



Faden Sinclair

*Forbidden
Temptation*

Tales of the Forbidden book 1

Tales of the Forbidden

Book 1: Forbidden Temptations

By Jaden Sinclair

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Devon Noved isn't the kind of man to turn a blind eye to a beautiful woman or to turn away from a challenge. Growing up in Treece, he knows every girl and every family. That is, he thought he did.

Kera Zoe was taken from school and placed in the Compound until she turns twenty-one. With the title of a runaway over her head, she's guarded closely until the celebration. She doesn't want a husband and fights within everything she has when Devon proclaims her as his wife.

Now a temptation is before her, one that is very forbidden. Can Kera keep fighting what is growing between them, or will she give into her heart and love the man before her?

* * * *

Thanks to Pat Sager,
Who has let me bounce idea after idea off her shoulders
When she has had so much going on in her life.
Thanks a bunch!

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**Tales of the Forbidden,
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Prologue

Treece was a town that valued its old ways, old customs, with people who preferred to keep things simple and classes of people where they belonged. An old tradition of arranged marriages had been set up for everyone.

When the founders of the town first designed the Compound, it was a chance for every young lady—rich or poor—to have the experience of the rich and the chance for happiness. Their status didn't matter. Everyone became equal, and to keep it that way, the drink was designed. A simple mixture that helped the people find that right one just for them. One kiss, one taste of pure sweetness, and you knew that person was right and just for you. But somewhere along the years that equality changed again. The upper class didn't like poor girls wedding their rich men. The rich wanted to keep their riches, not share. Yet, one couldn't change the elixir. Once it picked you, you were matched.

This worked just fine for many years. Girls came, went, married, and stayed. Then things changed once more. The Compound became more of a prison to the unwed girls than a home. Poor fathers were able to sell their daughters as potential wives, servants, or sex toys. The rich didn't mind this, yet many of the poor did, but had no choice. Some even thought the selling of daughters would lessen the chances of them mating with the upper class.

It didn't.

The moment no questions were asked, no reprimands were made, more fathers began selling their daughters to the

Compound. It became a way for them to improve their own lifestyle or leave, and so many fathers did leave. A trade in flesh some called it; others referred to it as slavery. The rights of young women were stripped away, their lifestyle changed. The young women were ordered about, and kept locked up for the Compound's celebrations.

Twice a year the Compound held parties. Men who desired to marry would come with the hope of being matched up, paying a small fee to walk through the doors. Girls were paraded about, in the summer and in the fall. Many would welcome the chance to improve themselves, and others would resist with every ounce of strength they had.

Chapter One

Treece 4036

“Kera Zoe?”

Kera looked up as shivers went up her spine. Two men in dark suits stood in front of the only exit in the room, both looking right at her. She knew who they were; men from the Compound.

Kera was reading in the public library of Treece, the one and only place in town a poor girl with the hopes of getting the hell out of town could go. At twenty-one she held out the small hope that she was too poor and too old to be considered for the Compound. College was her chosen course in life, and getting into a school far away before her father tried to sell her to the Compound was her goal. Because even though she might be twenty-one, she wouldn't put it past her father to sell her. Only when she turned twenty-two would she be truly safe from the Compound, or anything else.

The Compound, now there was a thought to make her snort and turn her nose up in the air. The place had been designed to produce elaborate match-made marriages for everyone, but somehow the rules had been changed, and then lost throughout the years. Families of good blood and money walked out through those doors. Not too many poor girls. Girls such as her might be sent to work there, but they rarely ever walked out as brides anymore. Maybe one in a thousand got married but ninety-nine percent of the time girls like her worked at the Compound as whores or slaves, nothing more.

One of the other students in the library pointed at her, and Kera reluctantly stood up. Her heart beat rapidly. Fear wrapped its arms around her body, preventing her from breathing or moving at all as the two masculine, suited figures headed for her

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table.

“We are here to escort you to the Compound.” One of the men handed her an envelope.

She ripped it open and quickly read the official letter inside. Her father had left town and sold her to the Compound. How the hell could he sell her? She was twenty-one! Too old to go, too poor for consideration as a wife. And to add more injury to the wound, she would be labeled a trouble maker and kept under lockdown to preserve her virtue for her future husband. All of this she read in the letter.

Kera’s mouth went dry in fear.

One of the men took both of her arms firmly and she was walked out of the library and to a waiting car. Stunned, Kera didn’t even give a thought to trying to escape. All she thought about was how in the hell her father could’ve done this? The Compound was set up for the upper and middle class, not the poor like her!

“There has to be a mistake,” she pleaded. Boxed in by both men she felt like a prisoner going to her execution.” My father can’t do this. I’m twenty-one—too old for this shit!”

They didn’t say a word. Both faced straight ahead, as if made of stone.

Located on the outskirts of Treece, the Compound, a very large, four-story building with bedrooms on each floor, was much like a myth to Kera. Thick concrete fencing and tall iron gates surrounded the grounds, which were always locked.

Once the mansion came into view, Kera began to truly panic. She had heard rumors from other young girls who’d gone in and come out married, but without proper information, she wondered, could it really be that bad? But there had to be some truth in the rumors, and seeing the place made it all very real for Kera; all *too fucking real*.

She stirred in the seat, causing the men sitting next to her to acknowledge her presence. They restrained her arms again when she made a move for the door, forcing her back into her seat.

The car stopped in front of a set of large double doors. The car door and the double doors opened simultaneously as Kera prepared to fight for her rapidly diminishing freedom.

The men still held her arms, but she struggled to break loose as they pulled her from the back seat. A woman came outside, and Kera stopped struggling in order to make eye contact.

She wore a black skirt and white blouse, her salt and pepper hair twisted up on the top of her head in a severe bun. The woman's cold gray eyes narrowed on Kera. Kera suspected this woman used that look to intimidate others to get what she wanted and to keep the girls in line.

"I'm the Mistress of the Compound." She held her hands together in front of her and her head high. Kera got the impression the woman was very proud of her role at the Compound. "Welcome."

She turned her back on Kera and began walking inside. With the men still holding her arms, Kera was powerless to do anything but follow her.

"This is a mistake," Kera said. "I don't belong here. My father has no right to do this!"

"Correction." The woman didn't turn to look at Kera, but she thrust one finger up in the air. "Under the laws of Treece, you still live under his roof, and that gives him all rights to your well-being."

"That's bullshit, and you know it!" Kera yelled. "I'm twenty-one. Too damn old."

"Twenty-two is too old," the Mistress corrected condescendingly.

