't want you hurt." His gaze snapped to Ian's face and Fallon easily read the unconcealed warning in her brother's dark eyes. Then he left them alone.

She felt Ian move up behind her. Still she fought down the familiar tingle his touch brought her. This man was dangerous; he affected her on so many levels.

"I should be going," he whispered as his hands caressed her arms.

"Thank you for helping," she said in the same low tone.

"I wish you'd reconsider filing a report about this."

"Let it go, Detective." Again she removed herself from his touch and faced him. "Goodnight, Ian."

His argent eyes widened. “That’s the first time you’ve called me Ian.” He brushed his thumb over her lower lip. “I like hearing my name coming from your mouth.”

Those words made her smile. “Didn’t hurt too much to say it either.”

“Then can I look forward to hearing it from you again?”

Fallon grinned mischievously. “Who knows what the future holds. Come on, I’ll walk you out.”

The man spoke in a low raspy voice to his driver. “I’ve seen enough. Let’s go.” He tapped the black-covered shoulder.

“Yes, sir.” Easing away from the curb, the car disappeared into the dark of the night. As they turned on another street, the man in the back placed a call.

“He’s leaving her place now. No, I don’t believe she filed a report. No, sir. It wasn’t there. We searched everywhere and I do mean, everywhere.”

His hand clenched into a fist as the voice on the other end grew louder and more berating.

“I don’t believe they know where it is. Unless one of them is wearing it on their person. And if that’s the case, we can eliminate the youngest brother. He and I had a tussle and there was no key on him at all.”

He rolled his eyes. “No, he didn’t see any of our faces. I don’t think he’ll be seeing much for a while. I thought they would have at least taken him to the hospital.”

His eyes closed as he received a new set of orders. Continually, he flexed his fist, loving the sting on his cut and bruised knuckles that had come from pummeling that young, tender face. A sadistic grin crossed his mouth as he ended the call and sat back to enjoy the ride back home.

Chapter 13

Ian's heart sped up when his doorbell chimed. Glancing at his watch, he read it was a quarter to midnight. He had been cleaning his kitchen, trying to work off some frustration over Fallon's situation.

The cop in him wanted nothing more than report the break in and assault on Dylan. The entire Maddox clan had closed ranks and refused. They said they would take care of their own. Nothing he said swayed them.

Tossing the blue towel over his shoulder, Ian headed for the front door. Right before he opened it, he ran a hand through his hair, suddenly feeling nervous.

He swung open the door. "Yes?"

It wasn't Fallon. His captain stood there.

"Evening, Cavanaugh," Rick DeVane said as if it were normal for him to show up a few minutes before midnight on his doorstep.

"Captain," he returned, confused as to what the man was doing here.

"I know it's late, but I needed a word with you."

"Come on in."

DeVane entered and glanced around. "I'm not interrupting anything am I? You don't have anyone here, do you?"

"No sir. Just washing dishes. What can I do for you? Can I get you something to drink?"

"A beer if you have one." Rick set his coat over the back of the couch and took a seat on it.

Grabbing one from the fridge, Ian tossed the towel on the spotless countertop. Closing his eyes briefly, he prayed this meeting would not turn ugly. With one more deep breath, he moved back into the living room.

"Here you go."

DeVane took the drink and enjoyed a long swing. "I need to make sure you've told me everything you and Ms. Maddox discussed."

Ian sat down in his chair and looked at his captain. "I told you everything we discussed. Are you questioning my ability as a detective now or just my honesty?" He was infuriated by the question. His tone surprised the captain, Ian could tell by the look on his face.

"I'm trying to look out for you, but if you're keeping something from me, I can't." Another swallow of the alcoholic beverage.

Ian shoved up from the chair and glared down at a man that at one point in his career he had looked up to and admired. Not anymore. "Protect me from what? Why are you so concerned with my relationship with Fallon Maddox? My private life is private. I handled the Maddox case with nothing less than the same professionalism I use on all my cases. The fact you'd be insinuating otherwise is insulting beyond words."

"I think of you as a son," DeVane began. "I'm trying to watch out for you." He took another drink of the beer.

"My own father doesn't question my integrity nor does he have a say in my personal life. So regardless of whether or not I have a relationship with Fallon Maddox, it need be no concern to you. This conversation is over. I am not spending *my* time listening to this. I think you should leave."

DeVane set down the beer and stood slowly. "I know you don't want to hear it, but it's best to stay away from that family."

Ian ground his teeth. "Goodnight, Captain." He led the way to the door and opened it.

Captain DeVane moved past him without another word. He walked down the steps and into the darkness.

After closing the door, Ian leaned against the wood. "Damn them," he swore. "Who do they think they are?"

His gut clenched. The captain never visited him before and this whole thing had an eerie and ominous undertone to it. He had wanted to smash his fist into Rick's face he sneered as Fallon's name fell from his lips.

Ian felt floored by the surge of protective instincts that he experienced during the day. Imagining Fallon being threatened and in danger made every fiber in his being want to spirit her away and keep her safe at all times.

"I think you're starting to see what I see in your captain, Detective."

Ian jerked his eyes open as Fallon's voice flowed to his ears. His body reacted immediately. Remaining against the door, Ian found her with his eyes.

She was across the room, dressed casually in a sweatshirt and a pair of black pants. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail.

His cock stirred to life and he allowed a slow grin to cross his face. He didn't know how she did it, but here she was, back in his home.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

“Since before your captain showed up. Once he did, I figured I’d better stay out of sight until he left.”

Ian walked to her, loving how her eyes lingered over him. Reaching out, he grabbed the strings for her hood and pulled them. She moved the rest of the distance to him.

“Did you need to see me for something?” he questioned in a low voice.

“You could say that,” she purred, her hands moving up under his sleeveless tee.

His skin tightened with each move she made. Her hands travelled up over his eight-pack and around toward his back. He trembled as longing for her raced through him like a wildfire.

“Fallon,” he murmured.

“Yes?”

He moved his hands to her ponytail and released her hair from its confinement. He wanted to groan in pleasure as the thick strands of her hair fell over his skin. This was pure contentment.

“Are you staying for a while?”

She maneuvered her cheek deeper into the palm of his hand. “Unless you want me to go.”

Not on your life. “Stay with me, Fallon. Spend the night in my arms.”

“Help me forget,” she said on a sigh. “I want to forget.”

His heart went out to her. She looked so damn vulnerable and hopeless staring up at him as if he could save her from every demon that haunted her.

Lowering his mouth to hers, he brushed her lips with his. “We’ll forget together.”

He lifted her sweatshirt up off over her head and dropped it to the floor, skimming his hands over her flat stomach and across her breasts. “Together,” he muttered softly.

His body reacted to being so near to her. He wanted to bury his cock deep within her wet core. Spill his seed inside her. Keep her beside him forever.

“Oh God,” she whimpered as his thumbs swept across her pebbled nipples. Fallon dug her fingers into his arms to help maintain her balance.

He watched her eyes dilate as he leaned in close and suckled a breast into his mouth. Bra and all. She shivered and his teeth nipped the tight tip. Dropping to his knees, he undid the snap at her waist. With a gentle tug, he pulled her pants down and helped her step out of them. He licked his

lips as her barely covered crotch was right before his eyes. For someone so tough, Fallon sure liked to wear sexy underwear. Tonight she had a matching set of turquoise satin bra and panties. His mouth watered even more, knowing precisely what lay beneath the scrap of clothing she wore.

Ian buried his face between her legs and lapped at her through the material. Her sharp taste imbedded on his tongue. He grinned as her fingers grabbed his hair and held him closer to her soaking core. Her hips moved the wet material over his mouth. His tongue snaked under the edge and began sliding up and down the wet slit.

Her groan of pleasure filled the room. He stopped long enough to pull down her bikini underwear and then his mouth went right back where it had been. Only this time, he slipped three fingers up inside her as his tongue played with her clit.

“Oh...oh, God,” she panted.

He moved his fingers all around inside the heat. Her muscles hugged him tight and he wanted to bury himself deep inside her.

Fallon moved away from him and he looked up at her from where he knelt on the floor. Her face was flushed, lips parted, eyes smoky. “I want you inside me,” she ordered.

Ian rose in one movement, his clothes disappearing in seconds. He allowed her to lead him to the bed. His heart skipped when she pushed him down and climbed on top of him. She hovered over him, her wet pussy teasing the head of his hard cock. Ian wanted to thrust into her, but he waited. Her eyes never left his as she reached into the bedside table and pulled out a condom. He moaned as she sheathed him quickly. Her warm hands cradling him, stroking him. She winked as she sank down on him slowly.

“Ohhh yeah,” he muttered as his erection was surrounded by her velvet warmth.

Fallon sat there and leaned forward. She brushed her lips over his before she moved her hips.

He watched her from beneath lowered lids as she began to ride him. Her breasts, still confined by the turquoise bra, moved enticingly with her. His fingers rested upon her hips, letting her set the pace.

His cock swelled more when she closed her eyes and bit down on her lower lip with her straight white teeth. Tempting little mewls emerged from her as she undulated against him.

He wanted so much to take control and pound into her, but the sight of her in such throes of passion made him want to keep her like that

forever. Her vocals grew louder and he bit the inside of his lip as she cupped her own breasts and massaged them.

“Fallon,” he groaned.

“What?” she asked. Her dark eyes opened slowly and she stared at him. Her gaze was glazed by desire.

“I’m almost there,” he muttered, his fingers tightening in the flesh of her hips.

A catlike grin crossed her face. “So I should slow down then?” she asked as her movements almost stopped.

A roar of frustration filled him. He moved his hands and lifted her, bringing her down hard on his cock. “I think I’ll just take over and set a pace.”

She leaned forward, her hair cascading around them, shrouding them in privacy. “Make it a fast pace,” she said.

Ian did just that. In moments, they both screamed their release to the room. Fallon collapsed against him, her heartbeat pounding a tattoo into his chest. Their bodies were slick with sweat.

His lips caressed her cheek. She smiled against his neck.

“Fallon,” he whispered as his heart began to slow.

“Yes?”

He burrowed closer to her. “Promise me you’ll be here when I wake in the morning. Don’t slip away into the night.”

Her hand trailed down his side. “Sleep for a while, Ian. I’m not done with you yet.”

She woke as an orgasm washed over her. Ian was settled between her legs, feasting away as if he were eating his last meal. His tongue made love to her clit as his fingers drove in and out of her.

Fallon was in heaven. Her hands moved down to settle on his head and press him closer as another orgasm neared. He replaced his fingers with his tongue and lapped up her cream as she screamed to the room.

Ian was slipping inside of her before she had even come down off her high. She fought to keep her eyes open as pleasure rolled over her in waves.

“I’ll never tire of this,” he murmured into her ear.

She hooked her legs around him and began moving with him. Her hands laced with his and she held onto him tight. His head was by her ear

and as he moved within her, he whispered softly to her in a language she didn't know. But she felt the meaning of what he was saying.

Fallon closed her eyes and let his magical touch take her away. He made love to her until they both collapsed from exhaustion again and fell back asleep. She woke a few hours later. Looking at the blue digital readout of his alarm clock, Fallon groaned. It was time for her to go.

Moving slowly, she climbed out of Ian's big, comfortable bed and reached for her clothing. She tugged her shirt on and drew on her pants. As her fingers fastened the snap, a deep voice penetrated the dark room.

"Where are you sneaking off to?"

Fallon was grateful for the dark to hide the smile that crossed her face at the mere sound of his voice. "I have to get going."

"Why?"

The sound of him getting out of bed reached her. She felt his warmth before he even touched her. When he did, her heart began to race even faster. His strong arms wrapped around her from behind, hands resting over her bellybutton.

"Can't you spend the day?"

Resting her head back against him, Fallon said, "No. I can't. Besides, don't you have to work today?"

"I'll call in sick." His lips nibbled the skin by her ear.

"I don't have that option, Detective. I have to go."

His hands undid the snap of her pants and slid inside them. They skimmed over her pussy and two fingers dipped into her.

Flames spread throughout her. Fallon widened her legs, granting him more access to her wet core. "Ah shit," she moaned, her hips thrusting against his intruding fingers.

"Stay," he whispered as he suckled her ear into his mouth.

Her insides trembled and she knew she was lost. "Yes," she muttered as her hips rode his hand hard, desperately seeking relief.

He added another finger. "All day?"

She whimpered. Her teeth captured her bottom lip as he continued to feast on her neck. "I...I...I...can't."

"Give me until noon, Fallon. Give me the morning."

Fallon reached up behind her with one hand and cupped the back of his head. "Yes."

She felt his low rumble of approval against her back before he shoved down her pants with his free hand, removed his fingers from her, and placed her back on the bed.

“What is it about this pier that you like so much, Fallon?”

A smile crossed her face as she turned her head to the side and glanced at the man beside her. Shawn.

“Pops used to bring me here all the time. I feel so close him being here. You know? Plus I love the water.”

His arm settled around her neck. “I know, sis, I know.”

Fallon nudged him with her shoulder. “What are you doing here? Big date?”

He chuckled. “Something like that.”

She sighed. “What do you think, Shawn?”

Dropping his arm from around her, he leaned against the railing next to her. “About?”

“Everything. About everything.”

She watched as her brother rolled his shoulders before flexing a hand. “You know sis, Ian...he’s alright. For a cop.”

“Why do you feel the need to give me your blessing about Ian Cavanaugh?”

“I’ve seen how you look at him, Fallon. And I know we haven’t been the easiest to talk to...it’s just, you’re our baby sister.”

She remained silent, wanting to see what he’d say next. Shawn kept his eyes on the ferries moving across Puget Sound.

“Even though we aren’t blood, it’s our job to protect you. And despite how well I got along with Ian in school, I’m worried he’ll hurt you. He’s one of them.”

Fallon knew what Shawn meant. Ian was a cop and he didn’t think anything would be able to get between him and the bond he shared with the others in blue.

Tugging on her black leather gloves, Fallon looked at her brother. “I think you’re underestimating him, Shawn. I think he’s caught between what he knew and what he knows to be true now. I won’t get hurt.”

Shawn took one hand and turned her face up to his. “Listen to me, little sis. I know you. Known that since Paul, you’ve kept men at a distance, but this way you look at Ian when you don’t think anyone knows... There’s more passion and feeling there than I ever saw in you when you looked at Paul, even on your wedding day.” He caressed her cheek. “This detective has already wormed his way into your heart. Ian

already has the capability of hurting you. And as your brother, that doesn't sit well with me."

Fallon stepped toward him and slid her arms around him, hugging him tight. "I'm a big girl now, Shawn. It's time to let me grow up."

He sighed and tucked her under his chin. "I know. I'll tell Clay to back off of him."

Closing her eyes, she smiled as her brother's cologne flowed over her. "Thank you."

"Humph. Still don't know what you see in him."

"You know, Shawn. If you miss him, why don't you just go talk to him?"

He grumbled under his breath. "I never said I missed him."

"Of course not. I was...merely offering a suggestion."

"Shawn!" a feminine voice hollered.

Fallon looked in the direction of the voice and smiled as a thin but buxom black woman walked up to them.

"Lina." He smiled.

"Who's this?" the woman demanded.

"Feisty, isn't she?" Fallon asked, stepping away from Shawn. "I'm his sister."

Brown eyes narrowed and she placed her fur-lined gloves on her hips. "Can't think of anything better than that? His sister isn't around."

"Well, normally I'm not, but since I came home for the funeral, here I am."

The woman glared at them. Fallon laughed and clamped her mouth shut when they both frowned at her.

She kissed her brother and tried her best to hold back more laughter. "I'll see you at home, Shawn. Dinner's at seven." Then she walked off, letting them hash it out. She didn't need to be around for that.

Fallon heard the high-pitched voice even as she moved further on down the sidewalk. Her brother rarely had good taste in women, in her opinion.

Keeping an eye on traffic, she jogged across the street and headed toward the parking garage where she left her Xterra. Getting off on the third floor, Fallon reached into her pocket and wrapped her fingers around her keys.

A whisper of a feeling was all she got before someone yanked her from behind and pulled her into a dark corner. A rough wool glove slammed across her mouth and nose, filling her with the overwhelming

smell of diesel. The sting of a knife blade streaked across her throat, left to right, before settling near her right side. Enough to grab her attention, but not enough for a serious wound.

"I've been waiting for you, sweets." His breath was rancid and made her want to puke. "I'm gonna ask you a few questions and then have some fun." He used one hand to grope at her breast.

Fallon stiffened before relaxing her body. She knew he would have to readjust to hold up her bodyweight.

And he did. The second he did, she reacted. She lunged forward, ripping out of his arms and sweeping her leg out behind her, sending him to the ground.

"Bitch!" he swore, scrambling after her.

Fallon was waiting. Instead of avoiding a confrontation, she held her ground and got off a strong left hook to his jaw. She quickly followed by a powerful roundhouse to the chest.

She heard his knife clatter to the cement and she jumped on him as he hit the ground. Rolling him over, she wedged his arm up, imprisoning him, her knee digging into his back.

With her free hand, she ripped off his ski mask and jerked his head back so she could see his face. It was the creep Kaitlyn had pointed out, the man she'd identified at Pike's Market.

"What do you want?"

He spit at her. Clucking her tongue, Fallon slowly got up and forced him to his feet. "That's not very nice." She slammed him into the concrete barrier. "Who are you?"

"I'm not telling you anything."

Running her tongue over her teeth, she bit back a hiss of displeasure and before he could blink, she broke his arm. His scream filled the parking garage, but no one came running.

"One down, two hundred five to go," she growled in his ear. "How many more bones will it take before you tell me what I want to know?" Fallon took his pinky finger in her hand and began applying sideways pressure to it.

He whimpered in pain.

"Let me tell you something, if you don't stay away from my family, I will take my time in breaking every single bone in your body. And when I'm done with that, I'll begin removing body parts. You leave my family *alone*. Do I make myself clear?"

"You can't do this," he stammered.

“You attacked me, I’m defending myself.”

“This is torture.”

A cruel laugh escaped her. “I haven’t even begun to torture you. Now tell me who you are.” She applied more pressure to his finger. He squirmed and bit back another low moan of pain.

“I...I...I wasn’t going to hurt them,” he blurted out, apparently not up for having any more broken bones. “My orders were just to follow and keep an eye out.”

“An eye out for what?” she barked in a low tone.

“I don’t know. A key. Just a key. That’s all I was told. And once I saw the key, then I was to report in.”

“Who told you?”

“He’ll kill me if I tell,” the guy told her.

“Do you think I care? Or that I would do any less if you don’t?”

He shook his head.

Fallon noticed some voices coming from across the level. “Tell me!” she hissed.

“He is too powerful. I can’t go against him.”

She broke his little finger. “How well is your all-powerful man protecting you from me? Because I don’t see anyone here to save your useless ass. Maybe he doesn’t care at all for you.” Fallon grabbed another finger.

“DeVane,” he gasped, tears sluicing down his face. “It was DeVane, Rick DeVane.”

She bared her teeth and shoved the man hard against the wall before slipping away and letting him slump unassisted to the floor. Her body was rigid with anger as she climbed into the car and left the parking garage.

“Bastard,” she seethed as she shifted gears and drove up First Street. “I’m gonna expose him for the fraudulent asshole he is.”

Chapter 14

When Ian opened his door, his smile faded from his face. He didn't want to see the person on the other side of the door. His father stood there, looking cold.

"What do you want?"

"Can I come in?" Donal Cavanaugh asked.

"What for, Da? You made your position on what I was doing perfectly clear." Ian didn't budge from his spot.

"Let me in, Ian."

There was something in his father's voice that made him step back and allow him entrance. Ian closed the door and followed behind as Donal made his way to the kitchen as if he belonged there, tossed his coat over a chair, and began making some coffee.

Leaning against the island, Ian watched his father. The man ignored him, focusing on the task at hand. He seemed older in that moment, and not the strong, proud Irishman he recalled from his youth.

"Got anything to eat around here?"

Silently, Ian moved to the fridge, pulled out sandwich fixings, and began making his father a corned beef sandwich. When he was done, he placed it on the table and put down two mugs for coffee.

Donal sat before the sandwich and picked up one of the halves and bit into it. Ian brought over the coffee when it was done and poured them some.

"Enough stalling, Da. What are you doing here?"

"Rick DeVane was in love with Nadine Harper, they'd been high school sweethearts. All of that changed the day she met Gregory Maddox in college. The rest was history; Nadine and Gregory got married and started raising foster kids. Rick never forgave Greg for stealing away Nadine."

Well, that's news. "And so naturally, he was hard on the kids," Ian reasoned.

"Yes. Made it hell on them if they got in trouble. So, that didn't help matters when the boys started showing disrespect. It only got worse."

Ian took a drink of his coffee. "And even now, he still hates them that much?"

"Apparently so. I wish you'd leave this alone, son, but I have a feeling you won't. Rick is a dangerous man. He has a lot of connections up the ladder."

"Da," Ian said, "do you think DeVane would lie about a homicide just because it was Greg Maddox?"

His father sighed. "I just don't know anymore. Whatever you do be careful, the brotherhood is strong."

"That's what Fallon says."

Donal arched a gray brow. "Does she now." From his father it was more of a statement than a question.

Ian felt his cheeks heat. "Yes. That was part of her reason for not believing the autopsy report."

His dad took a bite of the sandwich and he chewed slowly. After he swallowed, he asked, "What was the other?"

"There were a few things, ranging from her having to call someone to get the complete report to the fact things just didn't add up when she did get a chance to read it all."

"And why has she come to you?"

"I'm lead detective on the case, or was rather."

His dad took another bite. Disbelief filled his eyes.

Ian fiddled with his coffee mug. "I don't know. I hope she trusted me." For a brief moment, Ian toyed with the idea of telling his dad everything, but he held off. Fallon had asked him not to and he would do as she wished.

Whipped. I'm whipped.

The chime of his doorbell snapped him back from the road his down which thoughts were heading. He walked to the door, opened it, and smiled. Simultaneously a loud mental groan filled his head.

His mother.

"Let me in, Ian," she demanded.

Stepping back, he gestured for her to enter. She swooshed by him and he muttered, "Be nice, Ma."

Her eagle eyes honed in on him. "Why would you say such a thing..." her voice trailed off and she looked away from him and faced her ex-husband. "What are *you* doing here?"

"What? I can't come see my son?" Donal snapped.

Here we go. With another groan, audible this time, Ian glanced between his parents who were sniping at each other. With a deep sigh, he reached behind him, grabbed his leather jacket and his keys, before he left. They never noticed him going by.

"I can't take this right now," he muttered as he sank into the seat behind the steering wheel. Backing out of his garage, Ian drove to the park where he'd played football with Fallon and her brothers.

He climbed out of his car and sat down on a bench. He rubbed his head and sighed. *Chased out of my own house by my damn parents.*

"You always did come here just to sit," a deep voice reached him. "Didn't getting your ass beat back then teach you not to come alone?"

When they had been growing up, Shawn had defended him one evening when a few other guys had decided to beat up the pale Irish kid. That had been the beginning of their friendship, it had been Shawn's suggestion that he go out for football.

Ian turned his head to the left and watched as the fog materialized into the powerful form of Shawn Maddox. "Evening, Shawn," he said. Ian was shocked and glad to see him. He had missed his friend. And so far, he couldn't pick up on any animosity in his tone.

"What are you doing out here? You look like someone shot your dog."

A wry smile crossed his face. "My parents are at my house. They were just starting an argument, so I left. What about you?"

Shawn sat down beside him. "Just trying to clear my head."

A few moments of silence hung between them. Ian stared over the empty park and waited for Shawn to say something else.

"I'm sorry, Ian."

Wow. Of all the things Shawn may say, Ian never considered those words. Threats and warnings to stay away from his baby sister, yes. An apology, not in a million years. Ian looked at the man beside him. "You're sorry? For what?"

"For being such an ass."

Ian leaned back against the bench and chuckled. "I've missed you, too, Shawn."

Shawn harrumphed. "You are plannin' on treating my sister right, aren't you? Because our wrath will have *no* bounds if you make her shed even a single tear."

Ian smiled, knowing that was as much as a blessing as he'd get from Shawn to pursue a relationship with his sister. "Hurting your sister is the last thing I want to do to her."

"Oh, God!" Shawn moaned. "You're in love."

His grin spread from ear to ear. "That obvious?"

"Does she know how you feel?"

"Not yet." He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his thighs. "What did she do in the Corps?"

"I don't know. She mentioned something once about training marines and sailors in hand-to-hand combat. Fallon knows a few types of martial arts. Talking about it wasn't ever something she ever did. Ask her."

Hand-to-hand combat. A variety of martial arts. Fallon never ceased to amaze him. Ian nodded. For a while, he and Shawn sat there and talked about the past. Catching up with one another, Ian found out the truth of why Shawn left the NFL. He'd had too many serious hits to the head, garnering numerous concussions, which led the doctors to warn him that one more blow could easily lead to death, or paralysis. So, Shawn had left. He missed the game but wasn't about to give up his life for the sport.

As he drove toward his house, Ian's heart felt lighter. Shawn had told him he'd tell his brothers to back off. While it was late, he still wanted to see Fallon. Pulling out his phone, he dialed her number as he pulled into an empty parking lot.

The sound of her fists against the heavy bag filled the room until she heard the slight chime of a ringing phone. Fallon grabbed her phone from beside the towel, flipped it open, and said, "Maddox."

"I want to see you."

Ian's deep sensual voice caressed her soul. Picking up the towel, she dabbed her forehead and smiled. "You do, do you?"

"Yes, ma'am. Tell me where you are Fallon, I'll come to you."

"I'm working out at the youth center. Stop by and I'll let you in."

"Be there soon."

Fallon closed her phone and tossed the towel over her shoulder. She walked up the silent hallway and waited for Ian to arrive. It wasn't very long before the headlights of his Cobra shone through the glass front of the youth center. Sliding off the counter, she strode to the small door and unlocked it.

Her breath caught in her throat as he walked from his car toward her. The lights in the parking lot illuminated him. Tight blue jeans and his Seahawk jacket covered him. There was a light fog that seemed to adhere to his hair, making it shine. Then there was his stride. He had a swagger that never failed to affect her breathing or heart rate.

A smile flashed across his handsome face as he stopped outside the door. Her insides melted. Swinging open the door, she inhaled deeply as he moved past her. Her nose filled with the coolly masculine scent that mingled with his personal smell. It fit him so perfectly.

“Working late?” His words slid across her skin like velvet.

“Working out is more like it.” She locked the door and turned. Her towel fell to the floor and she bent down to retrieve it.

“What the fuck happened to your neck?” he thundered, grabbing her arm and pulling her close.

For a moment, Fallon debated lying. “I was attacked in the parking garage today after my meeting with Shawn.”

“Damn it, Fallon,” he hollered. “Did you even report this?”

“No. I didn’t.” She carefully loosened the hold his fingers had on her and ignored his frown.

“I want you to file a report on this.”

“I’m fine.”

He threw up his hands in exasperation. “What if he goes after another woman? Did you think of that? How will you feel if another woman gets attacked?”

“He was after me,” she muttered. “And I would *never* want another woman to be attacked, shame on you for even thinking that.” Fallon put the towel back on her shoulder, effectively hiding the light mark.

“What do you mean he was after you?” Ian grabbed her chin in his hand. “Fallon, what do you mean by that?”

She picked up on an underlying fear in his words. “He said he was watching me, that...that someone paid him to do so.” Fallon tapped his fingers so he’d release her. “Look, Cavanaugh, it’s over. Let it go.” *Besides, I don’t think he’ll be after me again, not any time soon.*

“You...you...argh!” he threw his hands up and stomped away from her.

Fallon watched as he muttered to himself. A small smile lifted her mouth as she walked up behind him and slipped her hand into his. “I’m okay, Ian. I promise.”

He swiveled toward her, his battleship-gray eyes churning with a myriad of emotion. "Fallon, I—"

"What'd you want to see me about?" she interrupted.

His gaze caressed her face. "Nothing. Everything. Hell, Fallon, I don't know. I just...I just..." he shrugged.

Squeezing his hand, she led him back up the quiet hall to the exercise room. The second the door closed behind them, he gathered her into his arms and kissed her.

With a purr of contentment, she arched into him, clutching his powerful body close. His tongue stroked along hers, sending shivers throughout her entire body. He released her mouth gently before drawing her even tighter against him and just holding her.

Soon his touch changed from tender to arousing. Her skin burned where he touched her. Her hands shoved off his jacket and moved onto his shirt. Hungrily she kissed him. Desperate for his touch, his caress. Clothing fell to the floor as their need for one another swamped them.

Before long, Fallon was screaming Ian's name in ecstasy as he moved deep within her body. Moments later, his cry echoed hers in the large room.

Fallon lay in Ian's arms. She'd put on her clothes, but he was only in his jeans with the button still undone. They lounged against a rolled up mat, she lay tucked up against his left side. His lips rested against her forehead as he moved one hand idly up and down her arm.

"He loved your mother," Ian spoke in a hushed tone. His lips were leaving feathery touches on her skin.

Furrowing her brow, Fallon asked, "Who did?"

"DeVane. They had been high school sweethearts but when she met your father, apparently she forgot all about DeVane. And he's never forgiven your family for it."

"Who told you this?" Fallon moved her fingers lightly over his chest.

"My Da."

Her father never mentioned it, only told them to steer clear of DeVane. Fallon never had a run in with the man. Not until now. At least this shed some light on the hatred.

"Fallon," he said. "Tell me about your time in the Marines." His fingers skimmed over her shoulder tattoo.

She sighed heavily. "Why is it so important?"

"I want to know more about you. Would you rather I ask about your marriage to Paul?"

“Yes,” she replied immediately. Ian stiffened slightly beneath her and she knew she’d surprised him.

“Okay then, tell me.”

Fallon closed her eyes and let the beating of Ian’s heart flow over her. “Paul and I met while he worked in an investigation of a dead sailor. We hit it off really well.” She snuggled deeper into Ian. “Eventually we got married. We realized we were much better friends. Especially when he started talking about having children.”

“You don’t want kids?”

“I don’t know. I’m not opposed to having them, but at that time, I was focused on my career. Even now it’s not like my biological clock is yelling or anything.”

“I want kids. At least two. I always longed for someone to play with when I was growing up and I think it would be a good thing for my child to have a sibling.”

An image of Ian playing football with his son flashed through her mind. “I bet you’ll make a great father.”

“I think so,” he mumbled against her skin. “You and Paul parted well.”

She chuckled. “Yes. He’s a great man and we wanted to remain friends. I hope he finds the woman he’s meant to be with.”

“Will you tell me who you called to put pressure on DeVane to release the report?”

Fallon opened her eyes, suspicion and mistrust sweeping through her. Did he really need to know about the people in the Pentagon she knew? “I have some connections,” she hedged. “I know a lot of people.”

A small rumble escaped from his chest. “You, Ms. Fallon, are a woman of mystery and intrigue.”

“You think so? I don’t.”

He laughed. “Of course you wouldn’t, you know your story. But for those of us who are trying to learn...you are.”

Fallon sat up and looked at him. “Very true. Now, I really should be going. I only came for a workout.” She got to her feet.

A grin snaked across his face. “I didn’t give you one?” She stuck her tongue out at him and he winked. “I know it’s late.”

He reached for his shirt and tugged it on, hiding his chiseled chest from her. Her eyes stayed on him as he stood and buttoned his jeans. Fallon yelped as he grabbed her.

His hands grasped her ass and squeezed. "Thank you," he said between kisses, "for this."

"You, Detective, are a distraction." She swatted him on the chest and he let her go.

"But still adorable."

More than any man has a right to be. His hair was falling forward and she almost reached out and smoothed it away from his face. Ian made her want to think about kids, love, and happily ever after.

Blinking, Fallon knelt to tie her shoes. "I have a confession."

He sat across from her and tied his own tennis shoes. "Do tell, I love confessions."

"The day of my father's funeral, you and Clay had a beef."

A slight grimace flashed over his features. "Yes. Something like that."

"I'm sorry for my behavior." She shook her hair down from the ponytail it'd been in for her workout.

He scrunched his brow. "Sorry for what?"

"The whole boot to the back of the neck and pressure point thing."

Ian's eyes grew wide. "That...that was you?"

She nodded. "That was me."

As he sat at his desk the following day, he still couldn't believe Fallon had rendered him helpless in seconds. What a woman. And his. Another smile crossed his face as he tried to focus on the paperwork before him.

"What has you all smiles this morning, Ian?" Bill, his partner asked. Ian glanced up to answer, but stopped as Bill shook his head. "Never mind. I know that whipped look anywhere. You're in love."

Holding up his hands, Ian asked, "Says who?"

"Please. It's all over your face. You look happy. No, not just happy, more like...content."

Ian grinned. "I am content."

Bill leaned forward. "She must be something special for her to wipe the stress off your face. But then I always figured Ms. Fallon would be, considering she snagged your attention the second she walked in here."

He was speechless. Was he that transparent? "Bill," he began.

"Don't worry, Ian. It's not my place to say anything to anyone else." His partner smiled at him and got back to work.

Bill teased him when they were in the car driving to talk to some witnesses in a new case they were working on. Ian took it all in stride, grateful his partner was behind him. As they drove through downtown Seattle, Ian smiled as the sun burst out from behind a cloud.

Just like an omen.

Apparently a bad omen. Their witness had disappeared. As Ian called in the BOLO on the car's radio, he noticed a man he'd seen earlier that day at the precinct; Ian had been on way in when this man walked past him.

"Thanks, Candace," Ian told the dispatcher. Leaning on the car door, he watched the man. He seemed very interested in the graffiti on a wall. Ian made sure he had a good sketch of the man in his mind. He'd go to the sketch artist and see if he could come up with a good composite which he'd run through the system.

He and Bill stopped for a late lunch on the way back to the station. A call from the captain cut that short and so they took the rest as take-aways. The captain wanted to be brought in the loop of the missing witness. That took a while, Rick DeVane snapped at them for the smallest thing. As if they were at fault for the missing witness.

"We've put out a BOLO on her, Captain," Ian said. "Everyone is looking for her. We're going to go over her file and see if we can gleam anything new from it."

With a low roar of fury, Rick ordered them out of his office.

Ian sat at his desk and read the file while he ate the rest of his lunch. "I don't see anything here, Bill. There isn't much to go on." Tossing down his sandwich, Ian ran a hand down his face. "I'll be back."

Bill acknowledged him with a wave, but didn't stop eating and working. Ian headed for the back of the squad room and knocked on a door.

"Enter," a feminine voice said.

"Hey, Shelly."

"Ian." She smiled. "To what do I own this honor?"

"Can you do a sketch for me?"

"Of course. Why didn't you just call me to come up to the bullpen?" She pushed back from the desk and rose.

"No. I don't want anyone to know about this." At her frown, he added, "I am going on a hunch and want to check it out before I say anything. You know how the Captain doesn't like to be made to look a fool."

She sighed and sat back in her chair. "Okay. Do you want a sketch or a computer composite?"

"Computer please."

Shelly turned the monitor toward him and in seconds had the program up and waiting. She worked quickly and it didn't take long for him to describe the man he'd seen.

"Thank you, Shelly."

"Anything for you, darling. I'll run this and see if we get any matches. I'll drop it off at your desk if I do."

Ian stood and smiled at her. "Thank you."

"You know, one day, you're gonna have to take me out."

"Okay," he said without thinking. "I have to get back to work. Bye, Shelly." He left her room and headed back to his desk.

Bill arched a brow as Ian took his seat. "Find anything?"

"Nope." Ian picked up a pen and scanned his desk. Nothing jumped out at him. His phone rang. "Homicide, Detective Cavanaugh."

"I warned you, Detective. You needed to solve the case before more innocents got killed. You failed. Their blood is on your hands."

It was the same computerized voice he'd heard before. Snapping his fingers, Ian grabbed Bill's attention and signaled for a trace.

"Who are you?"

"I'm not important. What are you going to do about it?"

Ian made some notes on his paper. "The Maddox file has been officially closed. Can you tell me something new, give me another lead?" Ian looked to Bill, who signaled 'keep him talking'. "Something," Ian paused, "that may point us in a new direction and give us a tangible reason to reopen the case. Hey...I'm asking for your help here, if we missed something let us know."

"Gregory Maddox stumbled onto something he wasn't supposed to. That's why he was killed. Keep digging, Detective."

Click. He was gone.

"Bill?" Ian asked as he slammed his phone back into the cradle.

His partner was shaking his head. "Sorry, Ian. Whoever he is, he's smart. According to the trace, it's coming from all over the world. Madrid, Nairobi, Bogota, Beijing, and even Stockholm."

"Damn it!" He threw his pencil down and smacked his hand on the desktop. "Alright, get a copy of that call down to the techs and see if they can get rid of the computerized crap on it to tell us if it is even a man I'm talking to."

“O’Neill! Cavanaugh!” DeVane hollered across the bullpen. “My office.”

Ian met Bill’s gaze. “Like being handed our asses once today wasn’t enough.”

Bill chuckled as he stood. “Let’s go get this over with.”

He sighed. “If we must.”

Chapter 15

“Mail’s here, Fallon,” Dylan called as he walked in the kitchen.

“No need to yell, Dylan. I’m sitting right here.”

Fallon glanced up from the plate before her. She wasn’t really eating, more pushing it around, seeing if she could make pictures. Leftover casserole made a pretty good puppy dog. Then again, maybe it was a horse, or a cow.

“I didn’t know you went by your Marine title anymore.”

“I don’t, why?” Dropping her fork, Fallon reached for the padded envelope.

He tossed a package toward her. “Here.”

Fallon stared at the label: Gunnery Sergeant Fallon Maddox. It was followed by her parents’ home address.

“Odd,” she said, ripping it open. *Who would be sending me something here?*

Another padded envelope slid out and landed on the table. A small white piece of paper floated down as well. Reaching for the envelope, she noticed there was nothing written on it. So she let it go and picked up the scrap of paper.

Ms. Fallon,

I was asked by your father a while ago to mail this to you upon his death. I am so sorry for your loss. Greg was an amazing man and will be missed by those of us who loved him so.

It was unsigned.

Fallon picked up the envelope and looked at the return address. It wasn’t familiar. The postage mark said Oak Harbor. She didn’t recall any of his friends who lived in Oak Harbor. This was mailed from Whidbey Island. Why was it sent to her and why had he stipulated it be done so upon his death? The date said a day ago. Also, why would they wait until weeks after his passing to mail it on to her?

Picking up the smaller padded envelope, she ripped it open. A small, robin’s egg blue box slipped out followed by a folded sheet of yellow legal pad paper. Taking a sip of water, she reached for the sheet and opened it.

Her heart stopped.

Pops.

The small perfect print of her father's handwriting leapt off the page and stared her down. She read the note.

My dearest and brave Fallon,

I have to apologize for bringing you into this, but I felt it would be safest in your hands. I had hoped to be able to put a stop to this and pray I will still be able to do so. However, if you are reading this, it means I'm no longer in this world.

Inside the box, you'll find a small key. It opens a safe deposit box at Wells Fargo. The bank is in Everett on Hewitt Ave. There is more information there. I am scared to put anything down on this paper, even though I trust Ruth with everything. I know you like to work alone, but bring your brothers in on this, you'll need them to watch your back. I wish I was there with you, but I have faith you will be able to persevere where I obviously have failed.

I am so proud of you for doing what you do, and I know I don't always say it. No matter what the future holds, never forget that I love you and I'm so proud of you. Thank you for being a part of our family.

Love you kiddo,

Dad

Fallon read and reread the note. Tears blurred her eyes as she the word "kiddo" jumped out at her. "Kiddo" had been his nickname for her. After she turned thirteen, he'd only rarely called her that. Reaching for the box, she opened it and stared at the small gold key with a number etched into it, 3579F.

"Fallon?" Dylan asked. "What's the note say?"

"It's a message from Pops." She stood, pocketing the key and note. "I have to go. I'll be back later tonight." *What the hell is going on here? And who is Ruth?*

Her brother stared at her in confusion, but Fallon left him there. She had to figure this all out. Forgetting the plate of cold food in the kitchen, Fallon grabbed the keys and headed to her Nissan Xterra.

Slipping on her sunglasses, she backed out of the driveway and headed for I-5 Northbound, merging with the rush hour traffic. Fallon drove with single-minded purpose, the classic rock playing barely registering on her radar. She exited I-5 when she came to Everett Ave and before long she was parking her vehicle in the lot of the Wells Fargo mortar building.

She strode into the brick structure, one hand remaining in her pocket, resting on the key.

“Good afternoon, ma’am. Can I help you?” A distinguished looking gentleman stood before her.

“Yes, sir. I have a safe deposit box here and I’d like to get into it.”

He took in her attire before he smiled. “Of course. If you will follow me, we can get you signed in and to your box in no time.”

“Thank you.”

Fallon breathed a sigh of relief as the heavy door sealed out the outside world. The box sat before her, long, cold, and sending her an ominous vibe. Rubbing her hands against the cotton of her BDU’s, she bought herself some time before she reached for the box and opened it.

The hinges moved the top up soundlessly. Fallon looked down into the box and saw a few photos, and a disk of some type. Picking up the photos, Fallon stared at them in disgust. Her muscles bunched as she tried to control her anger. Jaw clenched, she emptied the box and stood.

Holding the empty box, she left the room and went with the same man to put it back in its slot. “Thank you for your help,” she stated softly as she headed for the door. It was dark outside and yet she barely noticed as she walked to her vehicle. Climbing in, she sat behind the wheel and tried to calm her rolling stomach.

Rage and frustration overwhelmed her and she began beating on the steering wheel while she cried. “I’m sorry, Pops. If I hadn’t been gone, perhaps...perhaps I could have prevented your death. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry!” she wailed over and over.

She sobbed in the dark for a while until she got her emotions under control. Rick DeVane was about to get what was coming to him. And she was going to be the one delivering it. Grimness settled over her features as she started the engine. Easing onto the street, Fallon turned her attention to driving and did her best to forget everything else. Her phone rang as she was passing Lynnwood.

“Maddox.”

“Hey, beautiful,” Ian said.

“I was going to call you. We need to talk.”

“About?”

“This is something that can’t be done over the phone. We need to meet somewhere. Wherever you want.”

“Have you had dinner?”

Her stomach rumbled loudly, reminding her how she'd done a great job in neglecting it. "Nope."

"Is everything okay, Fallon? You seem kind of distant."

"Pizza," she said over him. "Pizza would be good. Have it delivered to your house and I'll be there soon."

Ian stood by his door, waiting for Fallon. When headlights turned into his drive, he opened the door and stepped out into the cold evening. The silver Xterra stopped before him. Fallon climbed out and locked the vehicle as she walked toward him.

"Hey," he said.

"Evening, Cavanaugh." Her tone was brusque.

Grabbing her arm, he stopped her from going up the steps to his front door. "Fallon?" Her body trembled beneath his hand. "What's going on?" She stiffened before she crumpled. Ian thanked God for his quick reflexes as he caught her right before she hit the ground.

His heart beat a mile a minute as he swept her up in his arms and carried her inside to lay her on his couch. "What's wrong, Fallon? Come on, baby, talk to me." He brushed some hair away from her face. This heart broke when he saw the tears on her cheeks. "Oh, Fallon," he whispered.

The doorbell rang and he swore. "I'll be right back." Jumping to his feet, he reached for his wallet as he walked to the door. He paid for the pizza and placed it on the counter before going back to Fallon's side. Dropping to his knees, he took in the tears that still flowed from her eyes. But she remained silent.

"Please talk to me," he begged. "Tell me what's wrong. Let me help, Fallon, please."

"I killed him," she muttered, staring directly at him.

What? "Baby, what are you talking about?"

Fallon sniffed and rubbed the back of her hand across her nose. "Pops. It's my fault he's dead."

Ian frowned. *Where the hell did she get this from?*

"Your father's death is *not* your fault." Ian grabbed her shoulder and shook it. "Look at me," he demanded. When she did he reiterated, "It wasn't your fault."

She closed her eyes and her breathing became so shallow he got scared. Then a whisper of her voice reached him.

“It was my fault. He sent me some evidence. I know he was hoping I’d come home and be able to help. But, I never did, all I did was worry about my career.” Shudders racked her body. “I got it today. It’s all my fault.”

“None of this is your fault,” Ian tried to console her.

“If I wasn’t in the military, I’d have been able to help.”

Sitting on the floor, Ian stroked her cheek. “Baby, you’re not making any sense. What does your being in the military have to do with anything?”

She wrenched her eyes open, exposing the redness and bloodshot veins. “Everything,” Fallon wailed. “Don’t you get it?” She sat up and crossed her black BDU covered legs. Her gaze never wavered from his. “If I hadn’t been in situations where I couldn’t come home every weekend, maybe it would have been different. He could have had me with him. We could have dealt with this together, and perhaps, he’d still be alive today. Some Marine I am, couldn’t even protect my own father.”

Ian crossed his legs as well and watched her. There was such torment and despair in her face, it was as if a hand reached into his chest and tore out his heart. Uncertain of what he could do or say to help assuage her fears, Ian just reached for her.

He rose up on his knees and uncrossed her legs. Reaching around behind her, he slid her forward on his couch until their waists met, then he maneuvered so his back was against the couch and he sat with his legs straight out in front of him, keeping her anchored against his lap. She burrowed her face into his neck, he felt her legs against his back. Her hands held him tight to her and her fingers dug into his shoulders. Ian closed his eyes and allowed the sensation of her body pressed to his move over him. Her scent lingered, filling his nose, his pores, everywhere. He had realized it was just her natural smell; Fallon didn’t wear any perfume or scented lotions. Ian loved it.