They walked down a long, cold marble hallway, past many closed doors until they came to a staircase with sets of stairs going in three different directions. The Mistress strolled toward the left staircase and Kera's escorts forced her to follow. During the long walk the Mistress explained things to her.

The Compound had various wings and staircases. There was a wing for servants, a wing for those girls in waiting, a more restrictive wing for the trouble-makers, and runaways, and one whole floor of elaborate bedrooms devoted to the married couples. The servant girls walked around freely, dressed in black with white aprons around their waists. Some carried buckets, others stacks of sheets. These were the poor girls who had no other place to go in the town. And if Kera didn't find herself a husband, then she would be joining their ranks to serve any who

came through the door.

They ascended another flight of stairs and started down one last hallway before the Mistress stopped in front of a door. She pulled out some keys, unlocked the door, and stood back. The men shoved Kera inside.

She stumbled in, but managed to keep herself upright, barely. She turned to the woman and glared at her. "This is wrong. I don't belong here."

"I agree, but it's out of my hands. Your father has signed you over to us, so it's our responsibility to see if you can make a match. Since you are twenty-one, soon to be twenty-two, that only leaves us one day before the next feast to get you ready. Also, your father mentioned you are a troublemaker, so you will remain in your room, only to come out for meals and class."

"What?" Kera couldn't believe what she was hearing. "You're going to keep me locked up in this damn place?"

"Your things have been brought over," the Mistress continued, acting as if Kera hadn't just questioned her. "You will be brought down for meals, unless you behave poorly. You will also have your only class today."

"And what class is that?" Kera crossed her arms over her chest and leaned to the side. Now she was pissed. She didn't like her father telling her what to do, and she sure as hell didn't care for this woman doing it either.

"Each young and inexperienced girl who comes to the Compound for any celebration will attend the sex education class. After all, you all need to know what your husband will expect from you and how to please him." The Mistress looked Kera up and down disparagingly. "But in your case you'll get the quick videos in order for you to know what to expect."

"You're out of your damn mind if you think I'm going to watch some damn sex movie or be willing to put up with your bullshit, lady."

"It's either that, or you may remain in your room until the time comes for your celebration. That choice is yours. Your breakfast will be delivered here in a few minutes."

The Mistress turned and walked out of the room, leaving Kera alone. When she heard the turn of a lock, her temper blew, and she screamed in aggravation.

She glanced around the bedroom and sighed. It was simple, plain, and not drafty like her bedroom at her father's house.

There was a full size bed with thick covers and fluffy pillows. A cream-colored comforter lay folded at the foot of the bed. Two nightstands stood on either side of the bed with lamps on them, one held a clock. Under a window with bars was an oak table with a lamp and a chair.

She had a small closet with everything she owned already inside it. Also, a personal bathroom, complete with shower and bathtub; yet another luxury she lacked at home. Hell, there were times she was damn lucky to have the water turned on, which was always cold because they never had the money to get the water heater fixed.

As she ran her finger across the bathroom countertop Kera thought to herself that if circumstances were different this would be her once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to escape the curse of poverty set upon her by her father.

But she'd been *sold!* Her father sold her! He didn't give a damn about what she might want to do with her life. All he gave a damn about was making a fast buck.

"Good one, Dad." She sighed. "You managed to finish fucking up my life perfectly."

An hour later her breakfast came. Oatmeal, the one dish that she hated with a passion. Hell, she'd rather go hungry than eat that shit. And it came with dry toast and a small glass of juice. Wow! She really was impressed now. *Not.*

The summer celebration was already in the works, which meant her sorry ass was going to be there, with her agreement or without it. Great! At noon, her door opened and she found herself escorted by personal guard to her first, and only, class. The personal guard didn't surprise her considering they'd labeled her a troublemaker. They wanted her to attend a sex class, but she had other plans. She turned on her guard and shoved her knee as hard as she could into his groin. He collapsed, moaning in pain and holding himself. She took off running.

She ran for her life, for her freedom, going by memory back the way she'd come into the Compound. By the time she made it back down the stairs, an alarm had sounded.

Kera escaped outside to the gates as they were closing and

slipped through them easily to run down the sidewalk, hoping she would make it.

Her first mistake: looking behind her to see if she was being followed. Yep she was. The second mistake: not keeping her full attention on where she was going. Kera collided with two men. They all went down, with her landing on top of one's hard chest.

"Oh shit!" he moaned.

Kera closed her eyes while she tried to catch her breath, her sides burning from the run. She sort of felt sorry for the guy she was on. He had caught the brunt of the fall, cushioning hers, after all.

"Where the hell did she come from?" another asked.

Slowly Kera opened her eyes and looked to see who she'd landed on.

He was big. That much she could feel for herself. He wore a white t-shirt stretched tight across his chest and over his muscular arms. As she lowered her field of vision, she saw the shirt tucked into tight-fitting jeans.

His hair was long, touching his shoulders and dark as night. He had full lips, a straight nose, narrow cheeks, and eyes that seemed to be just as dark brown as his hair, paired with long pretty lashes.

"Shit, where the hell did you come from?" she asked, pushing away from him and scrambling back to her feet.

"There she is!"

Kera turned her head and saw two guards coming for her. She tried to push past the man she'd knocked down, who had also gotten to his feet but he didn't budge.

Two guards halted when they reached her, grabbed her arms that were jerked back. All Kera could do was glare at the guy on whom she'd landed, currently blocking her way to freedom.

She couldn't speak. She glared at him as he stared back at her so boldly, until she could see him no more, thanks to being dragged back to the Compound.

The Mistress awaited her at the front entrance. Kera was escorted up the steps to the woman, who greeted her with a stinging slap to the face.

"Now you'll spend the whole time here in your room. Meals

will be brought to you. You will have no contact with anyone.”

Kera snorted. “As if that’s any different from before. And you can take that shit you call food and stuff it up your ass.”

“Since you are so very particular in your eating habits, you can make do with oats for the rest of your stay.” The woman looked like she’d sucked on a lemon.

“Ask me if I give a fuck,” Kera retorted angrily as she struggled to be free.

“Take her to her room.”

* * * *

“Now that’s a girl who’s going to give some guy a run for his money.”

Devon Noved stood on the sidewalk, watching the commotion as the girl who’d collided with him was taken away, wondering about her. She had been running from the Compound, and she didn’t appear to be the usual kind of girl they placed in the Compound for marriage, either.

Fingers snapped in his face. He looked up when his friend said, “Hello, Earth to Devon.” He blinked a few times before turning his head to look at Dane Knight.

“What?” Devon snapped.

“We can’t touch that one.” Dane smiled. “She obviously belongs to the Compound.”