Rubbing his hands up and down the thick cotton of her shirt, he let her cry it out. Each sob, each sniff, ripped a bigger hole in his chest. He longed to be able to fix it for her, take away all of the pain that flooded her body. But he couldn’t. He wasn’t even sure he followed the conversation. *I will help you realize your father’s death was not your fault, Fallon*, he vowed in his mind.

Her sobs turned to hiccups and she loosened her grip around his neck, pulling back to meet his eyes. A few stray tears leaked out of the corners of her big eyes. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

One hand reached up and tucked a few strands of her hair behind her ear. "You have nothing to apologize for."

"I think I need to use your restroom and get cleaned up." She moved to get up and he held her on his lap.

"You've never looked more beautiful," he muttered.

One side of her mouth moved in an attempt at a smile. "I'll show you what I got after we eat something." Her face settled into a blank expression. Fallon got to her feet and walked off silently.

Ian remained on the floor as she walked away from him. He knew what was happening; she was closing herself off to him. He recognized the coolness and detachment from the first day she'd shown up at his desk in the precinct. Standing, Ian smoothed his hands down his thighs and shook his head. *I'm not about to lose you Fallon, not behind that goddamn wall you keep around your heart.* He strode to the kitchen and set the table for dinner.

Ian was putting out some beer when she entered the kitchen. His eyes skated over her. She looked much more composed. There was no evidence of her earlier breakdown. Her eyes were not what he wanted to see, the brown ones staring at him were not soft and full of life, they seemed soulless.

"Hope you like sausage, mushroom, peppers, and pepperoni," he said, sending her a smile.

"I'm starved, anything will do." Her smile was wobbly but at least it was there.

Fallon sat across from him at the table and began to eat. Ian let the silence hang between them. He hoped she'd talk to him. She didn't, focusing instead on eating her pizza. After she finished a slice, she pushed the plate away from her and wiped her mouth with a paper towel.

"Thank you for dinner."

"You didn't eat a lot, sure you don't want anymore?" He pushed the box toward her.

"Not right now, but thanks."

With a shrug, he brought his bottle of beer to his lips and took a sip. "Tell me what you did in the military."

She nodded and leaned forward, her elbows resting on the table and reached for another slice of pizza. "I joined right after high school and the

Corps became my life. I lived and breathed the Marines. Re-upped without thinking about it. However, I really didn't like guns. Well, I didn't like how they made me feel. So, I focused on martial arts, which I had a knack for. Eventually, I began teaching hand-to-hand combat skills."

Ian stopped eating and watched her talk. Her slim hands tore her piece of pizza into small portions. He noticed her small smile when she mentioned martial arts. He asked, "What do you teach?"

"Mostly how to defend yourself if you are disarmed or weaponless. Like you learn in the academy, just a lot more intense."

"I saw you teaching the Bo at the center, is that something you know very well?"

"I know it. But I wouldn't say that's where my strengths lie."

"So your black belt is for what, then?"

Fallon ripped off a bit of crust and ate it slowly. "I have belts in Ninjitsu and Sambo. Much of what I teach is Krav Maga."

His eyebrows shot up. Krav Maga. What they taught the Mossad. "And now you just teach?"

"Pretty much so. They hire me and I show up and teach. Mostly Marines and Navy, but I have taught the other military branches as well."

So that's where you learned to move like you do." Her eyebrow rose. "That first day, when you came to the precinct, I almost checked to see if your feet even touched the floor."

A slight chuckle filled the room.

"Well, I know I don't float," Fallon said. "You seem pretty well balanced on your feet yourself."

He grinned. "Checking me out, were you?"

"A woman doesn't kiss n' tell, Cavanaugh." Fallon stared at him and his heart sank as her expression lost the softness it had just found. "This is why my father was killed," she stated and stood before pulling some items from her pocket.

Ian grabbed some of the photos and his stomach heaved in disgust. Shaking his head, he flipped through picture after picture of young Asian children huddled in what looked like a shipping container; some of the photos were of them holding numbers, dressed in very sexy outfits. There were some pictures of boys as well. He noticed Captain Rick DeVane with some, the coroner and a few more people close to the Chief of Police. Fallon's father had stumbled onto a sex slave ring. There were pictures of the Port of Seattle and one ship, *Venture III*. He held up one of DeVane

talking to a man at night. The man seemed familiar, but he couldn't place where he'd seen him before.

"Where'd you get these?" he asked.

"The mail. From someone who'd been instructed to get it to me if my father died. I got it today." She leaned forward. "I need your help."

Her words startled him. He hadn't expected her to ask him for help. The fact she had, meant a great deal to him.

"I can't let this continue. They have to pay for what they did to Pops and what they are doing to these children."

Ian agreed. This atrocity needed to be stopped. They need to be stopped. Running a hand over his jaw, he frowned. "I don't know how far this goes. One of the men here is a district commander. The Chief may be involved. We'll have to be careful."

"I don't want you to ruin your career. I don't need you headlining this. I'll do that. But I need access to cop information and you can get that for me."

Ian felt torn between pride and hurt. She needed his help, wanted to protect his career, and didn't want him involved. Did she not think he could handle it? He was an officer of the law for crying out loud. "Don't worry about my career. I'll see what I can dig up."

"No, if you start making noise on this, they may stop for a while. I can't let that happen. *He will be stopped.*"

Ian shivered at the malice tingeing her words. As much as he wanted to argue, he knew she was right. They couldn't afford to spook them. Still something nagged at him and he needed the answer. "Why me?" he asked. "Why'd you come to me?"

She held his gaze for a short time before answering, "You're the only cop I trust." Her eyes never wavered from his. "I believe you have the courage to help me stop this."

"And?" Ian wanted something else from her. He wanted a different reason. Ian wanted her to tell him she *needed* him. Not because of the case, but because she had feelings for him.

"And...I'm sorry I accused you of bleeding blue."

Moving away from the table, Ian walked toward her. "No other reason?" He crouched beside her, touched her leg, and waited.

"What other reason would there be?"

Ian bit back a growl of anger. He *knew* she had feelings for him. Why couldn't she say it? Wiping all expression off his face, he stood with a jerk and walked back to his chair. "No reason," he snapped. Flopping down, he

ran his tongue over his upper teeth and questioned, "So what do you want from me?"

Fallon knew Ian was hurt by something she'd said. Or hadn't. She watched his face as he sat there. His chiseled face was set in a frustrated line. More than the information she'd just shared with him caused it. His eyes were a hard slate color; she could see the anger and hurt in them. There was a tic along the left side of his jaw. Tension radiated off him. His exposed forearms flexed as he watched her.

"Fallon?" he asked. "What do you need me to get for you?"

"Nothing yet. I have to go over this with my brothers. I'll let you know the moment we figure this out."

Rage flashed in his eyes, so fast she almost missed it. When he spoke, his words were cold. "I won't condone vigilante justice in my city. If that is your plan, I *will* arrest each and every one of the Maddox clan."

"If my plan had been along those lines, I wouldn't have told you." She narrowed her eyes. "What is your problem?"

His gaze narrowed. "I don't have one. I'm just letting you know where I stand on this."

Liar!

"Fine. Duly noted." Fallon stood and began gathering the items she'd brought. As she reached for the few before Ian, he clamped a hand around her wrist. A brow arched. "What?"

"This is evidence of a crime."

"Yes it is. Your point?"

"I'm keeping them." His gaze was as hard as the hull of a battleship.

Like hell you are! Fallon put her other hand on the table and leaned toward him. "No. You. Aren't." The tic in his jaw grew more pronounced. "What is your problem, Detective?"

"You," he said. Ian stood, retaining his hold on her. "Why is it so hard for you to say how you feel?"

"You're having a tantrum because I don't talk about my feelings?" She was flabbergasted.

"A tantrum? No Fallon, this would be a tantrum." Ian dropped her hand, grabbed the table, and heaved it to the side, sending everything on it to the floor with a loud crash. She stared at him in shock. His eyes were

alive with flames and burned her as he held her gaze. "I'm not a goddamn robot, feelings are important!" he yelled.

"I never said you were a robot. What do you want me to say?" Fallon felt way out of her depth. "What is it you want me to say?"

He stepped toward her, ignoring the items on the floor. "I want you to tell me how you feel. Tell me something that would let me know it wasn't just about a damn job with you."

The raw agony of his words tore at her. Her skin prickled as she held his gaze. She swallowed and licked her lips. *Tell him!* Her mind screamed. The winds outside the house increased along with her tension.

"Why?" she demanded. "What possible bearing could my personal feelings have on anything right now?"

"Tell me," he begged.

"It doesn't matter." Her chest heaved as he moved closer and her fingers clutched tighter around the photos she held in one hand.

"It matters, Fallon."

The possibility of a lack of a future with him flooded her with pain. She battled with her emotions as he stared into her soul. In his eyes, she witnessed his desperate need to hear those words from her mouth. That sight opened the gate she'd kept closed around her feelings. "I came to you because I love you," she expelled on a ragged breath. "I've fallen in love with you, Ian Cavanaugh." *Despite the fact that we have no future together.*

She was in his arms in half a second, the disturbing photos dropped forgotten to the floor. He rained kisses all over her face before claiming her mouth. His tongue thrust in and out of her mouth as his hands worked on lowering her pants. Fallon felt his impatience and undid his slacks. She bit his invading tongue and purred as he lifted her off the ground. Flexing against him, Fallon took as much as she could before she jerked back and ripped off her shirt.

"Ian," she begged.

"Yes, baby." He pulled on her pants and she dropped one leg and maneuvered her pant leg down. With a low roar, Ian snapped her panties and slid home into her wet pussy with one smooth stroke. She whimpered as he thrust her back against the wall, wrapped one hand in her hair, and angled her head where he wanted. His hips plunged his large erection deep within her. In and out. Over and over. Never giving her a break. Her pelvis arched against him as she took all he gave and asked for more. Ian's mouth plundered hers.

Her skin burned as she met him thrust for thrust. One of her hands tangled in his thick hair, her other curled around the arm by her ear. Fire spread through her entire body as Ian took her closer and closer to the plane of euphoria she longed for. Each propulsion rubbed his hard chest against her tight, silk covered nipples, sending more bliss through her. Ian moved his head and buried it in the side of her neck. His teeth nipped, his tongue laved, and his stubble abraded her skin.

“Uh, uh, uh,” she panted as he continued to drive into her. Biting her lower lip, Fallon came with a rush. “Ian!” she screamed as her hips bucked against him. Internal muscles clamped down and she felt him move twice more before he unloaded deep in her womb as a roar left him. He pressed her further into the wall; his pounding heart matched the speed of hers.

Without a word, Ian walked their joined bodies back to his bedroom. Fallon gave herself over to the mastery of his touch. *I may not be able to have him forever, but I'll have what I can now.* She woke a while later and found herself anchored tight against Ian. His deep, even breaths soothed her frayed nerves. She glanced across the room to take in the glowing digital numbers. Three in the morning.

Fallon got out of bed and pulled on the button down shirt Ian had been wearing earlier in the night. It smelled like him and she snuggled into the soft material as it settled across her skin. She headed out to the kitchen, closing the bedroom door on her way. Turning on the light, Fallon looked at the mess. With the memory of Ian throwing the table, a shiver skated along her spine. Such a raw demonstration of power. *Seriously, that man looked so fucking hot when he did that.* Rolling her eyes at herself, Fallon reached for the table and righted it. Then she picked up the remainder of their dishes, evidence, and food. When the floor was free of littered, she found some cleaning supplies and got to work, washing the floor.

Chapter 16

Ian missed something. One arm reached to the side and landed on the mattress. He was alone. Sitting up, he turned on the bedside light and rubbed his eyes. Three-thirty in the morning. His bedroom door was shut. Climbing naked out of bed, he walked to his chest of drawers and drew on a pair of dark blue sweats, then left the room.

A lovely side view of Fallon on her hands and knees in the middle of his kitchen floor met him. The table was in the living room and there she was, clad only in his shirt from yesterday. The blue and white pin striping stopped shortly below her firm derriere. Ian cleared his throat and he couldn't stop the smile when she looked over her shoulder at him. Her thick hair was pulled back out of her way by a scrunchie.

"What are you doing down there?"

"Just finishing up." She pushed to her feet. The bottom hem of his shirt hung to her upper thighs. He swallowed as all the blood in him rushed to his lower extremities.

Ian walked to the table and moved it back then went to get the chairs as well. "You didn't have to clean up my mess, Fallon."

"It was mine as well." She tossed the paper towel and washed her hands before leaning against the sink and staring at him. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"You know what, Miz Maddox?" He walked toward her, loving the way her eyes began to smolder with passion. Her tongue snuck out to wet her full lips and his cock pulsed with anticipation. Ian longed to sink his hands in her hair, feel the silkiness of it pull across his skin. He rested his arms on either side of her. "I love you."

She smiled. "I know you do, Detective." Her hands skimmed up his arms and to his face. "I love you, too."

His heart felt absolutely perfect. This was what he wanted in life. Fallon Maddox. He wanted to share the rest of his days with her at his side. Leaning forward, he brushed a light kiss over her mouth. "Where does that leave us?"

"I don't know." Her hands touched his chest, moving lightly across his abdominals.

Unbuttoning the shirt she wore, he grinned. "I have a few thoughts."
The siren's smile that filled her features warmed his entire body.

Ian walked into the bullpen and saw his partner already there and working. He smiled and placed a coffee down for Bill. "Morning, Bill."

"You seem pretty damn chipper this morning."

"I guess so." He hung his jacket over the back of his chair and sat at his desk. "Heard the witness was found. I called the hospital and they'll call us when she wakes up from the sedation they gave her." Ian tapped his pen on the papers before him. "Oh, and I made sure she has an officer watching over her."

"Excellent." Bill stared at him. "You must have been up early."

Three-thirty. Making love to Fallon. Working out with Fallon and showering with her after. "Woke up around three. Couldn't sleep so I stayed up."

"Uh huh," his partner muttered.

Ian ignored his doubt and focused on the piles of paperwork before him. The hospital called and soon he and Bill were off to go talk to the girl who was their only witness for another homicide. He stayed busy for the rest of the day, but he managed to find time to stop off and see Shelly. Unfortunately, she didn't have anything to tell him, just that she'd keep digging. As he headed back to his desk, it hit him. The man was the same one as in the picture Fallon had, the one who stood talking to DeVane.

It was a long day and when Ian finally left, he felt exhausted. He was anxious and on edge; it didn't help he was waiting to hear from Fallon and the plan they would use to try to end this crap going on. His phone rang as he walked into his house. Ian answered with a short, "Hello."

His mother. Rubbing a hand over tired eyes, he sank to the couch to hear out the woman who had given him life. She wanted grandkids. After twenty minutes of her time, his mother hung up. Ian headed for his bedroom. He had just taken off his shirt when the doorbell rang.

"Damn," he hissed before sighing and walking up to the door. It was Shelly. "Shelly," he said, surprised to see her on the other side of the door. "What are you doing here?"

She waved a file and answered, "I got a name for you." Her gaze travelled hungrily over his bare chest. "Can I come in?"

Ian stepped back and let her move past him. It was then he noticed she was dressed up. A short skirt, high heels, and surrounding her, a sickly sweet perfume. Closing the door, he watched as she took in the décor of his home.

“The file?”

“Right.” She handed it to him.

Opening it, Ian glanced back at Shelly who still stood there. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“Water would be great, thanks.”

“Take a seat, I’ll be right back.” Skimming the file as he walked to the kitchen, Ian read about Enoch Wright. He had a long list of petty crimes, but there was more than just that. Some prostitution charges, battery, drugs, and two charges of assault with a deadly weapon. Those final two charges had been dismissed. Ian frowned. That wasn’t right. Looking further, he noticed the same judge had been assigned Wright’s larger offenses. Heading back to where Shelly sat, he handed her bottled water, “Here you go.”

Her blue eyes lingered over his chest before she smiled. “Thank you.”

He nodded and continued to peruse the file. This man hadn’t had an expensive, cutthroat attorney; no, he’d had a court appointed one. How did that happen? Ian went over the list of aliases that accompanied the photo of the man he saw. *Busy little man.*

“You didn’t tell anyone about this, did you?” he asked without looking away from the words in black and white before him.

“No, you told me not to.”

“Thank you, Shelly. For doing this and for dropping it off for me.” He smiled at her.

“You know I can’t tell you no, Ian.” Her eyes darkened and she licked her lips. “Not to anything you ask.” She got up and sauntered toward him, long fingers unbuttoning her coat as she moved.

“I’m having Spike and Truc check on some warehouses and a few places by the docks. We can’t move until we know where the kids are being held.” Fallon glanced at each of her brothers. They were all there with the exception of Herschel. “Once we nail down the place, we call 911. My guess, once the call goes through dispatch and over the radio,

DeVane and the others will respond quickly. I don't know how high this goes. So we have to move quick and carefully."

"You sure you can trust Cavanaugh?" Clay asked.

"Yes." Fallon held her eldest brother's gaze. "He's going to see what he digs up with the collector's guns. He'll be asking around to see if his co-workers can point him in the direction of a reputable collector. I *want* the man who put that bullet in Pops." Fallon took a deep breath and relaxed her fist. "Herschel...we keep him in the dark about this."

"The hell you will!" Herschel's angry voice broke in. "How dare you leave me out of this." His face was red and his eyes shot lightning. "I'm still a member of this family." He sat down on a stool and glared at each and every one of them. "You *will* fill me in on everything you've kept from me."

Fallon stared at Clay for a moment before she looked to Herschel. "We were trying to protect you. You have a family—"

"Can the shit, Fallon. I know I have a family. But, you all are my family as well. I don't believe you weren't going to tell me." The anger in his tone smashed into her with the force of a gale wind.

Sighing in defeat, Fallon nodded. She hadn't had the right to make that decision for him. "Herschel, I'm sorry we tried to keep you out of it. We were just trying to protect your wife and kids."

"Fill me in, Fallon," Herschel ordered.

So she did.

Later that evening, Fallon sat on the porch with Herschel. They'd had a big dinner and at the moment, Laura and the girls were inside with their other brothers. It had started to rain and she leaned back in her chair, propping her booted feet on the railing. "Are you happy, Herschel?" She could feel his eyes focus upon her.

"Yes I am. Laura and the girls mean more to me than I ever believed possible."

"Then keep them safe. Send them away, just until this gets straightened out. If it goes south, it'll go south fast and you don't want them in the line of fire."

"I can protect my family." His tone was hard.

Facing her brother, Fallon put a hand on his arm. "Herschel, look inside yourself. You know what's safest for them. And you know I'm not implying you can't protect them. Just, this isn't a fight they should have to partake in. It isn't anything your little girls should have to witness."

"I don't want you to think I don't care for all of you and for what happened to Pops."

"Hush. We understand Herschel. None of us will think less of you. We expect you to protect them. Take them somewhere safe, please." Fallon saw Laura standing in the doorway, eavesdropping. Laura met her gaze and quietly closed the door, giving them their privacy back. A heavy sigh reached her and she knew he'd made up his mind.

"Okay," he said, reaffirming what she'd guessed already. "But you keep me informed on the progress."

"Of course."

Silence reigned as the night sounds of the city reached them. Herschel's big feet moved to the railing beside hers.

"What's up with you and the homicide dick?"

She closed her eyes and shook her head. *Homicide dick?* "What makes you think anything is?"

"Shawn. He told us to back off of him, be nicer and all that crap because he made you happy. So I'll ask again, what's up with the two of you?"

Fallon sighed. "Just having fun."

"Just having fun? Fallon, please. You aren't the kind of woman to do that, so either you're working on a way to sabotage what you two have, or you've already convinced yourself it can't work." He made her look at him. "Why are you doing that?"

"I have done that whole marriage thing. I...I," she sighed, "I don't know."

"Stop ruining it before you give it a chance. You tell me to think of my family, well, I'm telling you to think of your future. I like Cavanaugh, he's a good match for you."

She snorted. "Thank you, Dr. Phil."

Herschel got to his feet and knocked her legs off the rail before placing his hands on her shoulders and his face in hers. "Be as sarcastic as you want. Just tell me you haven't fallen in love with him."

Fallon had no response to that. What could she say? Her brother was right.

"That's what I thought," he said softly. "If you don't give it a chance, you'll regret it for the rest of your life."

He kissed her cheek and walked inside, leaving her alone with her thoughts. Covering her eyes with one hand, Fallon groaned. *Why did he have to be right?*

Ian shut the door and breathed a sigh of relief. He had totally missed the fact that Shelly had wanted him. Her offer had thrown him for a loop. She'd been damn near naked in that outfit she wore. As carefully as he could, he'd told her he wasn't interested in a relationship with her. That he was currently in one. It hadn't been a surprise that she took it hard, but she finally left.

Running a hand down his face, he made his way back to the nearest chair and sank down into it. At least he got the name he was after. Now he had something to pass along to Fallon that may help her. Hopefully, it would help. A sick feeling filled him as he imagined to the possible repercussions.

"Please let us end this with her safe." The phone rang and he absently reached for the cradle. "Cavanaugh."

"Hey stranger," Fallon's voice reached him.

"Hey sweetness. I miss you." He pushed up from his seat and walked to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and pulled out a beer.

"Is that so?"

"That's so, Miz Maddox."

"Good." He could hear the smile in her voice. "Just calling to update you. We've got it all figured out on this end. The call will be going out over your dispatch, and when it does, we'll be waiting."

"Figuring on that whoever is in on it will want to be first on the scene," he commented even as he nodded his understanding.

"Yes. So keep an ear out. We're going to move as soon as we find where they're keeping them."

"We need to call someone in on this." He opened the beer and took a drink. "This should be dealt with by the feds."

"No!" she snapped. "Look, Detective, I trusted you when I told you about this. Don't make me regret it."

He ground his teeth and prayed for strength. "Fallon, don't you think we should help those kids? Or is this all about you and your vendetta of revenge?"

Click.

Ian looked at the phone and put it back up to his ear. She'd hung up on him. He dialed her number back and waited impatiently for her to pick up. His feet took him back into his living room.

“What do you want, Detective?” she bit off.

“What was that for?”

“Don’t be stupid. I don’t have time for this. If you want to think this is all about my vendetta then fine, do so, but don’t waste my time.”

Click.

“Damn it, Fallon!” he swore, throwing the phone onto one of his couches. He slumped down onto the green microfiber material and reached for the phone again. Pressing redial, he waited for her to pick up again.

“What?” Her tone was hostile.

“Don’t hang up on me. I have a name for you.”

“A name?” There was some rustling on the other end before she spoke again. “Give it to me.”

“Enoch Wright.”

“And his name is from what?”

“That’s the man in the photo with DeVane, by the ship *Ventura III*. He’s got a whole list of offenses but he’s never served any time. The two assaults with a deadly weapon charges were dismissed, and get this, all by the same judge. Judge Rouch.”

“Have you checked the other cases of this judge? Or cross referenced Wright’s name with any of the other cases Rouch has overseen?”

“Not yet. I will. And I am supposed to meet someone tomorrow about the guns. There was a message for me in my locker.”

She was silent for a moment before she said, “Be careful, Detective.”

“I will. You too, Fallon.”

“I gotta go. I’ll call you as soon as we find anything.” He heard an engine start and his eyes narrowed.

“Fallon?”

“Yes?”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going home.”

“Where are you?” A wave of jealousy swamped him.

“I’m in my vehicle. Look, I have to go, I need to concentrate on traffic, and I don’t have my earpiece in. I’ll call you later.”

“Okay.” He hung up and rolled his shoulders. That feeling of foreboding wouldn’t leave him.

That night his dreams overflowed with images and flashes of Fallon, hurt, bleeding and dying in his arms. He bolted upright gasping for breath, sweat dripped down his face as he fumbled for the switch to turn on his

bedside lamp. Sitting in the glow from the light he slowly caught his breath, chilled to the bone.

Climbing out of bed, he walked to the kitchen and poured himself a glass of water. As he drank down his third glass, he rested against the countertop. What the hell was going on with him? Ian looked at the green readout on his microwave. 4:30 a.m. it flashed. "No point in going back to bed now," he muttered.

He got in a workout before heading off to work. Still in the back of his mind, foreboding loomed.

Fallon pushed herself hard as she ran. She couldn't shake the feeling that someone or something was watching her every move. Over and over, Ian's words rang in her head that they should bring in someone else. He had a point, but damn it all, she didn't want bureaucratic tape getting in the way, not to mention that more law enforcement would push the Maddoxes out of the loop. Was her ego and vendetta clouding her judgment on what would be best for those children? She shook her head as she pounded around the paved trail. *No way*. Her priority was getting them all out of there and she could find them faster without throwing up any red flags, which would alert those involved to move them.

Her lungs burned and her muscles ached but she kept going. She needed this. There was no one with whom she could spar until she was exhausted, so running was the second best option. Closing her eyes against the glare of the morning sun off the waters of Elliot Bay, Fallon ducked her head and dug down deep for more. Her body had it and gave it to her. As she came out of a secluded area and faced the glow of the day, Fallon noticed a man standing along the edge of the trail, one arm, his only arm, resting against the bench beside him. He was watching her.

Eyes narrowing from behind her sunglasses, Fallon kept her gaze on him. He was an older man and she noticed something familiar about his posture. She moved nearer and his eyes never left her.

As she was about to pass him, he opened his mouth and spoke, "Fallon Maddox?"

Running in place, she stared at him. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like a moment of your time."

"Right now? I'm a bit busy."

"Perhaps we could meet after you are done with your run."

“Who are you?” Fallon questioned.

“My name is Donal Cavanaugh.”

Ah shit, Ian’s dad. She stopped running. Hands on hips she looked at the man staring down at her. “We can walk and talk.”

He nodded and fell into step beside her. “You know who I am?”

Running her tongue over her teeth, Fallon answered, “Yes. You’re Detective Cavanaugh’s father.”

“My son seems to be very concerned with the way you’ve been treated by the police in their handling of the death of your father.”

“And this is your business how?” Fallon asked as she wiped the back of her hand across her forehead.

“I’m his father. I don’t want him to have problems on his job because of you.”

“Last time I looked, your son was a grown man. I didn’t ask him to be concerned for the way I was treated. Seems to me you’d be proud of him for standing up for what’s right despite what others want him to do. You were a cop, right? Didn’t it mean something to you to help others, I mean, isn’t that why you wore a badge, to help others?”

The man beside her muttered something in a language she didn’t know. They walked on in silence. As they rounded another corner, Donal spoke again, “I’m just concerned about my son’s future on the force. He worked hard to get to where he is.”

“Why do you assume that I would like him to lose his job or anything like that? Your son appears very capable to me.”

“What do you know about helping others?” Donal questioned.

“I’ve served my country. And I understand the desire to want to protect and honor the bonds you’ve made with the ones you consider to be family, but that isn’t always the best thing one can do.”

Her companion stopped walking and placed a hand on her arm. “Do you love my son?”

Fallon looked at him. Donal Cavanaugh was taller than she was, and despite having only one arm and being older, he still had an imposing look about him. His eyes were as gray as his son’s and just as shrewd.

“It’s really a very simple question, Ms. Maddox. Do you? Love my son?”

Admitting it to Ian had been hard, was she ready to tell his father? Licking her lips, she held the assessing gaze even though she wore sunglasses. “And if I do?”

"If you did, I'd probably say something like, good. But you haven't answered my question."

"You're right. I haven't." She started walking again.

"Well, if he's willing to stand up to me and my mouth for you, he obviously feels something for you. So when is the wedding and when do I get grandbabies?"

Fallon almost tripped over her feet. *Is he serious?* Casting a look to her left, she again found herself mesmerized by the steely determination in Donal's eyes. "Who said anything about a wedding?"

"I just did."

"Well, I don't know anything about that. A wedding and kids aren't high up on my list of things to do right now." *Had Ian talked to his father about this?*

"Not high on my son's list either, but I'm hoping that will change. We're not getting any younger."

She arched a brow and cocked her head to the side. "Well, in that case, do you have a schedule of when would be a good time for me to give birth? You know, so we can plan our lives around your schedule?"

Donal Cavanaugh didn't get angry at her response. He laughed instead. "I see why my son likes you. You don't back down at all." He took her hand and bowed over it. "It has been a pleasure Miz Maddox. I look forward to seeing you again soon."

Fallon stood there and watched as the older man turned around and headed back the way they'd come. She wasn't sure what to make of that interaction. She began walking along the path, continuing along the direction they'd been heading. Her mind whirled as she tried to figure out how this was going to go down. Stopping at another bench, she did her stretches then headed to her vehicle.

Sitting behind the wheel of her Xterra, she focused on Donal Cavanaugh. What was his angle? It didn't seem that Ian had told him anything about what they were going to do, but Donal could have been playing it coy. "Man," she muttered, starting the engine.

Fallon stopped at Starbucks on her way home and got a mocha. The house was quiet when she entered and as she sat in the kitchen eating toast, she found out why. The woman her brother, Shawn, had met on the pier, Lina, strolled into the kitchen dressed only in one of Shawn's shirts.

"Oh," Lina said, pressing a hand with bright purple paint on the nails to her mouth. "I didn't think anyone was here."

Breaking off a piece of toast, Fallon said, "Obviously." Chewing slowly she didn't say a word, just stared at her brother's *guest*. "Who are you?" she asked knowing full well what the woman's name was.

Lina appeared insulted. "Lina. What's there to eat around here?"

Fallon stood and walked to the sink where she placed her dish. Heading back to the table, she grabbed her half-drunk mocha and continued on to the living room. "Beats me, I'm not your cook. Wake up Shawn and have him fix you something." Sipping her drink, she walked off toward her room and shook her head in dismay as she caught sight of a leggy blonde coming down the stairs in a tank top and boxers.

"It's like a damn brothel in here," she muttered as she entered her room, shutting the door behind her. "They'd be all over my ass if I had a guy here." A smile flitted across her face as she imagined the reaction of her brothers they walked in to the kitchen to see Ian in nothing but pants, looking like he just rolled out of bed.

Feminine shrieks filled the air and Fallon sat on her bed and laughed as the sound of heavy footsteps thundered down the stairs. Setting her feet on the bed, she closed her eyes and finished her drink. With a groan, Fallon got up and took a shower. As she left the house, she saw the two women in the kitchen and Shawn. Clay was heading in from the living room. Both of her siblings only wore pants.

"Morn, Fallon," Clay said, raking a hand through his dark hair.

"Make sure this is clean before you leave." She jerked her head toward the kitchen. "I'm going out."

"You're not having breakfast?" he asked hopefully.

"I ain't cookin' for your women. Forget it." Fallon headed for the door and went to her vehicle. She had some things to take care of.

Chapter 17

Ian sat in the booth across from Detective Josh Sparks, a tall man who worked in Major Case. He had cold blue eyes and a beard that he stroked as he stared at Ian, sizing him up. Remaining silent, Ian waited for Detective Sparks to speak first.

"I hear you're looking for an antique or two," Sparks said, resting his big arms on the table.

"You heard right. Can you help?"

"I know people with such guns." He ate a chip from the basket. "What are you looking for specifically?"

"A Webley Mark IV." Ian watched Josh's expression; it hardened briefly before recomposing itself.

"Why are you looking for one of them?"

Ian smiled boyishly. "It's a present for me Da. That is one gun he'd personally like to have." Josh nodded. Ian's father was well known. "So," Ian continued, "if you know someone who has one I'd love to talk to them. But can we please keep it quiet, I'd like to be able to surprise him."

"I'll get in touch with some people and let you know."

Ian nodded and slid out of the booth without another word. As he walked away, he cast a glance over his shoulder and caught a glimpse of Josh on his cell phone. Slipping behind the wheel of his Cobra, Ian's thoughts drifted to a feisty woman named Fallon Maddox. He knew he had other things he *should* be thinking about. However, as he drove home, his mind returned to her and her dark beauty.

His cock hardened in his jeans and he struggled to remain focused on his driving. He sighed with relief as his garage door shut behind him. Going inside, he headed for his bedroom, pulling off his shirt along the way. He froze before his bed as he envisioned Fallon lying naked, waiting for him. With a groan, he rubbed his hand the bulge in his jeans.

Undoing his pants, he toed off his shoes and slid his jeans down his legs. His cock strained against his boxers and he tried to ignore it as he removed his socks. It refused to be ignored and throbbed insistently. Ian removed his boxers and tossed his clothing into the hamper. His erection stood out, begging for attention.

Padding to his shower, Ian set the temperature cool despite the cold rain that fell outside. Gritting his teeth, he bit back a hiss of discomfort as the cold water doused his skin. He locked his knees and stood there as his body acclimated to the temperature.

Still, despite the cold his erection refused to subside. "Fallon," he groaned, giving in and wrapping his fingers around the hard shaft. Her sultry eyes and luscious lips encouraged him. Up and down, he moved his hand. The smell he associated with Fallon: crispness, filled his senses. Falster and faster he fisted his cock, imagining it wasn't his hand gripping him, but Fallon's tight hot pussy.

A low moan built up from his chest and exploded of his mouth as his erection jerked and unloaded thick streams of cum. Shaky, Ian leaned against the shower wall until his world stopped spinning. Then he washed up and got out.

Moving through his house in only a towel, Ian set up his coffee table with the items he needed to clean his guns. There was something relaxing about doing that. Some of his best thoughts arrived when he cleaned his weapons. Putting on a pair of loose fitting jeans, he got to work.

He had cleaned one Glock and was almost done with the other when his doorbell rang. Setting the semi-automatic down, he walked to the door and pulled it open. Ian's breath caught from the cold air and the woman who stood there.

Fallon Maddox.

"Hello, Cavanaugh," she said softly, her eyes turning molten as they moved over his naked chest.

"Come on in." He stepped back to allow her entrance. His mouth was on hers even before the door fully shut behind them. Her warm mouth welcomed his seeking tongue and his groin responded immediately.

She pulled back and gave him a sexy smile. "Hi."

"Hi yourself," he said, huskily. "I missed you." Ian touched the side of her face gently.

"Well, I'd have been here sooner if I knew you were wandering around shirtless."

He kissed her fast and hard. "Want a drink?" Ian helped her out of her bomber jacket and his cock pulsed as he took in her tight black ribbed shirt. She wore green cargo pants and tennis shoes.

"Please. What are you up to?" she asked as they walked in the kitchen.

"Cleaning my gun," he said as he poured her some tea.

Her gaze trailed down to his crotch where it lingered for a moment before she met his eyes and smiled wickedly. "Really?"

Handing her the glass he nodded. "Really." Turning her head, Ian pointed to the coffee table. "See...my gun."

"Humph. I think this one is more impressive," she drawled softly as her free hand cupped his erection and stroked it through his jeans. Ian felt empty when she dropped her hand and walked to the tan couch.

"Tease," he muttered as he sat on his couch and picked up his gun again. He reassembled the second Glock, set it aside, then reached for his backup piece, slipping it out of its holster.

"A Walther PPK," Fallon said with a nod.

Ian looked at her. He forgotten she didn't like guns but it sure sounded like she knew them.

"Yes, my ankle's guardian. Is this making you uncomfortable?"

"No. I'm not *scared* of guns, I just don't like them. Keep on doing what you do. Naked male torso and guns." She winked. "Every woman's fantasy."

His jeans grew tighter at her words. He removed the magazine and cleared the chamber. "Not that I'm not happy to see you, but was there another reason you stopped by aside from turning me into a horny old man?"

Her husky laugh did more than warm him. It stroked his cock like a tight glove. Shifting on the seat, he focused his attention on her.

"Yes actually. Although we'll have to re-explore that whole horny bit." She smiled. "I wanted to invite you to Thanksgiving dinner."

Ian ran his tongue across his lips. She was asking him to spend a holiday with her. His heart skipped a few beats.

"I mean, there's no pressure," Fallon stated. "Just so you know the offer's there."

"I'd love to. Thank you for inviting me," he blurted out before she changed her mind and rescinded the offer.

"You sure you don't have plans that'll conflict?"

He grinned. "Oh no. I'll be yours...all day." His eyes followed the motion in her throat as she swallowed. Good to know he wasn't the only one feeling horny. Her responding smile sent volts of electricity straight to his groin.

The doorbell rang and Ian bit back a curse as he rose to get it. His father stood there and behind him...was his mother. *Shit!* Both of them looked mad enough to spit nails.

“Hello, Da. Ma.” With a deep breath, he stepped and both of them stomped through the door. He shut it quietly behind them.

“Tell your father, you and I are having Thanksgiving dinner together,” his mother demanded.

Well, I must say, it didn't start as early as I thought it would. Even so, he wished he had just ignored the door.

“You spent it with him last year, Brigid,” Donal griped. “I should be able to see my son for a holiday meal.”

His mother snapped, “Don't you just drink away your holidays, you old geezer?”

“Shut it, crone,” Donal returned. “My son is celebrating with me this year.”

“Ohhh, beer and pizza, how exciting.”

Ian rubbed his head. This could easily go on for hours.

“And what are you doing that's so damn special?” Donal asked.

Brigid looked down her nose at her ex and said, “Hank and I are have a big meal and I want Ian there.”

Hank? Ian looked at his dad. His father's gray eyes widened slightly at his mom's words before they grew cold.

“Hank? Keep him locked up, do you? Scared he's going to run away the first chance he gets? Probably not the best idea to have a cop over for dinner,” Donal ground out.

She sniffed indignantly. “He could leave if he wanted but usually is too exhausted from all our bedroom activities.”

As Ian watched his father's gaze narrow, he realized his da most likely still had feelings for his ex. Intervention was necessary. “Enough!” Ian demanded. “I already have plans. I'm going to be,” he moved to where Fallon sat silently on the tan couch, “with Fallon and her brothers.”

As he sat beside her, his parents stared, neither saying a word. His da headed for the other couch and sat, his gray eyes straying between him and Fallon. With a huff, his ma, sat in a recliner.

“This is a joke, right?” Brigid asked.

“No, Ma. It's not. I was extended an invitation and I accepted it.”

“What about us?” she whined.

“I thought you had *Hank*,” his father added.

“Well, maybe I'm thinking of you,” she bit off. “We all know you're all alone.”

“Maybe I should leave,” Fallon's soothing voice fell over Ian. Her toned body began to rise.

“No!” Ian emphasized. “You stay. They’ll stop or they can leave.”

His living room fell silent; both parents stared as Fallon retook her seat.

“I’m sorry, Miz Maddox,” Donal said. “It’s good to see you again.”

Ian looked between Fallon and his father. She wouldn’t meet his eyes but instead answered his da. “And you, sir.”

Reaching for the coffee table, Ian dragged it closer to him and began to clean his gun again. He stopped briefly to steal a drink of Fallon’s tea. “I’m afraid you two will be on your own this year,” he said as Fallon took the glass back.

“At least stop by in the morning so you can meet Hank.”

His father lifted his lip and snarled. “You start cooking in the morning?”

“Well, not too early. Hank and I like to lounge in bed in the mornings. You know after we’ve—”

“Ma!” Ian said, appalled. “I don’t need to hear that.” He looked at the woman who’d given him birth. Her gaze was mocking as she stared at her ex. Ian cast a glance to his father, who sat there looking like he’d swallowed something foul.

With a haughty sniff, Brigid stared at her son. “Do you always clean your gun shirtless?”

Ian caught the twitch of Fallon’s lips as she waited for his answer as well. Sending the woman beside him a warning glare, he smiled at his mom. “Not always, no.”

His dad stood, walked around to Fallon, and leaned over to whisper something in her ear before he kissed her cheek and touched the side of her face with his hand. “Goodbye Son, Miz Maddox.” Donal looked at Brigid. “Crone.” Then he left.

Ian watched as his mother’s shoulders slumped after his father left. *She’s still in love with him as well.* She stood too and said goodbye. “Do stop by in the morning, Ian.” She brushed a kiss on his cheek. “Goodbye.”

He walked his mom out and as he shut the door, he leaned against it briefly. Shaking his head over his parents’ behavior, he pushed away from the door and moved back toward the couch. And Fallon.

Fallon swallowed as she leaned against the back of the sofa. Her eyes lingered over Ian’s cut physique as he strode toward her. Each step

displayed his strength and grace. She stared at his lightly haired chest, defined pectorals, and rippled abs.

Damn!

Her body pulsed with passion as she watched him. His loose jeans rode low on lean hips. A trail of dark hair dipped below the waistline and she longed to follow it, knowing where it led. His gaze scorched her as he drew nearer. Almost lazily, he took a strong hand and shoved it through his auburn hair. She crossed her legs under her and held his steamy stare.

“Sorry about that,” he muttered. Ian retook the seat next to her.

“Your parents are very...um...colorful.”

He chuckled. “You have no idea. The way they fight, I’d swear there was still feeling between them. Then in the next second, I don’t know how they stayed married as long as they did.” Ian looked at her. “What did my da say to you?”

Fallon didn’t want to answer so she pointed back to the coffee table. “There’s some fouling on the breach, you should get that off.”

Ian cocked an eyebrow at her and she stared at him innocently. “Wouldn’t want that there,” he said in a slow drawl. The kind that made one’s toes curl and skin prickle with anticipation.

“I wouldn’t think so.” She reached for her tea and drank, grateful for the coolness that ran down her dry throat and lowered her body temperature.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten my question, Fallon,” he said as he worked diligently on reassembling his PPK.

Her eyes stayed on his hands as they worked. His strong fingers with their short square nails. She loved how they felt smoothing across her skin. Sucking her lower lip in her mouth, she imagined those long fingers bringing her to orgasm.

“Fallon?” Ian’s deep voice grabbed her daydreaming mind.

She cut her gaze to him and raised a brow. “Yes, Detective?”

“Something grab your attention? You were making such delectable little moans.”

Her belly quivered but she held his inquisitive stare. “I was just imagining your hands on my body and all the pleasure it brings me.”

His hands shook and he placed the PPK down in a clean spot of the table. Ian focused on her, his face as mask of pleasure/pain and reached for her.

“No touching, your hands are dirty.” She got to her feet and nudged her way between his legs. Fallon used her hand to press him back against the sofa.

“Fallon,” he said, half statement, half question.

“No touching, Detective.” Leaning over him, her fingers trailed a path down his bared chest. She watched his nipples harden and his breathing heighten. Licking her lips, she unbuttoned his jeans with slow and deliberate movements. Fallon lowered his zipper. Each click of the teeth opening sent tremors careening through her.

Ian held her gaze, his eyes molten silver as they bore into her. “Lift up,” she ordered. Lean hips rose, pushing his crotch closer to her face. Carefully she tugged his jeans down his legs and piled them on the floor. As if she weren’t desperate to get to the treasure that rested beneath his blue striped boxers, she never hastened her movements. Her eyes fixated upon his pelvic region and her mouth grew drier than a desert.

Fallon flicked her gaze back up to his face. It was set in a grim line as he tried to do as she’d ordered. His hands were out to the sides where they wouldn’t touch her. Dropping her eyes back to his lap, she moistened her lower lip and watched in satisfaction as the ridge in his boxers twitched. Her hands cupped him through the cotton and his deep moan filled the room.

“Fallon,” he ground out as his hips shifted against her touch.

She ignored him, slipping her hand in the slit of the boxers to allow skin on skin contact. Curling her fingers around the hard flesh, she purred with contentment. Freeing his erection, her other hand joined the first in touching him. Her thumb slid across the large mushroom head, smearing the drops of pre-cum. He shuddered but didn’t move.

Leaning forward, she swiped her tongue over the top, cleaning the salty substance. His lower half jerked. Standing upright, Fallon undid her own pants as she removed her tennis shoes. He watched her pants as they fell down her smooth legs. His breath hitched.

“See something you like, Detective?”

“Stop teasing me woman, before I forget my hands are dirty.”

“You just sit there, I’ll do all the work.” She lowered her panties and stepped closer to the man with the large erection. “Condom?” she asked in a hushed voice.

“Wallet,” he rasped, his biceps flexing as he sat there.

She turned and bent at the waist to grab his wallet. Holding the condom in her hand, she met the raging and unquenchable lust in his

argent gaze. His turgid member jugged up from a nest of dark hair and she wanted to slip it through her lips. Ripping open the square packet, Fallon sheathed his cock and positioned her body over top of the straining erection.

“Fallon,” he begged as his hands moved toward her.

“Keep your hands to yourself,” she reminded him as the head of his cock teased her wet pussy. Clenching her teeth, she sank down on his stiffness. “Oh,” she hissed as he stretched and filled her. A low moan slipped from his throat at the same time.

“Ride me, Fallon. Ride me hard, baby,” he rasped in a low gravelly tone.

Moving at a slow pace, Fallon bit her lower lips as pleasure rocketed through her. As her eyes rolled back in her head she asked, “Remember what I said about no touching?”

“Yes.” His voice was low.

“I changed my mind.”

Ecstasy raced over her as his strong hands settled upon her sensitive skin.

The room was silent despite the number of people that occupied it. All the faces were stern. The occasional sound of ice clinking against glass broke the quiet. Everyone jumped when one man slammed his hand down on the desk. His angry gaze swept across all the people there.

“How is it possible that no one had found the key or the photos?”

“We’ve searched everywhere, maybe the knowledge of their location went with him to the grave.”

“Don’t get smart, DeVane.” The warning came.

Rick DeVane mopped the beaded sweat off his face. “Sorry, sir,” he mumbled.

“There’s another shipment coming in two days. The auction is set for Black Friday, I expect your best game. This is a large group. Then we take a break until those fucking pictures are located.” He took a long drink of his scotch.

Rick sat quietly in his chair as silence once again reigned in the room. Staring at the faces with him, he felt a bit cowed by the powerful men in the room. How was it, that with all their persuasion, this one man—who was now dead—had managed to elude their attempts to discover the

proofs he held over them? Judge, attorneys, councilmen, and even the Deputy Mayor.

“Something on your mind, DeVane?” The question broke the heavy silence.