Devon kept staring at Dane. At twenty-three, one year younger than Devon, Dane was the characteristic “pretty boy”. They both stood at six foot even, but where Devon’s eyes were dark brown, Dane’s were transparent blue and his golden hair and boyish charm usually got him anything or anyone he wanted.

Both worked out together at least three times a week, keeping their bodies tight.

Normally there were four of them; the four playboys of Treece. Today, Blaine Cedric and Darius Alistair were missing. They all dated, or more like went out with anyone who was willing to spend a night in their beds. Rumors even started that they liked to share one girl between all four of them. That one was not true.

They had one rule they all followed to the letter: Never bed virgins. When you did that a lot of commitment issues came into the picture, and they didn’t want or have the time to deal with

such things. Upper class saved the good girls for the Compound, so they all went for the lower class or to the brothel house fifty miles east of the border.

They had all enjoyed themselves immensely for years, and then it all came to a crashing halt. Blaine got shipped off by his father, as did Darius, leaving Devon and Dane alone. Devon's father, as well as Dane's grandmother, both thought that with two of them gone, they would tame down some.

They were wrong.

Devon and Dane kept partying, enjoying themselves, and wishing it would never end.

The moment when *she* crashed into Devon was a whole new beginning for Devon. Because the playboy life just ended.

"I want to find out who she is," Devon stated. "Right now."

"She's trouble with a capital T," Dane said. "Didn't you see that, or better yet, feel it when she knocked us over?"

"Oh, I felt her." A slow smile spread across Devon's face. "I definitely felt her...and liked what was there to feel."

"Oh, no you're not." Dane shook his head. "You can't dump me like this."

Devon put his arm over Dane's shoulders. He smiled as he turned to his best friend and started walking again. "Don't think of it like dumping you. Think of it as time for us to grow up, or me anyway."

"Devon, she's trouble."

"I like trouble," he reminded his friend.

"You *are* trouble."

"And I want her, Dane. So get that pretty ass of yours in gear and help me find out everything there is to know about her, including whether she's going to be at the celebration tomorrow."

"You're nuts."

Devon nodded a big smile across his face. "You know it. Help me and I'll owe you big time."

Dane groaned, rolled his eyes, and sighed, "Fine. Give me an hour and meet me at the restaurant. I'll get you what you need but, boy, you're really going to owe me big."

* * * *

An hour and a half later, Devon sat waiting for Dane, impatiently thumping his fingers on the table and wondering if he

was going nuts. He couldn't get the girl off his mind, just like his body still tingled from the first contact between them. Yeah, she knocked him over trying to get away, but what she didn't know was that she knocked him over in other ways too. Devon didn't believe in love at first sight, but he quickly began to change his opinion on that one.

"Do you know how many favors it's taken me to get this information?" Dane walked up to Devon in Olafini's, their favorite Italian restaurant. "This one is beyond the normal favor also, which means you owe me huge."

"Where the hell you been?" Devon snapped. "I've been waiting almost two hours for your sorry ass."

"Touchy." Dane touched his chest, acted hurt as he slowly sat in the chair. "And to think of all the trouble I went through to get you this information."

Dane picked up the wine bottle, which sat chilling in ice, and poured himself a glass. Devon sat back in his chair, watching as Dane took a big drink. It was damn hard to stay patient when inside he screamed to know what it was that Dane knew. He was definitely more than ready to go up to the Compound and claim the girl for himself. He just knew she would be the one for him. A perfect match.

"Didn't you order me anything?" Dane asked, giving Devon a pathetic look.

"Are you going to tell me what you know? Or am I going to have to make a big scene in here and whip your ass."

Dane sighed. "No lunch then? I'm hungry," he whined piteously. Devon kicked him under the table. "Ouch! Okay. Fine. Her name is Kera Zoe. She just got sold to the Compound today. She's twenty-one and her father sold her before he bailed out of town."

"Nice," Devon said.

"Yeah, well, furthermore, because she's not from the upper class, at her age she only has the one chance, tomorrow. If there's no match she'll be the property of the Compound, and then you can fuck her out of your senses." Another kick. "Ouch!" Dane rubbed at his abused shin and glared at Devon. "What the hell was that for?"

"I'm not going to fuck her out of my mind." Devon sat

forward, his eyes on Dane. "I'm going to go to the Compound tonight and I'm going to marry her."

Having already taken a sip of wine, Dane spit out his drink in Devon's face. "Are you out of your mind?" Devon picked up the napkin and wiped his face. "Did she hurt you some way I don't know about when she knocked you on your ass? She's trouble Devon, don't you see that?"

"She's what I want." Devon sighed.

"This isn't one of our games, man, you go in there and you come out with someone forever. End of story."

"I know."

"You're crazy, man."

"Maybe." Devon picked up his own glass of wine took a sip and grinned. "But you want to know one thing that I discovered today?"

Dane shrugged.

"Since I touched her I feel more alive than I have in months, hell, maybe even years. I want her and only her. And I'm going to get her Dane, even if I have to marry her."

Chapter Two

Kera woke slowly, the sun shining in her face, an intense pounding in her head, and a very dry mouth. She felt drugged. In fact, Kera knew she'd been drugged, and the anger that coursed through her helped to push it out of her system so she could wake up and deal with what was to come. She should've known they'd put something in her food, if one could consider the shit they served her food. As punishment for running she got the lucky deal of having oatmeal for her three meals. Only intense hunger by dinner time made her eat the shit and this was the result from it. Drugged!

Celebration day. Something she wasn't looking forward to.

Kera turned on her side in the bed and groaned. Her breakfast rested on a tray, sitting on the nightstand waiting for her. Fresh bowl of oatmeal. Ugh!

Instead of getting out of the bed, she rolled back over and closed her eyes with the intent of going right back to sleep. Thanks to the damn drug she just didn't have the energy to get out of bed.

The lock on the door turned. Rough hands pulled her from the bed to stand before the Mistress. Nothing was said. The woman only looked Kera up and down then turned and walked out. Kera made to follow.

With whatever drug was in her body, Kera found it difficult to walk. She couldn't even focus her eyes on where she was being taken—down one hall, around a corner, and to yet another hall before they stopped in front of a door that was opened for them by two guards. Kera was handed off to a group of girls who helped her inside and onto a massage table with towels on top.

Her clothes removed, her body and hair washed. The Mistress stood off to the side, watching everything being done to

Kera. Unfortunately, Kera was still too drugged to resist and fight.

Her legs parted, she was washed inside and out, and then the un-expected happened to her. Her pussy was shaved bare as were her legs and underarms before helped into a warm bubble bath. The water helped to clear her head some, and then her small lunch came, helping to settle her stomach also. This time a sandwich, milk and apple. She ate quickly.