Glancing up at the man who headed their group, DeVane shook his head. “No sir.” Perhaps he was impressive in his squad, being their captain, but in this room, he was closer to the bottom of the food chain.

“Is your boy reined in now?”

DeVane gulped and met the cold eyes of the man asking the question. “Detective Cavanaugh told her the case was officially over and returned her father’s things to her.”

He swirled his drink. “That doesn’t answer my question. They seem to spend a lot of time together, still.”

Nodding, Rick said, “They do. And I can’t get anything else on her. Cavanaugh even went through a contact he has at NCIS but they wouldn’t give any more details on her.”

“Think there is something between them?”

“Yes,” Rick answered immediately. “He calls her all the time, all hours.”

“Anything good off the tap?” Deputy Mayor Silna questioned.

“No,” Rick answered. “They never talk about the case on the phone. For the most part they are setting up times and places to meet.”

“I want a bug on her as well. Home and cell. Get it done.” The man behind the desk rolled his chair back and stood. “We’re about to be even richer, let’s not fuck this up.”

Taking their cue from him, the others stood, drained any remainder of their drinks, and headed for the door held opened by a scantily dressed redhead.

“DeVane, you stay,” the voice commanded.

Shoving down his fear, Rick turned and headed for the seat he’d just vacated.

“Anything else?” the redhead questioned.

“Send in Xiu Juan and Dewei.”

“Right away, sir.” She backed out and pulled shut the massive oak door.

DeVane kept his eyes looking at the floor, knowing what was coming. His body stirred to life and he tried going over mundane police procedure to stay in control of his emotions. When the dark door opened, he lifted his

gaze to the sight of two young Asian children. They kept their eyes downcast as they stood waiting for instruction.

“Come here,” the deep voice rang through the darkened room.

At that command, DeVane lifted his head, beckoned to the other one as his free hand moved to his waist, and unbuckled his belt.

Chapter 18

How the hell did he talk me into this? Fallon shook her head as his hand tightened around hers. She had things to do, but instead of finalizing plans in Seattle, here she was on a Monday morning walking across Deception Pass Bridge with Ian Cavanaugh. When he glanced at her and smiled, she got her answer. There wasn't anywhere else she longed to be.

Ian wore a black shirt, body molding blue jeans, and his Seahawks jacket. He had this look of pure contentment on his face. His gray eyes sparkled with enthusiasm and love as he met her gaze.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he asked as he stopped and pressed her between his body and the railing.

Fallon looked down at the dark water of Deception Pass then her gaze took in the lush greens of the surrounding vegetation. "Absolutely."

Ian had shown up at six in the morning and told her he was taking her away for the day. He'd stopped her lists of protest with a kiss. And now, standing there with his masculine scent surrounding her as his powerful body pressed into hers, she was so glad she'd let him convince to come along.

His warm breath teased her as his hands splayed across her belly. "I love you, Fallon," he whispered.

Turning her head, she pressed her lips against this jaw, loving the feel of his stubble against her skin. "Likewise, Detective."

"Why don't you call me Ian when we're alone?"

She rotated so her butt was against the metal rail and slid her arms along his sides, on the inside of his jacket. "I'm sorry." Fallon looked up as he bent his head to meet her gaze.

"Have I told you how beautiful you are?" he asked brushing his lips across her temple.

"Not in about an hour," she said teasingly. Closing her eyes, Fallon pressed her head against his chest and listened to the beating of his heart. It was moments like these that she wished there were more of in her life. Unfortunately, she knew they had to be getting back and get things done.

Her phone chimed, telling her she got a text message. Fallon reached in her pocket, licked her lower lip, and smiled as she saw it was from Paul. She pressed the button to open the message.

Melinda knows.

Call ya in 2 days.

Luv ya.

Fallon read it twice before she swore and closed the message. Her body shook with rage.

Ian asked, "What is Paul doing sending you texts and who's Melinda?"

Fallon easily picked up on his jealousy and despite her own anger, she saw to him first. Shoving the phone back in her pocket she looked up at him. His mercurial eyes were angry and he had an adorable tic in his jaw. With a small smile, she slipped her arms around him and rubbed her cheek against the softness of his shirt.

"Paul sent me a coded message. He's telling me the cops have tapped my phone and the ship is coming in two days." Fallon pulled away from him. "We need to get back, I have work to do."

"What? Why the hell would they tap your phone?"

"My guess, they want to know if I've found the evidence and if so what I'm planning on doing with it." With a final glance out over Deception Pass, Fallon took Ian's hand and began the walk back to where they'd parked his car.

"Fallon?"

"Yes?" She kept them going even though she felt his step stutter.

"How did Paul know about your phone?" He stopped and used his strength to halt her forward progress. "Fallon, how'd he know?"

"My phone is kept under observation so they know if someone has tapped it." She looked at him. Frustration etched across his handsome face. "'Melinda' was our way of letting the other know someone was listening to what we're talking about."

"Do you still think we shouldn't bring anyone else in on this?"

Did she? "Yes and no. Yes, just on the fact it's a lot of people involved and no because there's no telling who's in on it. And if they've tapped my phone, I'm damn sure yours is as well."

His brows scrunched together. "My phone?"

"Of course. They're gonna want to know everything you're doing and with whom you're doing it."

A low string of curses that would make a trucker blush left his mouth as his eyes shot silver flames. Fallon tugged off a glove and laid her bare hand against his cheek. "It'll be over soon." Her insides shuddered as he pressed his lips against her palm.

"But will it end well?" He whispered his question.

She stroked her thumb along his skin. *I hope so, Ian.* "Come on," she said with forced cheer, "I'm hungry. All this exercise has worked up my appetite."

Instead of walking, Ian gathered her in his arms, pressing his chest against her back. He lowered his head down to the curve of her neck and kissed her. "Thank you for spending the day with me, Fallon." She shivered beneath his touch. His arms wrapped around her waist and his kisses changed to nibbles.

"Stop," she said, "that tickles." He held her tighter and continued his assault. Laughter bubbled up out of her. "Stop," she begged as they got knowing looks from others passing them by.

"Tell me what I want to hear," he rumbled against her pulsing jugular.

"Ian," she panted as his tongue began to tease her skin.

"God, I love the way my name sounds, rolling off your tongue." He tightened his hold and Fallon could feel his hard cock as it pressed into her.

"Feels like it," she sassed before she slipped out of his grasp. "Come on, old man. Let's go." Throwing him a challenging look, she set off at a jog.

Ian watched as Fallon got further from him. His eyes took in her easy, effortless gait. She wore loose-fitting jeans and had her green military jacket on over a shirt that said, 'Stop looking, we both know I'm cute.' A decorative banana clip gathered up her thick hair.

Shaking his head, he set off after her. She glanced over her shoulder and grinned. Turning so she was moving backward at a fast walk, Fallon beckoned to him, a teasing glint in her eyes.

"Come on, you can catch me."

His cock twitched at the idea of catching her before having his way with her. He loved how she looked at that moment. So carefree, beautiful, and happy. Instead of running to her he stopped. She slowed to a halt as well, cocked her head to the side, and stared at him.

Ian used one hand to point at her and back to the ground before him then crossed his arms. He held her gaze, not missing a single emotion that flashed across her stunning brown face. She shoved her hands in her jacket, braced her feet shoulder-width apart and kept eye contact. Using the hand resting on his bicep, he crooked his finger at her. He groaned as her tongue snuck out to wet her full lips. Fallon shook her head at him before she smiled and nodded at the people who walked by them on the bridge's sidewalk. Ian crooked his finger again and nodded when his eyes caught her nonverbal refusal.

"Come here, Fallon," he commanded. At the first sign of her negative response, he reiterated his order. "Fallon, come to me."

Ian knew he was being an arrogant and high-handed, but he couldn't give Fallon all the power. *Please, more like I don't want her to know she has all the power.* He arched a brow at her, determined she *would* come to him.

"Fallon," he said in a low rumble.

With the ease he'd come to expect from her, she moved toward him. Her body flowed with endless grace. Her gaze held his as she stopped before him, exactly where he'd pointed.

"Yes?" she asked softly.

Ian was at a loss for words. He loved her so much it hurt and that scared him more than he wanted to admit. She stared at him, waiting for him to say whatever was on his mind.

"Do you know what you do to me, woman?" He reached for the spot on her jacket right above where the zipper stopped and pulled her close. "Do you have any clue?"

Her expression gentled but she didn't say a word. The wind picked up and moved the silken strands of her hair gently in front of her face. Ian reached out, rubbed it between his fingers, and tucked the hair behind one ear. His thumb skimmed her cheekbone.

"I don't want to lose you, Fallon Delu," he murmured softly, bringing his other hand up to her smooth face. *You've changed my life. I can't go back to how it was before you.* Her amazing eyes stared back at him, gentle and inviting.

"Let's just enjoy the present, Detective." She touched the back of his right hand with her left and smiled. "Now feed me."

Ian knew that was her way of avoiding discussing where their relationship was going. *We're going to talk about this, Fallon.* "I'll let it go." He paused. "For now."

Sorrow was the only word he could come up with to explain the emotion that flashed in her gaze. His heart sank. Did she not see a future for them as he did?

Tightening her hold on his hand, Fallon turned and pulled him behind her as she led the way to his car. Quickening his steps until he walked beside her, Ian glanced at her. He skimmed his eyes over her features. They were set in her look of endless patience.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked as the car came into view.

Resting her head against his upper arm, Fallon tightened her hold on his hand. “How much fun I had today.”

Ian smirked arrogantly as he remembered their explosively passionate encounter in a secluded area. “It was fun, wasn’t it?” He grunted as her elbow rammed into him. “What?” he asked innocently as he pulled his keys out of his pocket.

“Not what I was talking about.”

Ian looked at her, her gaze was waiting for his, and he saw humor and exasperation in the brown depths. “Well, what’d you elbow me for? I agreed with you.”

“I saw that smirk,” she tossed out.

Ian grinned sheepishly. “Oh that.”

“Yeah, *that*.”

He leaned down and brushed their lips together. “Can’t deny it, Fallon. *That* was amazing as well.” As he stared at her, passion swirled in her eyes.

“Yes,” she said throatily, “yes it was.”

His cock stirred life as her husky voice flowed over him, strumming his nerves. One corner of her mouth tipped up in a slight smile and Ian knew she realized what her affect was on him.

“Get in the car, Fallon,” he ordered, unlocking the passenger door.

“Let me drive,” she purred as she sashayed her tight ass around the front to the driver’s side.

Ian’s eyes stayed glued to the sway of her hips as she flowed away from him. By the time her question sank in, he was ready to ravish her right up against the vehicle. To hell with the law. He’d never let anyone drive his car. As he stared at her, she merely held his gaze. There was no pouting lip, no batting eyelashes, just her straightforward stare.

All she did was blink once and when the tip of her tongue slipped out to moisten her full lips, he was a goner. His erection pressed against his jeans. With a sigh, Ian tossed the keys over to Fallon who caught them

easily. She blew him a kiss before capturing her lower lip in her teeth as she unlocked her door.

Ian expelled a harsh breath as he fastened his seat belt. He watched as Fallon shrugged out of her jacket and set it on the back seat. Her slender yet strong hand caressed the shifter and his cock hardened even more when his mind imagined her touch on his stick. As if reading his mind, she cut her eyes toward him, focused on his crotch briefly before meeting his gaze and winking. Fallon slipped on her sunglasses with one hand as she started the engine with the other.

She handled his car with ease and Ian found himself relaxing. Fallon was silent as she drove toward I-5.

“Where do you want to eat?” he asked as she merged onto I-5.

“Doesn’t matter to me. Tell me where you want to go.”

Home to my bed.

Ian grabbed her hand and pressed a kiss to the back of it, grateful she no longer wore gloves. After a while, he said, “How about this exit. They have a few choices.”

She squeezed his hand before pulling free and positioning her palm on the shifter. “Okay.” She changed lanes and got off the interstate. Without a word, she pulled into a restaurant.

Ian held her hand as they walked into the establishment. They were seated at a booth and Ian slid in beside her. When she arched a brow at him, he just gave her a soft smile. While they waited for the main course, they nibbled on mozzarella sticks.

“We need to talk, Fallon.”

He felt her sigh more than heard it. She glanced at him, sucked the bread off her finger and thumb and asked, “Why now?”

“You have a better time to do so?”

“It’s just that...” She paused. “With all that’s going on right now...”

Ian grabbed her chin and forced an eye connection. “I don’t want this to end and you just slip away without a word, Fallon. That would kill me.” His thumb caressed her jaw. “I want you in my life, even after this is over.”

“I...I...”

Ian’s heart sank as she failed to complete her thought.

“Were you lying when you said you loved me, Fallon?”

She stayed silent as their food arrived. When they were alone, Fallon turned so she faced him.

“No, I wasn’t lying.” His heart soared at that, but faltered a bit when she continued, “I don’t know what I’m doing next. I—”

Ian shushed her with a kiss. He didn’t want excused, didn’t want maybes. So, he covered her mouth with his and let his kiss tell her how he felt. He grinned as her moan filled him. Ian cupped her face and deepened the kiss. After his intense perusal of her mouth, he slowly ended the kiss. He loved how her eyes stared at him, full of shimmering passion. Ian felt his cock twitch again as her tongue snuck out and ran over her kiss-swollen lips as if grabbing every bit of his taste she could.

“Eat,” he rumbled in a raspy voice. Her sensual smile almost made him forget dinner and drag her ass back out to the car so he could have his way with her. Without a word, she picked up her fork and speared some grilled veggies.

Dinner was relaxed, although Ian couldn’t forget how she kept trying to avoid talking about their future. While they waited on dessert, his cell phone rang.

Flipping it open he said, “Cavanaugh.”

It was DeVane. Without thought, his body tensed.

“You need to come in,” DeVane ordered.

“Has something happened?” he asked, frowning. Ian had plans for the evening and none of them included the precinct or his captain. They included this woman—the only woman he’d ever allowed drive his car.

“How long till you get here?” his captain demanded.

“It’ll be awhile. I’m in Mount Vernon.”

“Mount Vernon!” DeVane thundered. “What the hell are you doing up there?”

Ian frowned. “It’s my day off, Captain. If you must know I spent the day up at Deception Pass.” He knew his tone betrayed his emotions but he didn’t care. Catching the waiter’s eye, he signaled for the check.

Silence reigned for a moment. Ian looked at Fallon who finished the rest of her drink. As he stared at her, she turned her head toward him and winked. He felt the tension in his body melt away.

“Get here when you can, Cavanaugh,” DeVane stated and then asked, “Are you on a date?”

Ian flashed his gaze to Fallon for the second time in seconds. “Yes, I am. So if there’s nothing else...we’ll be heading back now. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

DeVane hung up and Ian ran a hand over his eyes with a groan. The bill came and Ian signed and left a tip before saying to Fallon, "Let's get going."

Without a word about not getting dessert, she slid out of the booth and followed him out the door to his car. Ian headed for the passenger side and as he climbed in, he noticed the tender look Fallon gave him. He grinned to himself. He loved making her happy.

After they were back on the interstate, his phone rang again. "Cavanaugh."

"Haul ass, Cavanaugh. Your date will have to understand."

"Yes sir." He shut the phone and said to Fallon, "Pull over for a moment."

She did without question and after the car was safely off the road asked, "What's up?"

"I have to drive."

With a shrug, Fallon put the car in neutral and set the brake. By the time he realized it, she was standing beside the passenger door waiting for him to either slid over or get out. Climbing out, he looked down at her. "I'm sorry, it's just—"

"No need to explain," she muttered, slipping past him and sliding onto the leather seat.

Ian sighed heavily. Making his way back to the driver's side he got in and buckled up. Flipping two switches, he disengaged the brake, put the Cobra in gear, and tore off down the road, lights flashing. Keeping his focus on the I-5, he snuck a glance at Fallon. She rested comfortably against the seat.

"Fallon?" he said softly.

"What, Detective?" Her brown gaze found his.

"I'm sorry about this, but I can't let you drive with the lights on."

"I didn't require an explanation. It's fine." She returned her gaze out the windshield.

Ian swerved around the cars that wouldn't move over. He hated this, this situation was not what he expected to encounter.

"I'll make it up to you," he said as his car powered down the highway.

"There's nothing to make up for. I had a wonderful time today."

Ian looked over at her. She waited to make eye contact. "I just...wanted to spend the whole day with you," he told her. A soft smile filled her face.

“We have.”

“Not as long as I wanted.”

“You’re pouting, Detective.”

With a sigh, he nodded. “Yes I am. Is it working?” He bit back a groan as her hand settled on the upper part of his thigh. Her fingers moved in tiny circles and sent spikes of pleasure through him.

“Not sure.”

Ian covered her hand with his and kept the pedal pressed.

Idly stroking the inside of Ian’s thigh, Fallon thought back to her message from Paul. A fear of early discovery filled her. What if they knew about the plan? What if they’d moved the children? How long had Ian’s phone been tapped?

“Will you take my car home and pick me up later?” Ian’s deep voice questioned.

Warmth flowed through her veins. She could imagine sharing her life with this man. *So much for not wanting to get married again.* “You want me to wait for you at your house?”

“Yes. I want to go to bed with you in my arms, Fallon.”

Her belly clenched with desire. She stared at the man who drove close to 100 mph and took in his confident aura. Despite it all, she heard uncertainty in his statement, as if he wasn’t sure where he stood with her.

He slowed as they went through Lynnwood but with the lights still flashing, most of the cars got out of their way. Fallon stayed silent as they neared Seattle, allowing him the concentration needed. Ian brought the car to a screeching halt before the station and shut off the flashing lights. Turning his head, he looked at her. Ian reached for her face with one hand.

“My house is yours, Fallon. Please stay.”

Fallon turned her head and pressed her lips to his palm. “Go on, you’re needed in there.”

“What about here? Am I needed here?” he asked, his thumb skimming her bottom lip.

“Yes. Call me when you’re done.” She smiled softly. “Now get.”

Before she could blink, his mouth dominated hers. His thrusting tongue laid claim to her. Fallon gave everything he asked for and more. Her entire body burned for him.

“Bye baby,” he muttered as he climbed out of the car. Fallon had just finished straddling the gearshift while she maneuvered into the driver’s seat when he stuck his head back into the car. The words out of his mouth weren’t in English, but the heat in his tone and gaze sent her body back into extreme temperatures. One more brief kiss and he was gone, heading up the steps to his building. Her eyes followed the masculine stride he did oh-so-well.

“Damn,” she swore as she shifted into first, released the brake, and headed to his house. She stayed in the car until the garage door closed behind her. Fallon climbed out and entered his house. She stood by the door leading to the garage and looked around the empty house, lit only by a single lamp. Ian kept a neat home. Pushing away from the wall, Fallon turned on another light and headed toward the kitchen. The keys she placed on the spotless counter.

Flicking her gaze between the kitchen and living room, she padded toward his stereo and turned it on. Making note of the station she changed it to classic rock and grinned when Aerosmith blared through the speakers.

“Perfect,” she said and went to the kitchen. “Let’s see what we got in here, since I missed dessert.”

Soon the house was filled with the mouthwatering scent of brownies. Fallon curled up on one of his couches and flipped through the outdoor magazine that lay on the coffee table. Even as her mind absorbed the images, she knew she should be figuring out her plan of attack. She needed to get in touch with some people, but hesitated since she knew her phone was tapped.

Tossing the magazine back down, Fallon strolled back to his office. She turned on the light and smiled. Total masculine décor. It was nice, just not very colorful. She walked to the wall of photos and smiled as she looked at the picture of Ian as a rookie cop. He looked so innocent and idealistic, his eyes weren’t haunted yet. There were also shots of him and his family, both blood and the brothers in blue.

With a smile, she turned her attention to his desk and began to look for a legal pad. As the leather chair cradled her, Fallon imagined Ian making love to her in this chair. Her throat grew dry as she pictured riding his thick cock.

“Jesus, Fallon,” she snapped at herself. “Get a grip.” *I can’t help it, every time I have a moment, I think of Ian and that thought leads to sex. With Ian.* Spying a pad on the corner, she grabbed it along with a pen and

headed back to the kitchen where she sat at the table and began to jot things down.

The vibrating of her Blackberry on the counter reached her as she was in the process of removing the pan of steaming fudge brownies out of the oven. Setting it down on the hot pads, she grabbed for her phone.

“Maddox,” she said.

“Am I interrupting anything? You’re out of breath, baby,” Ian’s voice curled around her like velvet.

“Evenin’ Detective. Are you done?” A small spiral of heat began to unfurl in the pit of her stomach.

“Almost. I will be by the time you get here. What had you breathing hard?”

She chuckled. “I wasn’t near my phone.”

“Are you coming?”

That there’s a loaded question. “I’ll be leaving as soon as I grab the keys.” She turned off the oven and swiped the keys from the counter.

“I’ll be outside, waiting for you,” he said with silky promise.

“Okay,” she managed to return as her body thrummed and her pussy pulsed. Ending the call, Fallon slid behind the wheel of his Cobra Mustang and groaned. The car itself was a damn aphrodisiac and knowing Ian would soon join her only added to her arousal.

She waited in the driveway for the garage to close, then she put the car in gear and let the powerful engine take her where she needed to go. Driving up to the front of the building, Fallon couldn’t stop the smile that filled her face, courtesy of one Ian Cavanaugh. She left the car running as she watched Ian move toward her. His stride alone was enough to send another wave of longing through her. Her gaze ate him up like a starving man a feast.

Raw masculine power.

A grin sat plastered on his face as he pulled open the passenger door and climbed in. “Hey baby,” he said, leaning across for a brief yet intense kiss. Settling back, he fastened his seatbelt.

“Hey yourself,” she responded. Fallon shivered as his hand landed on the inside of her upper thigh. “Is everything okay?”

His sigh filled the car. “For now. Just a whole lotta shit, happenin’ at once.”

Fallon nodded and dropped it, understanding he didn’t want to or couldn’t tell her anymore.

“What about you? How were you?” He moved his fingers idly closer to the juncture of her thighs. Biting the inside of her lips, she bit back a groan.

“I began working on our plan. A little bit.” Flicking her gaze to him at a red light she added, “Imagined having sex in your office.” His strong fingers dug into the flesh of her inner thigh.

“Fallon,” he ground out.

“Sorry,” she said. “Thought you wanted to know what I did.” She whimpered as his fingers began to run up her crotch and back down. Slow, deliberate strokes. Meant to drive her crazy.

“We’ll have to make that a reality,” he murmured as he pressed harder against her already sensitive flesh.

Forcing her pulse back under control, Fallon kept her attention on the road. The drive back to his house was torture. As she turned onto his street, the sound of a zipper lowering reached her. Fallon’s mouth grew dry as in her peripheral vision she saw his fully erect cock. Her pussy gushed. Her hand trembled as she pushed the button for his garage.

Unable to stop herself, her gaze followed the motion of his hand as he slowly fisted himself with one hand and placed his other hand against her core. Fallon turned off the car, got unbuckled, and had begun shucking off her clothes, all before the garage door had completely shut. Shimmering out of her panties, she released a hiss as Ian slid two thick digits inside her.