Dressed in nothing but a short cotton robe, Kera left the room with the two guards who seemed to be waiting for her out in the hall. Once more, the Mistress led the way into another room where Kera sat down in a chair for her hair to be fixed.

It was dried and brushed, then curled and pulled back at the sides away from her face. A light coat of makeup went around her eyes only. The whole process took about an hour; however the real shocker came last.

The outfit.

A white string bikini handed to her and a glare from the Mistress told Kera she'd had enough. Fighting right now wasn't going to accomplish anything due to her still being tired thanks to the damn drug, but she really needed to buy extra time.

Yanking the damn bathing suit from the Mistress's hands, Kera turned and started to go into a changing room to dress, but a disapproving sound from her captor stopped her.

Well fine! She'd just change in front of her.

Kera opened the robe and let it drop to the floor. As quickly as she could, she dressed in the skimpy thing, tying the strings of the bottoms around her hips and then tying the barely-there top around her neck and torso.

With a snap of her fingers, the Mistress summoned the guards to come back in, take hold of her arms, and drag her from the room. This time she didn't go back to the bedroom but down the stairs to the first floor.

With each step she took, Kera felt her adrenaline boiling up. She didn't want to be here. She needed to figure out a way to get out before something bad happened. She didn't think she had to worry too much about being picked or kissed. Most of the guys around this damn town that came to the Compound wanted a woman from their class. Kera was poor. That meant she didn't

have much of a chance. So all she really needed to worry about was getting out of the Compound and disappearing.

The Mistress unlocked and opened a door to yet another room. Damned if this place wasn't full of rooms. One could get lost just looking for the right one.

This room was very different than the others she had seen. This one only had a small leather loveseat pushed up against the wall, situated directly under the only bar-covered window.

She walked over to the love seat and crawled onto it. Sitting on her knees, she looked out the window. The party was set to start at noon, that much she had heard as she took her bath. It would last all day—or as long as the male clients wanted it to. From the stories she'd heard during the past few years about the celebration, most of the men who found the "perfect one" tended to go back to their rooms almost immediately. They didn't waste time in consummating the marriage, consensual or not.

Furthermore, the couple was locked in their room. If a man received a very reluctant bride, she couldn't run away from him. Only the next morning were the doors opened and the couple allowed to leave.

As for Kera, she just didn't know what would be worse, servant to the Compound or servant to a very unwanted husband.

She watched as the cars lined up, quicker than what she would've liked to see. At least fifty cars, one after another, turned into the drive and let out a passenger right at the front door. She noticed every man who stepped out of a car wore a smile on his face. To her, it seemed each one seemed very eager to get inside and see the meat which was about to be presented to the market.

Sickening!

Kera was about to turn away from the window, but her gaze ended up landing on the last car to pull up. It stopped right at the door, and a servant came out to open the back door.

A chill raced down her spine as she recognized the man who stepped out. The one she knocked over yesterday. *What the hell is he doing here?*

He was big. Very big! Huge, it seemed. *Now why didn't I notice that before?*

His shoulders were so broad and his arms so thick and muscular. Kera flushed in arousal. She couldn't see very much of him from this angle, but she saw enough to start praying he wouldn't be interested in her. Because she couldn't quite convince herself *she* wasn't interested in *him*.

Like the rest, he disappeared inside, and the gates closed. The click of the lock broke the spell, and Kera turned on the loveseat quickly, falling back on her ass. The Mistress once more came into the room, followed by the same two guards who seemed to always follow Kera's every move.

One guard wrapped his arms tightly around Kera, pinning her arms to her sides and jerked her to her feet. The other took hold of her chin and forced her mouth open. The Mistress came closer, and then Kera saw her holding a small cup of something in her hand.

Kera's head forced back, the liquid poured down her throat. Thanks to the one holding her chin and nose, she had no choice but to swallow.

"It's time," the Mistress said.

She was taken from the room in the usual fashion, restrained and dragged. This time, instead of going back upstairs they headed to the front of the Compound, passed the grand stairs and toward the back. Other girls stood waiting for their chance to go out. With a nod from the Mistress, a set of double doors opened and bright sunlight streamed in.

The girls headed outside, and Kera was escorted out with them. Once in the sunshine she was released, the doors closed, and the two guards stood back next to them, blocking her from re-entering. After a quick glance at her surroundings, Kera groaned inwardly. She stood outside in a courtyard with not only a large, half-concrete, half-wooden fence but also one hell of a pool.

The pool had a huge water fountain in the middle of it, in-ground hot tubs at each of the four corners, as well as floaters and rafts bobbing randomly around the fountain. Lounge chairs and sofas were scattered everywhere and servants walked around carrying drinks on trays. Two servants tended to a small buffet of food positioned at the far side of the pool.

Kera had heard that kissing was the way for these men to

find their perfect bride. Apparently the drink she'd had forced down her throat matched them up. That meant she not only had to fight off any overly amorous advances but kissing as well. Simple. *Bullshit!*

* * * *

Devon watched her enter the pool party. His eyes never left her. He saw the way she sized up the exits, every move she made, every cautious action, and every attempt—most of them successful—at avoiding the other men. He sat in the far corner at a table shaded by an umbrella. He slowly sipped his drink, mostly holding it up to his lips to hide the smile when one man finally found the nerve to approach her.

When the poor bastard tried to kiss her, Kera kicked him in the nuts, bringing him down. Devon found this poor man's misfortune humorous; however, a little voice in his head told him he was probably going to end up with a knee between his legs from her as well. This confrontation would only occur if his plan went as he wanted it to.

She had fire in her, a flame in which he wanted to be engulfed.

For years he waited for a woman like her—passionate, fiery, a fighter—and now that he found her he sure as hell didn't want to lose her to another. Her skimpy bathing suit, which clearly displayed her body for everyone's pleasure, caused anticipation to race through him. Devon knew, without a doubt, that once he tested what his gut was telling him, his bachelor status would be over; and he didn't mind it one bit.

She had curves in all the places he loved. Furthermore, her hips were nice and round and her torso just right. Kera had meat on her bones and he was becoming very hungry to taste it all.

His hands itched to cup and feel the weight of her breasts. His mouth watered at the thought of her nipples being ripe for him to suck on. Her hair was three or four inches past her shoulders and a silky, deep brown. Kera's shoulders, which appeared soft as satin, seemed to beckon him to caress and kiss her smooth skin.

Her sparkling green eyes and long, full lashes had Devon mesmerized. Her delicate cheek bones glowed a soft, subtle pink, as if they were just pinched. Kera's lips were not overly full,

but plump nonetheless. The preparations of the compound showed.

Devon bid his time until she not only moved closer to him but backed herself up away from the others. In less than fifteen minutes most of the men had matched themselves up. Some were enjoying the time at the pool, kissing and touching their new brides. A few were eating and drinking, but over half already headed back inside to where they would spend the rest of the day and night in one of the many private, luxurious rooms.

Taking one last drink, along with a deep breath, Devon stood up. It was time for him to confront her. This would not be easy.

He took a few steps in her direction. That was all that was needed before she turned her full attention toward him.

"What do you think you're doing?" Kera demanded defensively as she backed away from him. *Yep, she's very cautious. And so she should be.*

Devon didn't answer her. Instead he kept walking toward her, watching her retreat until her back touched the wooden fence. Quickly, he closed the distance between them, leaning forward until he felt her body heat and heard the soft intake of air as she gasped.

He towered over her, but the disparity of their heights didn't appear to intimidate his bride to be. Kera's head came even with his shoulders.

"I'm going to kiss you," he told her, keeping his voice low, soothing, sensual.

He brought his lips down very close to hers, expecting to kiss her, but it seemed she had other plans. Kera ducked under his arm and tried to get away. Devon was faster.

Before she could move around him, he grabbed her by the arm. Kera tried to jerk away, but he held her firmly, showing her that he possessed the power right now. Kera glared at him, which prompted him to raise a mocking eyebrow and give her a humorous grin.

"Can't leave now," he said with a smile. "You'll miss the party."

"Watch me." She tried again to jerk her arm away, but he didn't release her. "Let go," she snapped.

"Now, Kera." He shook his head and made a tsking sound.

“Why would I want to do that?”

“H-how did...”

He grinned at her as he caressed her shoulder with his free hand. “Know your name? I made it my business to know all I needed to about you. Your strength intrigues me, as does your fire.”

With a sharp tug, Devon had Kera back in his arms. He wrapped one arm around her waist, holding her at the small of her back, and the other he fisted in her hair. Still, she fought him by twisting and pushing at his chest. She also tossed her head back and forth in order to keep him from kissing her.

Devon had to admire her determination, even when it tested his patience. With a shake, he stilled her fighting and brought his lips down for their first kiss.

He plunged his tongue between her teeth to explore the depths of her mouth. He felt her weaken against him when the full impact of the kiss hit her, which permitted Devon to bring her closer. He moaned at the pleasure of her body touching his. Even her hand coming up to his throat, closing around it, he enjoyed.

Then it hit.

The sweetness of this kiss had him captivated.

Devon had never tasted anything as sweet as this kiss right now. It was a mixture of strawberries, watermelon, and mangos all combined, yet better. When he broke the kiss with great regret, he didn't let her go. He held her just as tight and looked down into her eyes. Her green eyes sparkled, her cheeks were flushed with arousal, and her mouth remained slightly open, eyes telling him she felt as shocked as he did.

“I guess now would be a good time to tell you my name.” Lightly, he touched his lips to hers again. “After all, I know your name. It's Devon... Nofff!” Devon started to say his last name but ended up on the ground holding his crotch. *Damn, that knee of hers struck again.*

Kera took a few steps back with a hand over her mouth and eyes even wider, looking down at him in shock.

She'd kneed him in the groin. He shouldn't have been surprised, since he'd seen her do it to a couple of others and figured she might try it on him. Hell, to begin with, he'd half

expected it, but not after the kiss they just shared.

It took several minutes for him to catch his breath and for the pain to subside. Slowly, he stood. When he gave her a quick glance, she took a side step.

Unfortunately, as luck would have it, everyone who was still outside saw what happened. The talking stopped. Everyone seemed to pause and take notice of the confrontation.

"I think you're the first to ever do that," Devon told her, aware his irritation and pain could be heard in his voice. Damn it, if a knee to his dick didn't hurt.

"Well, I'm sure it won't be the last time someone kicks you in the balls," Kera responded nervously as she took another wary step back.

"Looks like Noved can't handle her," someone yelled with a laugh.

Devon narrowed his eyes on Kera while he worked at straightening up. He didn't want to get angry with her. Anger wouldn't solve or help a damn thing right now, but fuck if it wasn't difficult. The discomfort between his legs slowly started to go away.

Kera stopped backing up and stood her ground with her arms crossed over her chest and that chin of hers rising in defiance. He rubbed himself again, mostly just to shock her. He had to admit though she certainly had a set of balls, for a woman that is, if she wasn't afraid to stand up to him.

"Lucky for you," he remarked. "You only caught the side of me."

"Really? Well, I'll remember to kick you in the right spot next time," she retorted.

Devon gave her a tight smile. "Oh, my sweet, there won't be a next time."

Kera rolled her eyes. She was trying to put on a good show like she wasn't afraid of him, or attracted to him, but Devon saw differently. "Oh, really? This one I'll let you get away with, since we're just getting to know each other. But one more and I'll be forced to have to spank you."

"Oh, please!" She snorted. "You don't scare me."

"I'm not wanting to scare you. Only stating a fact, darling." Devon took a deep breath, rubbing himself one more time. He

glanced behind Kera, giving a slight shake of his head to the guards who came back in. They were ready to step in if he gave the word. He didn't.

"Well I don't think I can simply let the knee thing go unpunished. So—" Devon quickly took the few steps needed to reach Kera. He bent over, picked her up, and slung her over his shoulder all in one smooth action. She let out a scream and started kicking and hitting him. Devon delivered a hard swat to her ass and headed to the pool. "Your temper, my sweet, needs a bit of cooling down right now." He stopped at the side and tossed her into the pool and, standing at the side, waited for her to come up.

When Kera's head cleared the water's surface, she swam to the opposite side of the pool to get out. She grabbed a towel, wrapped herself in it, and walked to the door. Devon watched her the whole time, chuckling softly at how she held all that passionate anger inside. He let her get as far as the door before he jogged up behind her. He boxed her in between the door and his body. He wrapped one hand around her wrist to stop her hand from reaching the handle and the other he slid around her waist.

"We can't leave until I give the signal I'm ready," he whispered in her ear. "And I'm not ready just yet."

Devon jerked her away from the door. He strolled calmly back to his table, dragging her along, trying to twist and yank her arm free the whole way. He sat down in the chair and hauled her onto his lap.

"Now that you've cooled off, let's talk." He grunted as he fought to restrain her. He needed to talk with her or they couldn't reach a compromise and get her out of here.

She tried twice to get off his lap, but he held onto her with ease. He placed one arm over her legs to prevent her from kicking, as much as he was able, and the other around her waist.