“Get over here,” he rasped, removing his fingers.

Climbing over to the passenger side, Fallon straddled the man with the impressive erection. She couldn’t see his face since it was very dark, but she could feel his need. Teasing his cock with her pussy, she gasped when his hands grabbed her hips and jerked her down to settle on his thick rod.

“Oh God!” she screamed in pleasure.

“Shit!” Ian’s voice echoed hers.

Fallon threaded her fingers into his thick hair, pressing him close to her neck as she rode him. Up and down, back and forth, she moved on his cock. His mouth on her skin set her ablaze. His fingers left her hips to cup her breasts. Ian undid her bra and then covered her nipples, tugging, rolling, and pinching them with his fingers.

Fire licked up from her toes. The only sounds in the car were the ones of flesh meeting and their grunts. Her head fell back as she neared her pinnacle.

“Uh, uh, uh,” she panted as his shaft filled her repeatedly.

“I love you,” he uttered in her neck.

“Ian,” she cried as she neared what she knew was going to be a mind-blowing orgasm.

“Tell me,” he rasped. “Tell me baby.”

“I love you.”

His hips powered his erection deep into her. The seatbelt dug into the side of one leg but she didn’t give a damn. Instead, she increased her motion and groaned as Ian kept pace with her.

“Again,” he commanded as he released her nipples to dig his fingers into the flesh of her hips.

“I love you!” she screamed as her world shattered into tiny explosive pieces.

“I love you, Fallon. I love you.” He thrust up a few more times before he came deep inside her. She shuddered all over again as his cum covered her womb.

Spent and out of breath, Fallon collapsed against him. Hungrily their mouths met, tongues rubbed and danced with one another. She purred as his hands moved around and buried themselves in her hair. Fallon could feel his cock hardening deep inside her. Slowly the kiss ended and they sat there in the pitch black of the garage inside his muscle car. Foreheads touching, the only noise was that of their harsh breathing.

“Fallon?” Ian murmured softly.

Stroking his cheek, she asked, “What?”

“Did I hurt you?”

Burrowing her face into the side of his neck, she licked his skin, tasting his sweat. “Yes.” He tensed. “But in a very good way. Although this damn seatbelt thingy is digging into the side of my calf.” Fallon felt his hand down by her leg and groaned in relief when he moved the offending piece away from her flesh.

“What say we take this inside?” he asked.

“Sounds good to me.” Fallon nipped the side of his neck. She lifted off his cock only to squeal when he plunged back into her.

“Once more,” he ground out.

Swiveling her hips, Fallon bit her lower lip at the feeling this man evoked in her. “How many other women have you done this with in here?”

Chapter 19

Ian was shocked by not only the question but by the jealousy in her tone. He stopped moving in her slick heat and held her still on his lap. Leaning forward he reached for the door handle and opened the door. The dome light illuminated them. When he saw her try to hide her face, he grabbed her chin and forced an eye connection.

“Fallon,” he began.

“Never mind,” she bit off. Her lithe body tensed on his. When she began to lift off his cock, he tightened his grip, keeping her in place.

“No, Fallon. Not never mind. Look at me,” he ordered.

She refused and Ian took in the grim set of her jaw. Her lips had swollen from his earlier kisses and her skin had a flushed look to it. *She’s so fucking hot.*

Moving his hips, he bit back the grin that threatened when she bit her lower lip and moaned. “Look at me,” he said again in a gentler tone. This time she did as he requested. Her dark chocolaty eyes met his. “What we’re sharing in this car, I’ve never done with another person my entire life.”

“I had no right to ask that,” she muttered.

He kept moving slowly inside her as they held each other’s gazes. With one hand, he reached for her face and tugged her head down to meet his waiting lips. The kiss began slow and grew more intense as her hips began to move again, increasing the depth of his thrusts.

“I swear I’ve never done anything close to this with another person in here. Only you, baby. Only you.” Ian told her after he ended the kiss. “Jesus,” he ground out as her body tightened around his. Keeping his eyes on her, Ian watched as Fallon orgasmed hard on his cock. Her internal muscles gripped him and stroked him so he followed her over the cliff. With a low shout, he erupted within her pussy.

In the light from his car, Ian noticed the sweat on Fallon and how fast the pulse at her neck beat. He smiled and kissed her again. His car smelled of sex and sweat and he had never been so proud.

“I don’t know what it is about you, Fallon, but I can’t seem to keep my pants zipped when you’re around.”

She smiled. "Do you hear me complaining?" Fallon lifted herself off his cock and carefully stepped out into the garage.

Ian stared at her, standing there in her shirt and socks. Carefully putting his cock back in his pants, he zipped them but left the button undone. With a look to his left, he grinned as he saw her pants, shoes, and panties on the driver's side, both seat and floorboard. He grabbed them and his keys, and got out. Shutting the door, the garage was once again swamped by inky blackness. He felt her hand grab the back of his pants so he walked slow, carrying her things and doing his damndest to make sure she didn't hurt herself.

Pushing open the door to his house, he walked in and smiled all over again. The smell of brownies reached him. Pulling Fallon behind him, he took her back to the bedroom where he turned on the light and dumped her clothes on the floor.

Gathering her into his arms, he brushed their lips together. "Thank you. For everything."

"Give me a dry shirt to wear, I'm a bit chilled," she said.

He pressed his pelvis against her. "I know how to warm you back up."

"I want brownies." She kissed him and strode to his closet, leaving him to stare at her. Which he gladly did. Sitting down in a chair, Ian removed his shoes before taking off his jeans. Fallon pulled out one of his old academy shirts, stripped quickly, and pulled it on over her head. His shirt fell to her knees and he loved seeing her in it.

It didn't take him long to slip on some sweats and join Fallon in the kitchen where she had cut the brownies and placed one on a plate for each of them. He kissed the exposed skin on her shoulder as he moved around her to make some coffee for them. When really all he wanted to slip between her thighs and just love her. Ian couldn't get enough of her.

He joined her at the table where she ate the brownie and looked over the legal pad before her. "What's that?"

"Just some things I need to do before the *Ventura III* comes in." She met his gaze. "I'll have someone following wherever they unload them at and store them before the *auction*."

Ian nodded. At the thought of what was coming up, dread settled in the pit of his belly. He didn't think this was going to go well. Biting into the brownie, he enjoyed the rich taste. "These are wonderful, thank you."

"I needed my dessert," she said with a smile. "Anyway, I'm just scared that they may be onto us because the phones are tapped."

Shit! I didn't even think of that. "So, now what?"

“I’m gonna get in touch with Paul and see who he knows in the FBI that he trusts. I think they’ll have to be brought in.”

Ian could hear her reluctance to do so. Before he could say anything, his cell phone rang. Going to the counter, he picked it up and answered it without checking the caller id. “Cavanaugh.”

“He’ll sell.” The words reached him. It took Ian a few seconds to place the voice before he realized it was Josh Sparks.

“When and where?” Ian questioned him as he smiled at Fallon who watched him even as she licked brownie crumbs off her fingers. His cock throbbed and he had to force himself to stay where he was and listen to Detective Sparks.

“He’ll get in touch with you.” Click. Sparks was gone.

Flipping his phone shut, Ian frowned.

“What’s up?” Fallon asked.

“Got a bite for the sale of the gun. Don’t know who yet, but he’s supposed to get in touch with me.”

Ian could see the feral excitement in her gaze at his news and he knew without a doubt that Fallon would have no problem killing whoever murdered her father in cold blood. For a moment, the cold calculating look on her face repulsed him. Then she blinked and it all melted away, leaving behind the woman he had fallen in love with.

“You let me know when you do. I want a match off the gun.”

“I know you do, baby.” Ian kissed her before he grabbed them both some coffee and another brownie each.

Two hours later, Ian turned off the lights as he and Fallon headed back toward his bedroom together. He trailed behind her as the lone light from the bedroom highlighted her form as she moved. His gaze skimmed her from the top of her head, down to the soles of her bare feet and back up again. *I could seriously get used to seeing her here with me before bed every night.*

It was another hour or so before the couple finally allowed the sandman to do his job.

Fallon smiled at Dylan as she headed to the door. Her brothers were such pranksters. Opening the door a different smile filled her face as she stared up at Ian Cavanaugh.

“Hi baby,” he said leaning in to press a kiss to the corner of her mouth.

“Hey, glad you could make it.” She stepped back to let him in and closed the door on the blustery Seattle day.

“I wouldn’t’ve missed it for the world. Happy Thanksgiving.” He handed her a bottle of wine. “I didn’t know what else to bring.” Ian shrugged out of his black leather reefer jacket and hung it on the coat rack. Once it hung there, he took out a bottle of wine.

“This is perfect, thank you.” She let her hand trail over his dark green sweater. “Nice,” she purred. He wore an Aran sweater made out of Merino wool and a pair of relaxed fit dark charcoal trousers.

“You too, baby.” He stroked a finger along her cheek.

“Hey, Ian,” Shawn said as he approached. “Glad you came.” They shook hands before Shawn smacked him on the shoulder like old friends.

“Me too,” Ian responded.

Fallon bit back a smile at the sight of them together. She knew they would both get stupid and arrogant if they thought she was amused. Ian’s fingers trailed down her back before he followed Shawn further into the house. Fallon took a moment to herself and just stood there as she heard Shawn introduce Ian to Lina, his date, and KaraAnn, Clay’s date. She watched her family head to the kitchen.

Sadness filled her as she thought about her parents. She’d had years to get over losing her mom, not that it was easy, just easier. It was hard, knowing that Pops wouldn’t be around for any more holidays; still, her heart lightened as Ian walked back toward her. The only way to describe his expression would be ‘loving’.

“Are you okay, baby?” His question flowed over her like Egyptian cotton.

“I’m okay. Just missin’ Pops, is all.”

“Have I told you how beautiful you look today?” he asked by way of responding to her.

Fallon smiled, she knew he was trying to make her feel better. Blinking back the tears, she placed her hand on his chest, the heat of his body searing her though his thick sweater. “I think I should get back to the kitchen, keep an eye on things.”

His strong hand grabbed her upper arm and brought her back in close to him. Slowly his head lowered until their lips met in the barest of brushes. “I love you, Fallon Delu Maddox,” he whispered.

She cupped the side of his face before she headed for the kitchen and all the people in it. Fallon could feel Ian's presence behind her. Clay stood with his date and fell silent when Ian walked into the kitchen.

"Cavanaugh," he said after a moment.

"Clay," Ian answered in the same terse tone. "Happy Thanksgiving."

Fallon shot her brother a glare before sighing. Some things never change. At least they were being semi-civil to one another. Soon, she was lost in the final preparations for dinner. Her brothers' dates weren't helpful at all in the kitchen and so she utilized Dylan and a very willing Ian to help get things ready.

A while later, the front door opened to admit Herschel and his family. Fallon stood there and read the love in her brother's eyes.

"Happy Thanksgiving," he said before his arms slid around her, engulfing her in a powerful hug. "I just couldn't not be here for this."

"I'm so glad you're here, Hersh."

After kissing his cheek, she said hello to the rest of the family, and while everyone else exchanged greetings, she grabbed more chairs. A smile flitted across her face as she saw Ian go into the cupboard and pull out some more place settings. Laura walked into the kitchen loaded with more food and she set it on the countertop before pulling Fallon into a hug.

"Happy Thanksgiving, Fallon."

Hugging her back, Fallon answered, "Same to you, Laura. I'm so glad you all made it."

"Me, too," her sister-in-law said. "Now, what can I do to help? It doesn't look like their women are very good in a kitchen."

Fallon laughed. "You see that too, huh?"

Laura lowered her head and whispered conspiratorially, "Chest size is larger than IQ, I'd wager."

Smothering a laugh, Fallon bit her lower lip. "No argument here." Leading her to the counter, Fallon pointed out what remained to be done. Soon, she and Laura were finishing the last preparations of the meal. While they cooked, the men snacked on the shrimp cocktails, cut veggies, and cold meats.

At two in the afternoon, the entire Maddox clan and one Ian Cavanaugh sat down at a beautifully decorated table, loaded with food. Clayborne sat at the head of the table and on the other end sat Shawn. Herschel and his family were on one side, Lina and KaraAnn were sitting next to their respective dates. For herself, she was between Ian and Dylan.

Ian moved this thumb in small circles across Fallon's knuckles as Herschel gave the blessing. As everyone in the room said, "Amen," he raised his head and cast a glance at the woman beside him. She was so beautiful to him and grew more so each time he saw her.

Today she wore a cap-sleeve tie-waist purple dress that flattered her figure with its soft draped look. A v-neckline with ruching accentuated her breasts. The garment fell to her knees and had a mock sash at the empire waistband. The material moved seductively with her. The color of the dress offset the beautiful dark hue of her skin. She had on a pair of two-inch T-strap heels the identical color as her dress.

Around her neck and settling between her gorgeous breasts rested an elegant white gold pendant housing a purple/blue stone. Matching stones hung from her ears, set in the same metal as her necklace.

Clay carved the turkey while the sides began making a trip around the table. Ian looked on in awe at all the food before him. He hadn't seen a spread like this since before his parents got divorced. His mouth watered as he took in all the food before them.

"Here, Ian," Shawn's deep voice pulled him away from just staring at the food. He looked to see a big bowl of creamy mashed potatoes held out to him.

Taking the dish, Ian smiled his thanks and spooned some onto his plate. Looking to his right, he asked Fallon, "Would you like some?"

"Just try and stop me from eating any. Clay makes kickass taters." Fallon winked at him.

She scooped some onto her plate before taking the bowl from him and passing it on to Dylan. There was two types of stuffing, green beans, Brussels sprouts, dinner rolls, croissants, gravies, macaroni and cheese, turkey, honey baked ham, candied yams, potato salad, cranberry relish, fresh fruit, and more. There was wine to drink, tea, and water.

Dinner was lighthearted. Kylie and Kaitlyn kept people entertained and Ian couldn't recall a more enjoyable Thanksgiving dinner. Even the two other dinner guests were easy to talk to. Although, he believed those brothers could both do better.

They offered a large range of desserts as well. Pumpkin, sweet potato, pecan, chocolate, and lemon meringue pies. There were also brownies,

cakes, and some other sweets sitting out. They lingered around the table, ate dessert, and drank coffee, tea, or sodas for the twins.

Ian watched with a small smile as Fallon stood across the room, talking with Laura. The dishes remained forgotten on the table. Football was on the television and the guys were watching, as were the twins. Shawn and Clay's dates chatted amongst themselves.

He let his gaze linger on Fallon's firm body. She was so strong and yet, today she seemed delicate. Her hair sat gathered up off her neck, with only a few tendrils left to fall down the sides of her face. His heart clenched as she smiled and laughed at something Laura said. For the life of him, he couldn't picture his life without her in it, sharing it with him.

She glanced at him over her shoulder and sent him a smile that warmed him all over. He got up from the recliner and strode towards the women. Slipping his arms around her waist, he pressed a kiss to her cheek.

"Hey," she murmured. "Not watching football?"

"I think I will fall asleep if I don't get up and move around."

Fallon placed her hand over his forearm. "Okay. Laura, why don't you go sit down, you've done enough."

"Thank you for everything, Fallon," she said before she headed back to the living room and the loud cheers as they watched football.

"What about you?" Ian asked, well aware she'd busted her ass to get this ready.

"I'm gonna start cleaning up." She reached behind her and touched his cheek with one hand before removing herself from his embrace.

Determined to be helpful, Ian said immediately, "Let me help."

"Sure." Pointing to a small table in the living room, she added, "Can you move the desserts to there, so they can still eat some if they want to?"

"Sure thing." He did as she requested before joining her in the kitchen. For a moment, Ian leaned in the doorway and just watched her. She had tied an apron on to protect her dress and was putting leftovers in containers. One corner of his mouth lifted, he liked this—this domestic side of Fallon Maddox.

"Just gonna stand there and stare at me all day, Detective, or were you planning on actually assisting me?" her voice teased.

"Well, I don't know. I like watching you like this." He moved away from the doorway and prowled toward her. Laughter escaped as she glared at him. "Okay, okay. I'm ready to work, don't hurt me."

Her dark chocolate eyes twinkled. "You know you'd like me to hurt you, Detective," she purred. "You'd like me to do a lot of things to you."

Stepping up flush to her, he brushed his erection against her tight ass. “So true, baby, so true. Got time? We could work off some of some of that food we just ate?”

She chuckled and his body hardened more. “Get over there and bring me that mac-n-cheese please and thank you.”

Smacking her on the derriere, he sighed dramatically. “Fine.” They settled into a comfortable rhythm as they filled numerous holders. Ian snuck a glance at her as she filled a square receptacle with the leftover mashed potatoes. “Thank you for inviting me, Fallon. I had a wonderful time.”

She looked at him and licked the remaining potatoes off the spoon. His cock throbbed. After swallowing, she smiled. “I’m glad you came. It meant a lot to me.”

“Really?” He reached out and wiped a remaining trace of potatoes off her lip. “It meant a lot to me, too.”

“Oh God, get a room,” Shawn’s voice interrupted.

Ian didn’t even look away from her. “Sounds like a perfect idea to me,” Ian drawled. His mouth grew dry as he watched Fallon’s eyes fill with molten passion.

“What do you need, Shawn?” she asked. “Are you hungry again?”

“Just came in to get more coffee.”

Ian finally tore his gaze away from the delectable Fallon to meet Shawn’s half-amused, half-disgusted stare. Shawn shook his head and headed toward his sister.

“Thanks for a great meal, sis,” Shawn said, as he kissed her on the cheek on his way to the coffeepot.

“You’re welcome, Shawn.”

Ian sighed. The love between them was so strong it was palpable. He felt like an outsider. At least until Fallon turned her smile on him, where it banished the emotion. Shawn didn’t hang around after starting another pot. Instead, he kissed Fallon again, shot Ian a glare, and left them alone.

Fallon winked at him before he could say anything. “Okay, what’s next?” she asked.

Ian grabbed up the pan of green bean casserole and handed it to her. As she continued to put food away, he began to load the dishwasher. He stopped as Shawn returned for the freshly brewed pot of java. Putting in the soap packet, Ian shut the door and started the machine. It didn’t take long before the island was stacked with the containers and Fallon stacked the remaining dishes beside the sink.

“Come sit down, Fallon. You’ve done enough for the time being.” Ian placed his hand at the small of her back and guided her out to where the others sat watching the game. He escorted her to a love seat and took a seat beside her, resting his arm across the back. The tips of his fingers skimmed across the back of her neck.

“Here, Auntie Fallon. Momma said you need coffee and cake.” Kylie and Kaitlyn stood before Fallon.

Ian watched the twins hand her the items. A smile flitted across his lips as he noticed there were two clean forks resting on the plate. He gave the girls a smile. *So damn cute. I wonder what my and Fallon’s girls will look like.* That thought floored him. Casting a glance at the woman beside him, he sighed as she smiled at one of the girls. He couldn’t tell them apart, they were identically dressed.

Two pairs of beautiful blue eyes watched him. “Thank you,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” they responded together before skipping back to the game they played on the floor.

Reaching for a fork, Ian helped himself to the moist cake on the plate resting on Fallon’s leg. She took a sip of coffee and met his gaze over the cup’s rim. With a wink, he turned his attention to the screen and focused on the game, smiling as he noticed the Cowboys were losing.

“Is it done?” the liver-spotted man asked as his bony fingers curled like talons around his glass of bourbon.

“Almost sir,” Rick DeVane nodded as he stood before the large oak desk.

“I want it taken care of.”

“Less than six hours and it will be done. The meeting is being set up in the next few moments.”

“Good.” The grip on the glass was powerful despite the age of the man who held it. “You did well, son. You’ve made me proud.”

Rick preened. Acknowledgement didn’t often come from the man behind the desk. “Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t disappoint me.”

He swallowed. Those three words took all the joy he’d experienced at the praise and deflated it like a popped balloon. *I wouldn’t dream of it.* “No sir. I’m taking care of it personally.”

“Good.” With a practiced flick of his wrist, he drained the remaining amber liquid. “See you do.”

The door opened and in stepped Xiu Juan along with her brother, Dewei. Rick’s pulse increased as he gazed at the fresh young faces.

“You’re dismissed, DeVane.” Rick glanced at his father in shock. He’d fully expected to participate in what his father had planned. His shock must have showed because the old face hardened into an ugly mask.

“Why are you waiting?” he snapped. “Get out.”

Dropping his gaze, Rick nodded once, respectfully, and left.

Chapter 20

“Cavanaugh.” Ian smiled at Fallon as he spoke into his phone, sending impulses through her body.

She returned his smile and left him alone to talk on his cell. Standing in the kitchen, she started as the slight knocking on the back door. Setting down her tea, she moved to open it, cautious given the late hour.

A slim yet wiry Asian man stood there, shrouded in black clothing. His eyes were cold and calculating. They were the eyes of a man who’d seen too much.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“Spike sent me. We’ve got their location.”

Heart clenching, Fallon stepped out onto the back porch, shutting the door behind her, keeping the cold night out of the warm house. This explained why he came to the back door.

“How’d you get here?” Fallon questioned.

“I’ve been here since last night. That way no one would see us coming or going.”

“Have you eaten?” she asked with a frown. How off was she if she didn’t even notice someone in their backyard?

“I had some things with me.”

“Come inside and warm yourself while I fix you a plate of food.” Fallon noticed his hesitation and took his arm pulling him into the warm kitchen. Pressing him into a chair, Fallon grabbed a clean plate and began popping lids off containers to fix him dinner.

When he began to protest she shushed him and sat down across from him, sliding a drink toward him. She looked him over as he shrugged out of his thick jacket. Her gaze moved across the vast number of tattoos that marred his olive skin. On the left side of his neck, she picked out The Rapiers gang tat.

Still, she held her peace as he ate. Fallon glanced up and behind her as Ian strode into the kitchen, moving in that powerful way he seemed to own, hands down.

“Everything okay?” she asked.

“Fine. I have to go, though.” He paused and looked at her visitor. “I’m sorry, we haven’t met, I’m Ian.” Ian reached out his hand.

Fallon watched the exchange. She knew the look of distrust on her guests face. His black eyes flicked to her briefly, before he stuck out a hand, covered in more tats.

“Jin.”

A slight furrowing of Ian’s brows occurred before he looked back at her. “Can I have a word with you?” he questioned.

“Of course.” Fallon pushed away from the table. With a smile for Jin, she headed to the living room with Ian on her heels. Her brothers had left with family and dates, so it was essentially just her and Ian. “What’s up?” she queried once they were in the living room.

“What is he doing here? And why are you feeding him?”

Fallon grinned at his jealous tone. “He’s here as a favor and I’m feeding him because he’s hungry.”

“I don’t like it. It’s almost midnight and you’re inviting strange men into your house.”

With a small smile, she touched his cheek. “Don’t worry so. I’m well protected. I have a detective here to defend my honor.”