"I don't want to talk to you. I want to get the hell out of here!" she stated.

Devon held her and let her fight as much as she could with the hold he had on her, recognizing her need to be in control. He even had to block her a few times because she tried to slap him. She was a wildcat, a wildcat with passion and desire to match

his own. He knew that when the time came he would adore her and give her anything she wanted.

* * * *

Kera still tried to get off his lap, to put some distance between them in order to clear her head. When he once more leaned in for a kiss, she attempted to bite him for the sole reason that each time he kissed her he stole her breath, made her senseless. And being senseless was something she couldn't afford at the moment, not if she wanted to get away from him and the compound.

Devon took her by the chin and kissed her hard, deep, and once more she tasted the sweetness of the elixir. His hand wrapped around her neck, thumb rubbing a spot that had her squirming uncomfortably on his lap as he thrust his tongue in and out, tasting her. Once more he'd stolen her breath away. When he let up on the kiss she could still feel the stamp of his possession, grudgingly admitting he tempted her into giving in.

"Damn, you taste good," he breathed heavily against her lips. "You make me so damn hungry I can't think straight." He kissed her again, teasing her lips with the tip of his tongue. "God I want to kiss each and every inch of your body."

It took a few precious moments for her to clear her mind, open her eyes. "Not in your wildest dreams," she huffed, irritated, trying to get her breathing under control. Why had she stopped resisting his kisses? This was crazy!

"Oh baby, soon you'll get to see just what my dreams are all about."

Devon held her in place and kissed her again. He deepened it while lightly tracing from her neck down to the top of her breast with the back of his hand. The contact sent shivers racing down her spine, nipples turning into hard sensitive peeks. He held her still with such ease, but so gently she didn't even fight when he continued to graze her breast with the back of his free hand. He brushed the top of one breast and then cupped it before travelling down her stomach and then up a thigh. When he got to the hem on the bottoms of her bathing suit, she broke the kiss and the spell. Getting herself back under some kind of control she sat up straighter, moving away from where she'd somehow leaned against him.

“Don’t,” she said in a soft yet breathless voice.

Irritated with her surrender, she pushed off his lap. He let her go but took hold of her wrist. After the kiss and the light touching Kera could clearly see that Devon was very aroused; his erection pressed against his shorts, eyes sparkling.

Something in her head screamed that it was time for them to be alone completely. That he was going to take them to one of those rooms and Lord only knew do what he’d do to her.

Devon stood up and jerked Kera to him. She tried to twist her wrist free, fear of the unknown and what was to come giving her the strength and motivation to fight once more. He dragged her along with him as he went over to the guards who waited for them at the doors.

“Take her to my room,” Devon said to them.

Kera grabbed onto the door, and glared at Devon. “You’re a son of a bitch if you think you can have me!”

“Then, my sweet—” He smiled back with that sexy grin she both hated and was starting to like. “I’m a son of a bitch because I *am* going to have you.” Licking his bottom lip, he looked her up and down. “Each and every sweet inch of you.”

Chapter Three

The bedroom she stepped into was very large. In fact, it was so large that her bedroom, the bathroom, and the kitchen in her father's house could've fit into the space.

A large King-size bed, low to the floor, took pride of place in the middle of the room with its white fur coverlet already turned down and the many pillows placed appropriately, ready for use. Next to the bed stood a low table on which sat a bucket of chilling champagne and two crystal flutes. To the right of the bed Kera could see the bathroom, with a tub easily large enough to fit two.

Kera saw that there were also two white robes at the foot of the bed. Another low table crouched in the other corner with large pillows around it but other than that, there was no other furniture in the room. It was strictly a room with a bed.

She turned quickly when someone unlocked the door. Not Devon. She sighed in relief since she needed to plan. A maid with a cart of food entered the room. Outside, she saw the same guy who had escorted her still guarding the door, so Kera couldn't run. Instead, she stayed put and watched the maid place the food on the low table before leaving without saying a word, again locking Kera in. More minutes passed before the door again unlocked. This time Devon stepped in.

He stood in the doorway looking around the room, nodding his approval. When his eyes landed on Kera they had a small stare off. He closed the door slowly behind him before he strode into the room. Kera, on the other hand, took a few steps backward, preparing herself for the fight she knew was coming. He gave her that sly smile of his and stalked toward her. Again, she backed away.

"I'm not going to bite," he told her with a grin. Kera reminded

herself he wasn't handsome, even as she licked lips become dry. "At least not right now."

"I'm not in the mood for your games, so why don't you just cut the shit and tell me what you want."

"Right to the point." He crossed his arms over his chest, one hand then rising up to his mouth to tap a finger over his soft, luscious lips. "I sort of like that. Bullshitting around definitely isn't me either. Want a drink?" He pointed to the champagne with the finger that had been tapping his mouth. Kera watched him closely as he moved over to it, pulling it out of the ice. "Nice year."

"Aren't you going to—um...?" She couldn't bring herself to finish the statement.

"Do what?" He popped the cork, his nicely muscled back to her, and poured the liquid in two glasses.

He handed her a glass, and she took it. But instead of standing in front of her, he went over to the plush pillows and low table, sat down, and stretched out comfortably. She watched him take a drink, staring at the way his throat moved as he swallowed. Would his neck taste different than his lips?

"Staring at me like that isn't going to help matters any, just so you know," he said.

"Don't know what you're talking about." She sighed.

"Come over here, Kera."

"Why?"

"Because I'm asking you to."

He was being nice to her, and she didn't understand why. No one was *ever* nice to her, not even her father. With some caution, Kera walked slowly over to the table and sat down across from him, making sure the table stayed between them.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"What d'you want?"

He took another drink, lingering it seemed, both on that drink and answering her. Smacking his lips together, Devon twirled the liquid in the glass before setting it down on the table. Kera's stomach seemed to drop when he looked her right in the eyes.

"I have what I want."

"That is?"

"You."

The statement had her panicking all over. Kera scrambled back up onto her feet, as did Devon. She only made it to the middle of the room before he once more had a hold of her.

In a blink of an eye Kera found herself wrapped tightly in his arms, face to face, his hold relentless. She felt his fingers as they searched for the tie of her suit on her lower back. Kera couldn't still the panic that rose when he pulled, releasing half of her admittedly scanty protection.

"Devon," she gasped when he found the tie behind her neck, releasing that one also.

"You're so soft," he whispered as he pulled the top away, tossing it behind his back.

For the first time in her life her bare breasts made contact with the bare chest of a male. The feeling was so exquisite and so new she could only watch as he closed his eyes, obviously enjoying the feel of her to the fullest. Hell, she had a hard time not closing her own and enjoying the sensations that ran through her body.

"I think I could stand here just holding you all night long," he said softly. He opened his eyes, looked down at her. "You are perfection."

"I don't think this is such—" she didn't finish what she was saying thanks to him moving her arms behind her back causing her chest to thrust upward.

He lightly brushed the knuckles of one hand across her left breast, watched as the nipple peaked slightly when he gave it a light caress. She was unable to stop the tremor that went through her at his touch. It felt so good! When his hand closed around the mound the air rushed right out of her lungs.

He kneaded it, teased the nipple with his thumb, and all the while she didn't even realize he was walking her backwards to the bed until her legs touched it. He bent down to kiss her. Kera leaned away to avoid him and ended up falling right onto the bed. Realization hit. Quickly covering her breasts with the fur, she scooted away from him, going right to the center; eyes open wide and fastened on his every move.

* * * *

Kera covered herself quickly. Devon met her frightened gaze, working hard to hold back the lust threatening to spill forth

and drive his every action. He knew right then that having her, claiming her, and especially making her want it, was going to be a big challenge.

Not breaking that eye contact, Devon slowly moved closer to the bed and climbed on it, leaning over her as he went. Leaning on his hand, so as not to put any of his weight on her, he got so close he was sure she could feel his breath on her face. Still, she didn't move. *Kera wants this, but is afraid*, he thought, *but afraid of what?*

Devon tried to give her a light kiss, but she turned her head and he wound up kissing her neck. This time he didn't stop. Holding himself up so as not to make body contact and scare her further, he took hold of the fur cover with one hand and started to gently slide it away from her body. Kera held on to it tightly. Yet, Devon was persistent and suddenly, with a quick yank, the cover came away. It left her completely exposed, arms quickly going up to cover her breasts.

When his eyes roamed over her body, his erection became thicker and began pulsating with excitement. The only other time in his life he had to fight for this kind of control was his first time with a woman. He saw the shyness in her eyes and it helped to cool him down some.

Slow and easy. That's what he kept telling himself. *Go slow and easy with her.* Frightening the shit out of her wouldn't do either one of them any good, it'd only cause a fight and by the look in her eyes he could tell that fight was soon to come if he wasn't careful.

Devon looked down at his hand, following it with his eyes as he grazed, ever so lightly, the part of Kera's breast her hands were not able to cover. He felt her try to move away from him, yet the way he leaned over her meant she couldn't move very far. He had her just where he wanted her.

He continued to trail his hand over her body. He caressed her arm, her side, and then down to her belly. When he reached the top of her bikini bottoms, he thought he heard a faint "no," but couldn't be sure. Brushing the strings that held the bottoms together, he started to play with them. He teased her by letting them slip through his fingers, then giving them a light tug. However, he didn't pull on them hard enough to slip the knot.

She wasn't ready for that just yet. He wanted her willing, or at least, as willing as possible.

Down her leg he touched her, then back up to the inside of her thigh. He loved the softness of her skin, the way it felt under his hands, and he even liked the faint smell of jasmine that lingered on her body. Devon's erection became painful when he thought of her soft skin rubbing his. The painful arousal was enough to test his control, which began to slip faster than he would have liked.

Slowly, he lowered his body down to hers, the heat of her flesh sweet agony. All he wanted to do was rip off her bottoms and thrust his rigid, aching cock inside of her until he passed out from exhaustion. Instead, he took a deep breath and tried to calm himself because he knew it was not the right moment to be thinking like this. Devon wanted to get her to relax and enjoy his touch, even to crave it, or at the very least get used to him being the one to touch her. He reminded himself to take things slowly. She wasn't going anywhere tonight. She was here to stay.

Devon took hold of her arms, pried them away from her breasts, and felt, for the second time, her breasts against his chest. He also moved her legs apart so he could lie between them. Instantly, her hands went up to his chest to push him away. At the same time, Kera tried to use her legs in order to buck him off. But all her fighting resulted in was allowing him to better position himself between her legs as well as giving him full access to her breasts. When he gazed at her face, Devon saw the fire she had displayed earlier at the pool had returned in full force.

"Stop, damn you!"

Devon took hold of her wrists, pinning them over her head. "Shhh," he tried to sooth. She whimpered, but whether in fear or arousal he couldn't tell. "I'm not going to hurt you, Kera. I promise you that everything I do will be pleasurable." He looked her up and down again. "Now to think of how I'm going to do this." He put both wrists in one hand and then reached down to cup a breast again, but ended up having to hold her wrists in both hands once more.

"Okay, plan B then."

Devon leaned to the side, reached under a pillow, and

searched for the white silk scarf he'd requested. Kera's eyes widened even more when she saw it and she began to fight like a wild animal in a cage. She twisted, bucked under him, tried to pull her wrists free. Tying her up became a job itself, one that he struggled with but in the end won.

Once he had the scarf tied to her wrists he jerked her to the headboard, fought to position her back in the center of the bed and avoid the kicks that almost made it to his chest.

"Wow," he huffed, smiling in amusement. "I have to say, the fight you have in you is very impressive."

"You suck!" she snapped, twisting back and forth. "Here I was thinking you might've been human and maybe we could compromise, and then you pull this shit!"

If looks could kill, he would have been suffering right now, he had no doubt about it. Devon also didn't think his cock could get any harder than it was already, but it sure as shit felt like it. Even in her anger, Kera was sexy. Which meant he had it bad for her, and still hadn't really done anything but kiss and lightly touch her.

"You don't like being tied up?" he asked with what he thought to be an innocent voice.

"What the hell do you think?" her voice rose in pitch.

Devon chuckled. "You might change your mind when I get done with you."

"I highly doubt it." She gave a tug to her arms. "Let. Me. Go," she demanded through clenched teeth.

"Nope." He touched her breast with the back of his hand, moving down to her belly, sliding over and up to the other. Her nipples peaked hard at his touch. "You're a very beautiful woman, you know that?"

With a low moan, he bent over and sucked a nipple into his mouth. Kera began to buck under him but he easily subdued her with his body weight. As he sucked and lightly bit on the tiny nub, he brought his other hand up to play with the untended nipple. He pulled, gave it a turn, popped the one out of his mouth and took the other in. He teased both with fingers and mouth. Flicked them quickly with his tongue, and blew hot air on them. She gasped, squirmed, and watched his every move with eyes dazed from growing arousal.

Once satisfied that they were hard little points and hopefully

very sensitive, he moved down her body, kissing, licking his way along the soft skin. He licked her belly button; he felt her stiffen and knew she realized what he was going to do.