Rolling his eyes, he kissed her palm. “Crazy woman. I have to go. I’m meeting with whomever about the gun.”

Fear snaked through her at his words. *Should I tell him what Jin truly is doing here?* Was it a coincidence that the call for him came at the same time as they knew where the children were located?

“Be careful,” she ordered.

“Always.” He leaned close and placed his lips over hers. “Don’t think I didn’t notice The Rapier tat on the side of his neck,” Ian whispered after he ended the kiss.

“Never thought you didn’t see it,” she replied in the same low tone.

“Is he here about the kids?”

“Yes.”

Ian muttered a round of curses. “I wanted to hear what he said and go with you.”

“You do your thing. We’ve got this end covered. Remember, we’ll be calling it in to dispatch so I’m sure it will be going out over the scanner.”

Wrapping his strong arms around her, he held her in silence. The occasional scrape of Jin’s fork against the plate as he ate broke the quiet.

“Be careful, yourself, Fallon.”

She held him close. “Always.”

Ian stepped away and stared down at her. "I'll see you soon. I love you." He stroked his thumb along her lower lip before heading to the front door. He barely slowed as he grabbed his jacket off the coat rack and disappeared out the door.

Fallon didn't move until she heard a noise behind her. Glancing over her shoulder, she met Jin's inquisitive gaze.

"He your detective?" he asked, stuffing a piece of croissant in his mouth. She narrowed her eyes and he smiled, showing her a perfect set of teeth. "Spike told us you had a detective. That man screams 5-0."

"Spike seems to say a lot. What do you have for me on the location?" She firmly turned the direction of the conversation.

"We've had people on the ship since it landed. Both from us and the Double Z's." At the widening of her eyes he added, "Yes, we know about the meeting. Both sides were against it until Spike mentioned the human trafficking and sex slave ring." He licked his fingers. "We can go back to hating each other later."

"And you're sure you know where they are being held?"

Jin walked back to the kitchen and sat at the table before picking up his fork and eating some of the macaroni and cheese. "We know. There were lots of us keeping tabs on where they went. They're good." He flashed a mocking smile. "We're just better."

"Where are they?"

He scooped some potatoes into his mouth. After he swallowed, he sighed. "Two different warehouses."

Nodding, she took a deep breath. They would be spread thin, they needed to hit both warehouses at the same time. "Okay, give me the addresses."

Jin reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He carried a black cherry LG Chocolate cell phone. Sliding it open, he pressed some keys and slid it across the table to her. Picking it up, Fallon looked at the two addresses on the screen. Going for a sheet of paper, she wrote them down then used his phone to text her brothers, explaining the situation and sending Shawn and Clay to a different location, she would take the second one with Dylan.

"Spike said he and Truc will have men at each place." Jin took a drink. "I'm with you for the night. We have weapons at each place, waiting."

“Sounds good. I’ll use my phone to call it in to 9-1-1 once everyone is in place. They have it tapped. So my guess is they will be on their way before dispatch sends vehicles.”

Jin nodded as she talked. Fallon wasn’t expecting responses from him, it was just how she worked things out in her mind.

“Do you need any more food?” she asked, getting up from the table.

“No. I’m good. Thank you, it was very tasty.”

“I’ll be right back.” Fallon headed for her room, not bothered by the fact she was alone with a stranger in her house. She had other things on her mind.

Fifteen minutes later, Fallon and Jin left the house in the quiet Seattle neighborhood. She ran her hand down her black BDU’s. As she unlocked and entered her Xterra, her mind flashed to Ian and his meeting.

I hope he’s okay.

Ian put his car in neutral and let it idle outside the abandoned building. He hadn’t spent much time in this part of the city.

“Odd place.” He scanned the area. A feeling of unease settled in the pit of his stomach.

The voice on the other end of the line when he’d received the call at Fallon’s had rattled off a time and this destination. Ian was five minutes early. His instructions were to wait in the dark until someone came to the car.

It was all very strange and all the senses that made him a great detective were screaming at him. But, if this was the way to get the gun and a possible lead to whoever killed Gregory Maddox, then here he’d wait.

His anxiety grew as time passed. There was something wrong. Keeping an ear tuned to the low-set scanner, he watched the dark building. As he waited he debated calling Bill just to see if he would meet him here, but decided against it. He’d been ordered to come alone. Shaking his head, Ian sighed.

“I’m as nervous as a rookie.” Pulling one gun out of its holster, he chambered a round and got out of his car. The ringing of his cell phone surprised him and he frowned as he reached for it. “Cavanaugh,” he said in a soft tone.

“Are you there?” The question was barked.

It was Rick DeVane. This was a surprise. A huge one. "Captain?"

"Are you waiting as instructed?"

"I'm here. On my way into the—"

"No!" DeVane yelled. "Wait in the car. Keep it completely dark."

"Why all the secrecy, Captain? Am I getting the gun from you?"

"You ask a lot of questions. Now get back in your car and wait."

Why is he so keen on me being in the car? Am I being watched? He scanned the area but couldn't see a thing. The lights were useless and the cloudy sky gave good cover. He did as he'd been told, quietly pulling the door shut after him.

"I'm in the car."

"Now just wait. I'll be there soon," DeVane grunted and hung up.

A million questions raced through Ian's head. The main one being, why here and why now? Although why DeVane had gone through so much secrecy to get him here was a close second. He'd always trusted his gut and it was telling him to get out. Screaming actually.

Moving quickly, but as silently as possible, he opened his door and sipped out. With a few glances around, Ian headed for the still-dark warehouse.

KA-BOOM!

The noise reached him as the heat wave hurled him forward to the brick wall of the building.

Holy shit!

Ian felt something crack into the back of his skull and as he sank to the ground, unconsciousness swirling upon him, he grabbed for his phone and pressed a preset button. His phone fell from nerveless fingers as darkness overtook him.

Fallon met Jin's gaze as they crouched in the near dark by the backdoor of the warehouse. Dylan was at a different door with another gang member, this one from the Double Z's. Resting familiarly in her ear sat an ear bud that connected her to her brothers. "Everyone ready?" she asked.

Her mind whirled as affirmative answers reached her. This was dangerous. Anyone of her family could be in danger. Dylan's voice was the last voice she was waiting for.

There had been a change in plans. Members of the Double Z's were waiting by payphones to call this in. She would be calling in her contact given to her by Paul, Agent Jackie Carlson. As she listened to Jin telling people to go ahead and place their calls, she cracked open the door and slipped inside. Moments later, Jin joined her.

Flipping open her phone, Fallon placed her own call, dialing a memorized number. "It's going down. Get here fast." She knew the feds wouldn't be long in storming the building, they'd parked near, but not close enough to alert anyone who may have set up as a watch. Shoving the phone in her back pocket, she looked at Jin. "Let's do this."

Sneaking through the dark, she hesitated at a doorway. The faint glow of a light reached her. She could hear booted feet walking back and forth across the concrete floor. The steps indicated a lighter person but whoever it was carried themselves with assuredness. Sounds of bodies shuffling together also reached her.

Jin paused beside her and she saw him slip off the safety. "We should get moving. The others will be alerting them and the feds will be here soon. Sure you don't want a gun?" he asked.

Fallon shook her head and he pushed the gun into the back of his waistband. She knew Dylan had a gun as well, but she wasn't going to use one. Even though Jin and the Double Z were only there until the feds arrived, she would count on her hand-to-hand combat skills.

She waited for the man patrolling to come closer before she grabbed him around the neck and choked the air out of him until she felt his limbs relax as he sank into unconsciousness. Fallon dragged him backward, out of the room into the one where she'd waited for him and lowered his body in silence to the cold floor, keeping him in the shadows. Before she left him, she tossed his gun after she'd removed the clip from his AK-47 and threw it in a different direction.

In her ear, she caught snatches of her brothers as they did what she should be doing. Saving the kids. Gritting her teeth, Fallon put her head back in the game. Swiftly, she moved back in her original direction. As she passed cells full of children, she held a finger up to her lips. Not that they seemed inclined to make any noise. They just watched her with suspicious and wary eyes.

They were young, the oldest she'd wager not more than eleven or twelve. Her stomach clenched at the things they'd almost had to go through. The older ones comforted the younger ones, keeping the crying hushed. As if they expected some form of punishment for making noise.

“Dylan,” she muttered. “East side, there’s a room with kids in cells. Get here and keep an eye on them.”

“Kay,” he responded. She could hear his frustration. He thought she just wanted him out of danger, which she did, but that wasn’t her reason. Dylan was very good with children.

Staring at the frightened Chinese youngsters, Fallon flashed them a reassuring smile before she moved across the floor to the door located on the other side of the room. The next room was filled with pallets stacked high, containers, and more. There was noise and light coming from the other side of it.

She cast her gaze up toward the ceiling and around the room as she hid in the shadows. *Perfect place for lookouts.* “Jin, scout the top of the main room.”

“Sure.”

Fallon gave him a few seconds before she progressed further into the room. Sticking to the numerous shadows, she headed to the well-lit area. Peering around a large stack of barrels, Fallon bit back a hiss of disgust as her gaze took in the scene before her. One large screen with photos of each of the children she’d just left, on another, an enlarged photo of a child in the center with personal stats under it. A third large screen showed the interested and nodding faces of people who were listening to the speaking man. Sitting around in a semi-circle were more people, well dressed, watching another board that ran live bidding. The amounts kept climbing.

They were selling off the children. Her fingers clenched before she got her emotions back under control. The man talking in the middle turned and as she looked at his face, she swore. It was the deputy chief.

“Do it,” she muttered.

Jin and Sync, the member from the Double Z gang, opened fire on the gathering, not hitting people, just destroying the computers, screens, and lights.

Screams filled the air as those guarding the group began to return fire. Someone hit the lights for the entire room and everyone blinked as their eyes readjusted. Fallon frowned as she stared at the large man across from her. Before he could pull the trigger, instinct took over and she kicked it out of his hands and began to fight with him.

She heard the radio at his side crackle as a panicked voice yelled they were under attack. Clay and Shawn's presence had been discovered. As she put the man down on the floor, she moved on to the next one, her body

in total Krav Maga mode, neutralize your attacker as quickly as possible. Fallon wanted the deputy chief, wanted to make sure he didn't escape before the feds showed up.

She could hear the sirens and she hollered to Jin and Sync, "Get out of here."

"What about you?" Jin's voice reached her.

"Go," she ordered. "They'll be here soon."

She dispatched her next opponent and pressed closer towards the deputy chief who attempted to slip away. Ducking as bullets whizzed past her head, Fallon picked up the pace a bit. She passed fallen people, yet, didn't stop. When she made it to the edge of the room, she noticed the cop running off down the darkened hall.

"Sis?" Dylan asked. "You okay?"

"Keep sharp, Dylan," she ordered even as she heard an outside door being blown open. "Never mind that, get out of there."

"What?"

"Get out of here, Dylan. Go home, now. Get out of here." She stopped to grab a small chunk of cement and hurled it down the hall at the man trying to get away. It hit him in the lower back. Despite the gravity of the situation, a small chuckle escaped as he crumpled to the floor, screaming in pain.

"FBI, FBI, everyone down. Everyone down!" A deep voice hollered. She looked up found herself staring at the business end of an M-4 Carbine assault rifle.

Fallon froze, even though she kept an eye on the man she'd knocked to the floor. She heard him arguing with the agent restraining him as well.

"I'm Deputy Chief of Police, I demand you let me go!" he shouted.

"Sorry sir. No one is going anywhere until we get this all straightened out," a snide voice returned.

Fallon's gaze took in officers of Seattle PD intermingled with ones wearing the blue blazers with the brilliant yellow lettering across the back that identified themselves. *As if the feds can't tell which ones are their own. Uptight bunch of...*

"Identification," the one holding the gun on her said.

"Okay," she agreed. "I need to talk to Agent Carlson." Fallon slowly got to her feet. "My ID is in my vehicle." The man narrowed his eyes at her. She bristled in response. "Do you think we could *lower* the gun now?"

"Let me search you."

Spreading her legs a bit more, Fallon waited for the impersonal touch of a man searching for weapons. He finished in a few seconds. When the man stepped back, he gestured with his gun toward the cold wall. She took it to mean she should stand over there. Ignoring his silent directive, Fallon held his gaze. "You were just about to point me in the direction of Agent Carlson," she prodded.

As the agent frowned at her, she heard a code called out over the radio that had all of the Seattle officers antsy.

"Code 510. I've got a Code 510. I have an officer down at Marion and Western. Roll a bus! Now! Goddamn it. My partner's down!"

Fallon frowned as the words hit her. Then she looked up and caught sight of a dour-faced man, and the downed officer slipped her mind. "Agent Carlson?"

The man arched a brow and said, "Fallon Maddox?"

"Yes sir."

Every muscle in his body ached. Slowly he opened his eyes. He could hear sirens and see the flashing lights. It took a while before things came into focus. The first thing he saw was Bill's face. His partner's face looked all scrunched and worried.

It didn't take Ian long to figure out he had an oxygen mask on over his mouth. "What's going on?" he rasped.

"Don't try to talk, Ian. Just hang in there. We're almost to the hospital."

Hospital? His head screamed with agony as he tried to remember what happened. Bill's face began to fade as darkness swarmed in on him again.

There were other voices yelling some garbled mess about stats and he felt people touching him all over. He wanted it to stop, longing for silence.

"Hang in there, Ian!" Bill shouted. "Stay with me."

Ian couldn't summon enough energy to respond. He heard Bill yell as he faded into the blackness, "Move this damn thing! That's my partner lying there." Then there was nothing.

Chapter 21

Bill O'Neill gripped the limp hand of his partner, Ian Cavanaugh as the ambulance sped through the rain-slicked streets. He offered up prayers to God every few seconds. He thought of Ian as his younger brother. When he'd gotten a call from him and answered, there had been no talking. All he'd heard on the phone was the sound of something burning, and then came an explosion.

Moving with the speed of a much younger man, Bill had someone track Ian's phone. His skin still crawled as he recalled the scene he'd discovered upon his arrival. It had begun to rain, the temperature plunging with each raindrop that fell from the dark sky.

Before him sat Ian's Cobra, burning eerily in the mist and rain. Screaming for his partner, Bill scrambled to the body he saw lying near the warehouse building. It didn't take long for him to call out the Code 510. The blood streaming from Ian's body had blended with the rain, and Bill was afraid to move him. He checked for a pulse, it was faint, yet there.

While he waited for the ambulance to arrive, he sat on the ground beside his partner and protected him the best he could from the increasing rain. Bill ignored the fact there may still be someone out there, honestly, he doubted it, since if they were there, they probably would have finished them both off.

Making sure Ian could breathe, Bill, waited with increasing impatience until the paramedics showed up and stabilized Ian. Climbing into the ambulance with Ian, he watched as a fire truck pulled up and began to douse the flames still burning on his car.

"Move this hunk of junk," Bill snapped at a young EMT that climbed behind the wheel. They waited until two pounds hit the back door before the driver gunned the engine taking them away from the scene.

Bill's heart skipped a beat when Ian's gray eyes opened and he looked right at him. It was like looking at him, and yet at the same time, not. There was confusion and pain in the gray orbs. Bill grew even more frightened as Ian faded back into unconsciousness. Images of Ian as a strong and healthy man vanished, leaving a shell in its place. The bruising,

pale skin, shallow breaths. Nothing like the man who'd been his partner for years now.

Only after they arrived at the hospital did Bill heave a sigh of relief. Waiting doctors and residents rushed ahead and did a smooth exchange with the paramedics. Bill followed as far as he could before he was refused further admittance. His hand resting on the wood of the swinging door, he sighed and offered up another prayer. When he turned around, he saw a bunch of other detectives and cops streaming in to offer support.

With one last glance through the doors leading toward surgery, Bill turned his attention on the people gathered around him. He answered what questions he could.

Fallon knew there were going to be more questions. But for the time being, Agent Jackie Carlson had allowed her to go. She called her brothers and made sure they were okay. They were okay, and although detained, it was what they'd expected to happen.

The agent who'd aimed the gun at her walked her to her vehicle. "You'll be reachable?" the man asked, his eyes no longer as professional as they scanned her body.

Staring at him as the flashing red and blue lights highlighted his clothing, Fallon nodded. "Yes, Agent Carlson has all my information." She unlocked her vehicle and arched a brow as the man opened the door for her.

"Great, so we'll be in touch."

Is he coming on to me? "Okay." She climbed in and tried to shut the door, but he held onto it. "Something else, Agent?"

He stared at her for a few moments before shaking his head. "No ma'am. That'll be all from me for now."

She started the engine as her door shut on the increasingly wet night. The back of her neck prickled and she worried her lower lip as she dialed her brother, Dylan. He should have checked in by now. She frowned as no answer was forthcoming.

Fallon couldn't stop the fear from growing in her belly as she headed toward the house. She called Shawn and asked if either he or Clay had heard from Dylan. That was a negative. "Damn it, Dylan, where are you?"

She turned onto her street, shut off the lights, and pulled to the side of the road, parking along the curb. Vehicles she didn't recognize were in the

driveway. Hopping across to the passenger seat, Fallon snuck out of her Xterra and stayed low, even the feel of the cold rain not penetrating through the dread that cloaked her.

Sneaking along to the back of her house, Fallon quietly crept into the backyard. Loud crashes reached her ears from the inside and fear rose again within her, and on its heels rage followed close. Silently she vaulted over the railing and landed beside the door leading to the kitchen.

She opened it slowly and peered inside. No one was in the kitchen and so she eased her way in. It was unlit in this room and she could hear mumbling, crying, and some muffled yelling.

“I’m going out to my vehicle, and when I come back, I want what I’m looking for. No more games, no more playing around. You either give it up or I’m going to kill everyone.”

Fallon hissed as DeVane’s voice reached her. Its cold malevolence made her shiver. The one who answered him made her gasp. It was Dylan.

“I’ll not tell you anything, even if I knew,” he muttered defiantly.

She hugged the wall of the kitchen as a large figure moved past the doorway. Three soft pops reached her seconds before the front door slammed shut. Fallon would never forget that sound. Despite the knowledge of what she knew she heard, nothing in all her years could have prepared her for the sight that greeted her as she stepped into the living room.

Windows again were broken and the house trashed but she glossed over all that as her gaze landed on the people in the room. Herschel’s family sat tied up in a corner, eyes wide with tears and terror, Herschel lay in a crumpled heap beside them, and on the floor in the middle of the room...laid Dylan.

His red blood seeped out onto the tan carpet. She could see he was doing his best not to cry, but was fighting a losing battle. His pale green eyes were full of pain and tears. His normally pale skin seemed extra pasty.

She sank to the carpet beside him and gathered him into her arms, heedless of the blood running out of his body and onto her and the floor. “Hang in there, Dylan. Oh God, hang in there.” Blinking back tears of her own, Fallon grabbed for her cell and dialed Clay, then Shawn. “Dylan’s been shot,” she said before hanging up and calling for an ambulance. His blood was warm and slick as it seeped into her clothing and touched her skin.

"I'm scared." His voice was weak. "Help me, Fallon. Please. I don't wanna die."

Fallon brushed a hand along the side of his face, knowing there was nothing she could do for him, not with three holes in him. "I'm right here, Dylan. Hang in there, I called the ambulance. It's coming. Just hang in there."

"They wanted photos. I tried to fight back." He fell silent shuddering. "Cold," he muttered. "So cold."

Without looking away from him, she grabbed for the blanket on the couch and covered his frail body. Not for a second did she turn her gaze from him, scared she'd lose him if she did. "Stay with me, Dylan. Come on, baby brother. Stay with me."

He looked up at her and tried to smile. "Guess I don't have to worry about a house anymore, do I?" His words grew garbled as he struggled to breathe. The death rattle crept into his voice as he did his best to hang on.

Dylan reached up with one bloodied hand and stroked it down the side of her face. She grabbed it with her own and tried to squeeze life back into him. It was not going to work, no matter how much she longed for it to do so. *Don't leave me Dylan. Please don't leave me.* His eyes never wavered from hers as he breathed his last. His final sigh echoed throughout her soul and tore it in half. Tears streaked down her face as she reached out and slowly closed his green eyes forever.

Her features sobered as she pressed a kiss to his forehead. *That bastard has gone too far this time.* Despite the murder in her heart, Fallon was extremely gentle as she lowered Dylan's dead body back to the floor and covered his face with the blanket. Without a word, she drew her knife, moved to the huddled family, and freed them.

"Fallon," Laura began as she tossed the gag and gathered her children to her, pressing their faces against her chest to keep them from seeing their uncle dead on the floor.

"Get out, Laura. Get to the back room and stay low. Things are going to get ugly."

Fallon checked to make sure Herschel was breathing okay before she headed back toward where a fully covered Dylan lay on the floor. Leaning down, she grabbed the gun resting beside him. Taking more ammunition from his pocket, she loaded and readied the Browning Hi-Power before straightening the blanket back over her brother. As her hand curled around the butt of the gun, she felt herself hardening. Her skin prickled and she knew her body had remembered its combat training.

When the door opened, she fired and watched with dispassionate eyes as two men fell to the floor in her house's entryway. Determined steps took her closer to the man who'd taken her brother from her.

Unpleasant surprise blanched Rick DeVane's face as she strode out onto the porch like Nemesis. He stood by his vehicle and when he turned his gaze from the fallen men to her, he reached for his gun. Without hesitation, she raised hers and pulled the trigger, sending a bullet to lodge in the fleshy part of his thigh.

"Fuck!" he hollered and dropped his gun, his fat hands reaching toward the injury.

"You killed my brother. You gotta die." A shot from the other side of his SUV winged her shoulder, but she didn't flinch, instead she looked at the one who'd shot her and put two in his chest, hardly blinking when he sank to the ground. Then she glanced back at DeVane, who was calling on his radio for backup. "What makes you think I won't kill you before anyone arrives?"

"I'm a cop. You don't want to be known as a cop killer."

Her shoulder throbbed, but she ignored it. "I think killing you would be good for everyone in this city."

His eyes narrowed in hate. "Stupid bitch. Just couldn't keep your nose out of other people's business. Just like your old man. Taking things that weren't his, getting involved in things that were none of his affair."

In that moment, she knew. She didn't need a gun and ballistics, or a match of any other kind to tell her. Rick DeVane killed her father. "You killed Pops," she stated, not asking, but telling.

"Yes. I did. And you'll never find the gun since it got blown up tonight with your lover."

Ian! Keeping her face impassive, Fallon held his gaze in the muted light. For all she knew it was a trick. Her eyes narrowed against the rain that increased in intensity. "It's over, DeVane," she said. "The only question now is how much do I make you suffer for the pain you've put my family through?"

"The cops are coming and they'll kill you without hesitation." He sounded gleeful.

"I don't care." Fallon moved closer to him and didn't stop until she was right in his personal space. Cocking her head to the side, she pressed the barrel of the Browning to his forehead. "Because you'll still be dead." Shoving it hard against his skull, he gulped and tried to step back. Fallon followed. "Unlike you and how you did Pops, you coward, I won't do it in

the back of your head. I wanna watch your eyes as I pull the trigger. I want to see the life drain from your worthless body.”

Fallon saw fear and desperation wash into his gaze. She heard the sirens and knew her time was running out. With a deep breath, she began to squeeze the trigger.

“Fallon.” A voice reached her from the darkness. “Don’t do this.”

“Dylan’s dead, Clay,” Fallon said without retreating from her position. “This bastard killed him just like he killed Pops.”

In her peripheral view, she watched as Clay, Shawn, and a beaten up Herschel materialized out of the shadows. All three of them had guns and they pointed them at DeVane.

“We know, Fallon.” Clay stood on her left, Shawn on her right, and Herschel next to Shawn. “Think about this. Think about what you’re doing.”

“I know what I’m doing. Avenging Pops and Dylan.” “Is this what they would have wanted?” Clay asked.

Her hand shook. Furiously blinking back tears, Fallon looked at her eldest brother before glaring back at DeVane. “Yes,” she snapped.

Clay reached out and lowered her gun before turning her face towards his. “No, it isn’t. Look at what it’s turning you into. You don’t like guns and now you’re ready to put one between his eyes. It’s over, Fallon. The feds have the evidence, this bastard has no escape, don’t let him win again by giving him his freedom with a bullet. Make him pay for his crimes. Make him live the rest of his life behind bars.”

This side of Clay shocked to her. He was always the shoot-first-ask-questions-later kind of man. “He doesn’t deserve to live!” she bit off.

“No argument here, but if you kill him, he wins.” Clay pulled her into his arms and held her.

Fallon struggled but Clay never let go. A grunt made her turn her head in time to see DeVane crumple to the ground. Herschel stood over him and his face was set in grim lines as he met her gaze. She didn’t argue when Shawn took her gun from her. As if she were a little child, Clay swept her off her feet and carried her up the steps and into the house.

Once they were back in the living room, Clay put Fallon down and she scrambled over to where Dylan still lay covered by the blanket. She sat with him, her hand stroking the side of his face. She never moved, not even when the cops and paramedics showed up. At the front of the pack was Agent Carlson. His blue eyes swept over the scene and when they found her, he gave her a sympathetic smile.

Crouching before her, he touched her leg. "We need to get you to a hospital and checked out." He glanced down at Dylan. "I'm sorry for your loss." Looking over his shoulder he hollered, "Sam, get the car and take her to the hospital, she's been shot in the shoulder."

Fallon brushed her lips over Dylan's forehead and slowly got back on her feet. She looked around the room, Clay and Shawn were talking to agents and officers. Herschel was holding both of his girls and Laura was as close as she could be to him. Tears welled up as she stole a final look at Dylan, he looked so alone.

"I'll catch up with you at the hospital, Miz Maddox," Agent Carlson said.

"Sure." Silently she walked through the chaos of the house and followed the man named Sam out to an idling car. She watched DeVane yelling something from the backseat of another vehicle. Her shoulder began aching as she settled into the front seat. Now that the adrenaline was slowing down, the pain was arriving.

She remained mute as Sam called ahead and let them know he was bringing in a gunshot wound to the shoulder. A wheelchair was waiting and Fallon closed her eyes against the bright glare of the hospital's emergency room as they pushed her down the hall.

It didn't take long before Fallon was reclining on a bed waiting for them to say she could leave. Her shoulder stung but the bullet had just torn through muscle. The curtain slid back and in walked Agent Carlson.

Fallon held his blue gaze as he approached the bed. For a moment, he didn't say a word, just stood there and stared down at her. Still she waited.

"Thank you for helping stop that disgusting activity."

She nodded once.

"I really should arrest you. You can't do anything like that again. If you suspect something like that, you need to come to us a lot sooner."

Waving him quiet, Fallon asked, "Do you plan on arresting me?"

Carlson smiled, showing her his crooked front teeth. "Nope. Just please don't do anything like this again." He patted her hand. "I'd hate to have to arrest you in the future. Now, I know there are some people here who want to see you." As the words left his mouth, the privacy screen moved back and in walked her brothers.

"So what happens now?" Shawn asked Agent Carlson.

"I would suggest you take real good care of your sister, here. And...stay out of trouble."

"That's it?" Shawn narrowed his eyes.

“As far as I know, you were wounded in a break-in at your house, part of which was an overflow from our sting that went down a bit earlier. Y’all were never there at the warehouses.” He gave them a two-fingered salute, looked Fallon over one more time, and slipped away, leaving the siblings alone.

“I think our baby sis has an admirer,” Herschel stated.

“Shut up, Hersh,” Fallon snapped.

“Oh, Fallon, before you go, your detective is in here, you should check on him.”

“Ian?” Her mind raced to what DeVane had said. “What happened to him?”

“Don’t know,” Clay said. “All they said was he’s lucky to be alive.”

“I have to see him.” She swung her legs over the side of the bed. When her brothers stepped in front of her, she glared at them. “Get out of my way.”

“Do you love him?” Clay asked.

“Yes, I do. I love him.” Fallon watched as her brothers all looked at one another.

“Then go to him, Fallon,” Clay said. “Go be there when he wakes up.”

Smiling at her family, Fallon kissed them all, slipped out of the small area, and headed towards admittance. She saw a bunch of cops hanging around and was about to go up to one when a voice behind her grabbed her attention.

“Fallon?”

Turning around, she found herself face to face with Ian’s partner. The man looked much older than she remembered him appearing. “Detective O’Neill, right?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am.” His eyes skimmed over her newly bandaged shoulder. “You okay?”

“Bullet just grazed me. Where’s Ian?”

Bill licked his lips and held her gaze. “Let’s go sit down over there,” he said pointing to a row of chairs that were partially full.

She didn’t want to go, she wanted to find Ian and see for herself if he was okay or not. Somehow, she made her feet follow Bill over to the plastic chairs. Fallon sank into the end seat and Bill settled his lanky body right next to her, allowing their knees to touch.

“What’s going on?”

"I don't think there's really a way to say this other than to just come out and say it. Ian's in a coma."

She would have fallen to the floor if she hadn't already been sitting. "What happened?" Fallon hardly recognized her own voice.

"Someone blew up his car."

She gasped and Bill reached for her hand, holding it tightly in his. *Someone blew up his car? Oh sweet Jesus.*

"He wasn't in it, but he was hit in the back with a piece of flying metal. I wasn't that long in getting to him, but by the time I got there, he was already unconscious. He woke up briefly in the ambulance but hasn't regained consciousness since. His shoulder is sprained and he has a gash in his leg from something slashing into him, but otherwise, he's okay. He just won't wake up."

Her mouth was dry. She licked her lips a few times before she said anything. Fallon took a deep breath and asked, "Can I see him?" Every instinct she possessed screamed for her to not ask, just go. Nevertheless, she refrained.

Bill stood and waited for her to join him. "I'll do my best to get you in the room."

She felt like it was a funeral procession as she walked beside Bill heading up the hall to the room where Ian lay. Officers and detectives lined the walls, their gazes sharp and assessing as she moved past all of them. Their expressions were somber.

A guard was at the door and Bill held out his hand toward her. "Let me see if you can go in." She was chomping at the bit but she nodded her head. It didn't take Bill long before he was back beside her. Fallon lifted her gaze to his expectantly. "The doctor says you can have a few minutes with him."

Worrying her lower lip with her teeth, Fallon dropped her gaze to the floor, slipped past Bill, and entered Ian's hospital room. A single nurse was in the room checking the machines and making notes on Ian's chart. Without a word, Fallon met her eyes and then headed to the bed.

Ian lay there, unmoving. His skull was wrapped with gauze and there were tubes sticking out of him everywhere, it seemed.

"Ian," she said on a long sigh. Nothing, not even a flicker. With her good hand, she reached out to touch him. "Come on Detective, open them gray eyes and look at me."

She fell silent and just stood there holding his hand, the beeping of the machines the only noise in the room. When the doctor walked back in,

Fallon reluctantly released Ian's hand and stepped back. *I'll be back, Ian.* "Thank you for letting me see him," she said softly.

Fallon remained quiet as she walked back down the hall to where her brothers waited. She didn't hesitate, just moved into Shawn's arms and let him hold her. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Ian's parents hurrying past toward the room.

"Let's go," Fallon whispered. "We have a brother to bury."

The four remaining Maddoxes walked in stoic silence out of the busy emergency room and into the early morning hours of the day. It truly was Black Friday.

Chapter 22

Fog. Thick penetrating fog, like the kind surrounding Elliot Bay in the early morning. The kind that required lighthouses and foghorns. It was all around him. It made him cold. Little pinpricks of cold shot through his body.

He tried to push through it but it was remarkably similar to slogging through armpit-deep wet cement. Lost, chilled, and unsure of where to go he hesitated to see what would happen. Then, like a beacon of light through the darkness, came a voice he'd missed hearing so much.

"Come on, Detective. It's going on two weeks now. You have to wake up and say something. Your parents can't take much more of this." He heard her sigh. "Can't say I'm a huge fan of this either. You need to open up them beautiful gray eyes of yours."

Ian felt the fog slowly retreat as her voice continued to flow to his ears.

"I missed you at Dylan's funeral. I wish you could have been there to hold my hand. Really could have used your support for that. It was a beautiful service, as far as funerals go, that is."

Her warm stroke came gentle upon his forehead and down one cheek. Her touch vanished before he felt it again as she curled her fingers around his limp hand.

"Come on, Detective. Stop being so stubborn. I miss you, miss your voice, the way you hold me, and kiss me. I even miss the way you look when we argue, that stubborn set of your chin and the glint in your eyes. Then the way it flares into passion. The way you look at me as if I'm the only woman in the world. I can't live for the rest of my life without seeing that again. I don't know what else to tell you, except that I love you and I can't imagine living my life without you in it. I don't know what that means, but if you don't hurry up and find your way back to me, I never will. Please come back to me. I need you in my life. I need you, Ian."

As if he were opening up blackout curtains on a sunny day, he saw his way back illuminated. He cracked his eyes open slowly and stared at Fallon through lowered lashes as she sat beside his bed. Her left arm was in a sling and he frowned. *What happened to her?* Her head was bent low

over his hand, her hair gathered up haphazardly in a clip, and a few strands hung around her temple.

The way she said his name made him smile inside. *If only she'd show me this kind of emotion when she knew I was awake.* He couldn't complain, he knew Fallon was reserved and he damn near felt like an eavesdropper as he listened to her whisper to him.

"I think it means you're stuck with me," he mumbled as he opened his eyes fully, in time to see her wide ones swing to him.

"Ian!" she gasped. Immediately her face was close to his. "You're awake?"

"Hey beautiful," he rasped.

She sucked her lower lip into her mouth as she smiled. Her mouth moved but no sound came out for a bit until finally she managed to say, "I should go get the nurse. And your parents." Her fingers reached out toward his face before pulling back, leaving him feeling bereft. Ian wanted to hold onto her as she withdrew her hand but he didn't have the strength.

"Fallon?" he asked before she got too far from him.

"Yes, Detective?"

"What you said, did you mean it?" He held her gaze as he watched her battle with her decision on what to say to him. Ian knew it had been a private conversation she was having, not expecting him to overhear.

Her expression grew soft as she stared back at him. He watched her thick lashes drop down slowly and rise back up. Her brown eyes banished the last of the chill he'd felt earlier. "Every last bit of it." Her expression smoothed out before she turned and walked out of the room.

The next thing he knew, he found himself faced with his parents, who for once weren't arguing, and a doctor. Through all the commotion, Ian kept searching for Fallon, but she wasn't there.

Finally fed up with the whole situation, he shoved away the water cup and demanded, "Where's Fallon?"

His parents fell silent and stared at him. "Out in the waiting room," his father informed him.

"I want to see her," Ian insisted.

"Okay, okay," Donal said. "I'll go get her." Eyes so like his own stared down at him and Ian would have sworn there were tears in his old man's eyes.

"Thanks, Da," Ian returned with a smile.

After his father left, Ian kept his gaze glued to the doorway. He *needed* to see her, be in her presence, and touch her. He felt his entire body relax as she stepped through into the room ahead of his father.

Her eyes sparkled with happiness and a little bit of mischief as she smiled at him. "Seems you needed to see me, Detective. What can I do for you?"

"Stay," he ordered.

Fallon didn't say a word, just pulled up a chair near his head and settled in it. She touched his face with her right hand and smiled at him. "Rest, Detective. You rest now; I'll be here when you wake."

He'd been waiting for those words. Turning his head, he pressed his dry lips to her soft skin and closed his eyes, giving into the exhaustion that pounded at the door.

Fallon sighed as she overlooked Elliot Bay. Christmas was a week away and Seattle sure was ready for the holiday. She'd just spent time at the cemetery and had come down here to try to find some comfort. Her heart still ached at the knowledge she'd not only lost her parents, but Dylan as well.

Eyes trained on the Olympic Mountains, she curled her fingers around the venti sized Starbucks in her hands. Even with the cardboard holder and her leather gloves, she could still feel the warmth seeping into her.

The city seemed to have settled back into a normal routine; after the news of the scandal broke things had gotten a bit crazy. She'd not seen much of Ian, nothing really, since he got out of the hospital.

You're the idiot who's been ignoring your heart and him, her brain accused.

She did miss him. A lot. She watched the press conference where the Federal Bureau of Investigation recognized him for his part their sting that ended the horrendous child sex ring. There were images in the papers of Ian marching Rick DeVane's father in handcuffs down the steps of his house.

He was a hero. Especially once the news of Rick DeVane's rigging of Ian's car with C-4 hit the airwaves as well. She knew how much he missed that car; it had been his pride and joy. There was talk of a promotion, or even him going to the FBI.

Either way, she missed him. The cold wind blew across her as she stared out at the approaching ferry. With a sigh, she took a drink of her Mocha. With one hand, she brushed a few wayward strands of hair out of her face.

“Hello beautiful,” a sinful voice from behind her said.

Her body tingled as the wind shifted and carried to her the scent of the man she’d been longing for. Turning around, Fallon took in the sight before her.

Ian stood there, dressed in a pair of carpenter blue jeans, black boots, and his Seahawks jacket over his charcoal shirt. His auburn hair, a tad longer now, moved with the wind and his gray eyes were sharp and clear as they stared at her. He had his hands shoved in the pockets of his leather jacket.

“Ian,” she said with a sigh of pleasure. “You’re looking really well.”

He prowled towards her, never dropping her gaze. “How would you know how I’m looking? I haven’t seen you since I got released from the hospital.” His tone was accusatory.

“You seemed busy.” Fallon bit the inside of her cheek to keep from jumping into his arms.

“Never too busy for you, Fallon. I’m never too busy for you.”

His words banished the chill of the day. “What are you doing down here?” she asked.

“I called Shawn and asked him where he thought you’d be and he brought me here. He said you were thinking of leaving.” He stopped right before her, forcing her to look up at him if she wished to keep eye contact.

“That’s true.” She was. It was time for her to figure out what she was doing. There had been a request for her to come to a training camp for a unit of marines, Force Recon marines.

“Why would you leave?” Ian backed her up until the rail stopped her from going further.

“It’s my job.” Each inhalation brought his masculine scent to her nose and sent up tremors of desire inside her.

“And me?” he questioned, reaching out with one gloveless hand and threading his fingers through her hair.

“Seems to me you’re a very popular man. Promotions and offers from the feds.”

“I don’t care about them, Fallon.” His gaze was direct.

This was the Ian she loved. So straightforward. Not one to hedge about his feelings. Swallowing, she whispered, "I wouldn't have left without saying goodbye."

"You didn't even tell me you got shot." His thumb caressed her cheekbone.

"You had just woken up, my scratch wasn't all that important."

He frowned at her. "After all that time you spent with me in the hospital, why did you vanish when I was released?" Despite the chill of the day, his skin was warm and his caresses did strange things, powerful things to her innards.

"What do you want from me?" she mumbled as his touch sent her body into overdrive.

"I...I...have something for you."

Cocking her head to the side, Fallon waited in silence for him to continue. She took a deep breath as his hand dropped from her hair back to his pocket.

"You know how I feel about you, Fallon. I know you do, and before you leave, I want you to have this. I had meant to ask you to marry me, but I think you'd just run away from me. So, I just want you to accept this."

Fallon stood there speechless as Ian set her coffee on the ground and pulled off her left glove. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a ring. Tears filled her eyes as he slid it on her ring finger.

"We'll call it a promise ring if that will keep you from bolting on me. Just please say you'll accept this."

Still in awe, Fallon looked down to the ring that fit so snugly on her finger. White gold with yellow gold text between the thin bands that read "Mo Anam Cara" and nestled between each word rested a small Claddagh.

"Oh Ian," she breathed. "This is absolutely beautiful." Licking her lips, Fallon met his gaze. The love and passion in his eyes nearly sent her to her knees.

"I know it isn't much, but I didn't know what to get a woman who rarely wears jewelry."

"No," she said, "this is perfect. What does this mean? The writing on it?"

"*Mo Anam Cara*? That means 'My Soul Mate'." He tipped her face up to his. "That's what you are. I don't want to live without you."

Looking at the ring one more time, Fallon erased the distance between them and slid her right arm up around his neck. "You know something, Detective. I don't think I've ever heard anything more beautiful. But I

don't want a promise ring from you." She caught the tensing of his jaw and a siren's smile filled her own face. "I'll accept this only if you consider it an engagement ring."

The smile barely had time to cross his face before he was kissing her. Fallon whimpered into his mouth as his tongue plundered her depths. When he pulled away for a breather, his eyes shone like silken quicksilver.

"You drive a hard bargain, Fallon Delu, but I accept." His lips teased hers again.

Time slipped away as he kissed her thoroughly. When her body was limp and drenched with desire for him, he ended the kiss. It was as if he knew she was a puddle of mush.

"Open your eyes, baby," he whispered against her swollen lips.

She did so, slowly, and saw his arrogant grin. "I want you, Ian," she admitted as she stood back from him and tugged on her glove over her new ring.

"And I you, Fallon." He leaned down and retrieved her coffee for her. "Here you go."

She winked. "Not sure I need any more heating up."

"Let's go," he said. Fallon sucked her lower lip in her teeth. Ian sighed and touched her face with his hand. "We'll get it all figured out, Fallon. Let's just go spend some time alone with one another."

He knew her so well. Slipping her right arm through his, she rested her head against the smooth leather of his jacket. "Okay. Let's go."

"Are you sure you don't want a more traditional engagement ring? With stones or something like that?" he asked as they walked to where she parked her vehicle.

"No, this...this is more than I could have hoped for. I love it." Fallon moved her head against his jacket. The rest of the walk to her SUV was done in comfortable silence.

Ian stopped beside her Xterra and turned her to face him. When their eyes met, her breath caught in her throat. There was just something about the way he watched her.

"What?" she asked.

He took one hand and followed along the curvature of her face before his fingers trailed lightly over the nearly faded scar on her neck, from the knife wound. "Do you know how much I love you?"

The sounds of the parking garage faded into the background and her world consisted of two people. Herself and Ian Cavanaugh. "I think so, Detective," she murmured. "I think so."

Ian kissed her until her toes curled. With an arrogant smirk, he helped her into the passenger seat and slid his large body behind the wheel. Fallon didn't say a word as she buckled her seatbelt, perfectly content to let him take over.

They held hands as he drove carefully through the highly decorated streets of Seattle towards his home. As he pulled up to his house, Fallon sat up and frowned. There were a few vehicles in his driveway.

"Unexpected company?" she asked, as she heard his muted curse and bit back her laughter.

"Trust me, baby, the plans I had for us definitely didn't include anyone else being in the same room, much less the same house."

She smiled at the frustration in his voice, and yet she couldn't disagree. It'd been way too long since she'd felt him love her. "We won't know who it is until we get out."

"Well, they're not on the porch so that means my parents are there and are inside."

Leaning across the middle, she pressed her lips to his cheek. "Come on, Detective. Surely you aren't scared of your parents." She shook her head as she opened the door and left the warm interior.

"I'll plead the fifth on that," he sassed as he undid his belt and climbed out. Ian reached for her hand as they walked up to his front door. Fallon gave it a gentle squeeze and was rewarded a sexy smile and wink in return.

Fallon's eyes grew wide as she followed him inside his house. There was a big banner hanging down, directly in sight from the door that read: CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR ENGAGEMENT!!! Standing beneath the sign were her brothers, Laura and the girls, some of his fellow detectives, and Ian's parents. They all had smiles on their faces and were holding out pieces of cake.

"Congratulations!" they all shouted.

Slanting a glance at Ian, Fallon teased, "Just a promise ring, huh?"

He shrugged sheepishly and she could see the tint of the blush on his tanned skin. "I had no idea."

As they were separated by family and friends, pulled into hugs and given more best wishes, Fallon knew it would be a while before she and Ian got to spend any time alone. As if he knew what she was thinking, he met her gaze and sent her an apologetic smile. She blew him a kiss in response, smirking to herself at the flare of passion in his mercurial gaze.

Later on, as everyone sat around eating cake and drinking coffee, Kylie, who sat on the floor beside her leg, looked up and asked, "Will your baby boy be named Dylan?"

Fallon's hands shook as she tried to find an answer. Ian covered her shuddering ones with his own strong fingers and replied for her, "I think Dylan would be a wonderful name for our son. Do you think he would approve?"

Kylie smiled at them both. "I know he would. He told me so." She pushed up from the floor and leaned over to kiss Fallon. "He's okay, Auntie Fallon. He wants you to be happy."

Fallon blinked back tears as she pulled Kylie in for a hug. "Thank you, Kylie."

Unaware of the gravity of what she'd done, Kylie lifted her shoulders easily. "You're welcome. Will you hurry up though? I'd like a little brother and mommy and daddy say they aren't gonna give me one."

Laughter erupted in the room. "I'll see what we can do, Kylie," Fallon said.

Ian's arm settled around her shoulder, pulling her tight against him. Turning his head, he swiped his lips across her temple. "Are you okay?"

"Yes."

Plans were made for Christmas dinner, and Donal and Brighid were getting along well enough that there was no bickering between them. Fallon would swear she saw longing glances between them.

As she stood with her brothers, Fallon knew she'd finally come home. This was what she'd needed. Ian was what she needed. She half-heartedly listened as Shawn and Clay swore they'd kick his ass all the way up and down the coastline if he ever hurt her. Her eyes moved across the room to where, Ian stood talking to Herschel and Bill. His gaze was waiting for her.

"I love you," he mouthed.

I love you, too, Ian Cavanaugh. She smiled and raked her eyes up and down his physique. She licked her lips before turning back on her brothers. With a quick sneaking glance over her shoulder, she read the promise lurking in his eyes.

"You seem happy, Sis," Clay said. "Really happy."

"I am, Clay, I promise."

And why shouldn't she be? She had a man who doted on her, would do anything he could for her and treated her how she deserved to be treated. Fallon was...

The Detective's Lover.

The End