“Don’t you even fucking dare!”

Kera fought mercilessly against her bonds, trying to buck him off and away from her as best as she could. Glad he knew how to tie the bonds in a way that wouldn’t hurt her, he wasn’t swayed. Devon continued to kiss from her navel and along her hips, biting at the suit strings still covering her lower half. He even swiped his tongue across the outline of the suit.

“I think it might be time for these to come off,” he told her.

Devon used his teeth to remove the knot holding the last part of her suit together. He didn’t tug hard enough for the suit to slip away but did tug enough that it only covered a few inches of skin.

“Oh I can’t wait to taste you.” He couldn’t keep the edge out of his voice when he spoke.

“You’re crazy!” she gasped.

“For you, baby, I sure as hell am.”

Her squirming caused the skimpy suit bottoms to slide to one side. She squealed, her face turned red and she stiffened up with wide eyes watching the material. He chuckled

“Let’s have some fun, shall we?” Devon took hold of her ankles and flipped her over to her stomach. The bathing suit bottom fell right off. “Very nice.”

Kera screamed in frustration. Devon parted her legs and sat back on his knees between them, waiting for her to finish her tantrum. He rubbed her backside, up and down her back, to the curve of her ass. Soft as silk. And she was arching *into* him... not much, but a little. Hmmm.

“What—what are you going to do?” she stuttered.

Deliberately, he moved slowly, stretching out over her backside and spine, brushing her hair to one side. He kissed her ear before speaking. “I’m going to taste every sweet inch of you, just like I told you I would.”

“Oh god,” she moaned, turning her face away from him.

“Have you ever been spanked before, Kera?” That had her turning her face right back to him, eyes wide in shock. “Spanked until you come?”

"You are seriously out of your mind."

"Maybe." He sat up on his knees, rubbing his hands up and down her skin and over her ass. "But I bet I can get you off by spanking you." Raising his hand, he landed the first gentle slap to her ass.

Kera cried out, arching as much as she could to get away.

Devon landed several more spansks on Kera's ass. They were firm enough to only leave red handprints but would be effective nevertheless. He kept her legs spread with his knees between them, and every time she tried to rear up, he teased her damp pussy with his fingers.

After maybe ten swats, he stopped, rubbed her cheeks with his face, and slipped a finger inside her body. She was hot and wet from the spanking. Kissing and licking at the red marks on her ass, he continued to stroke his finger in and out of her pussy. He heard her moan quietly even as she pressed her face into the pillow to mask the sound. But she was moving with him, not against.

Another finger joined the first to stretch her and Devon skimmed up her body to lie against her back. He took hold of her hair, turned her head and gave her a light kiss and lick on her neck, never stopping the movements of his fingers. He watched her face while he finger-fucked her, saw the pleasure build inside her. The plan was simply to give her as much pleasure as he could before he entered her.

"You feel it, Kera." He licked at the tears and whispered into her ear, "That very first orgasm is quickly approaching."

"What are you doing to me?" she cried out as he nibbled on the ear he was whispering into, thrusting his fingers in and out faster.

"Loving you." He groaned in pain. Damn if he wasn't hard as stone, ready to thrust into her, to take and love her until he became exhausted. "God I want to taste you, too, feel your climax, to sip every drop of your release."

Kera's head went back on his shoulder and she screamed. He felt her contract around his fingers, felt the very first orgasm wash through her body, and it just about made him come also.

Devon stopped what he was doing and slid back down her body. He rolled over to his back and lifted Kera up by her hips,

moving her into position. Kera cried out when Devon lowered her hips to his waiting face and tongue, and immediately started to work on her damp mound. He worked his tongue back and forth at the slit that held his treasure. Every so often, he would flick her straining clit, causing a few small moans from her.

“Oh god,” she moaned loudly. “Shit, shit, shit.” She panted, almost gasping for breath as she moved her hips, wanton in her need.

Devon attacked her clit. He sucked on it, pulled, rolled the tiny nub with his tongue into his mouth. He brought out every whimper, every moan he could from her. He built up the pleasure to the point that it caused *him* pain. At the same time, he thrust two fingers back inside of her and finger-fucked her fast. He felt her tense up as he moved his fingers, heard her gasping for air, and loved it all. He moaned against her clit while he sucked it and she cried out, humping her hips. He held her with ease, using only one arm around her waist. Kera began to move and moan, her actions speaking loudly to him; instead of pulling away or fighting, she pressed herself down harder onto his mouth.

The tension in her body told him how close she was getting. Kera’s release was so close that Devon didn’t know if *he* could withstand it. He wanted so much to feel her lose that control she had over her mind and body. He could barely wait to feel her tremble with the power of the climax. But what he wanted the most was to feel her orgasm around his cock.

When he heard the faint, muffled “Oh God” from her, he knew he had her. She wanted this now. Devon released her clit slid up under her body and kissed her deep. With his mouth over hers and his fingers deep inside, he felt every tremor in her as she experienced one hell of a powerful orgasm. Before she could come down from the high, Devon stopped kissing, skimmed back down some and sucking a nipple into his mouth. Not once did he stop pumping his fingers into her, drawing out each sensation, each pleasurable feeling. By the time Kera settled down and regained her senses, Devon was lying back under her fully with her legs spread over his hips. He was in the perfect position to take her, and when she gazed at his face, he could see by her expression she knew it also.

“I could take you just like this, Kera,” he told her softly, gently

brushing sweat-damp hair from her eyes. "But I think this position might be too much for you for your first time," he purred, rubbing his lips across her own. "Too deep," he continued as he raised his arms and let her arms loose, then quickly flipped her over onto her back with him on top. "I think this way would be better for you, for our first time."

"Devon, please," she begged, staring at him in fear, hands pressing against his chest. "I—I'm not ready for this yet." But the look in her eyes was one of lust, desire.

"Yes, you are."

His cock pushed at her entrance and Devon saw the fear rise in her eyes. He nuzzled her neck as he shifted his body, pinning her arms between them and rubbing his hand down her leg. "Try to relax," he whispered gently in her ear. "If you tense up then the pain is going to be worse than what it should be."

"What?" she gasped.

Closing his eyes, willing some control to come back to him, he began to slowly enter her tight, hot pussy, fighting the urge to force himself inside. Gently he pushed in, feeling the unused muscles stretch for the width of his cock. New and powerful sensations washed over his body as he withdrew slightly, nearly pulling out, and then, as if by reflex, back in. She was so tight, so hot, Devon felt as if he was going to be burned alive. Twice he entered and withdrew his cock. Twice he worked to stretch the tightness of her treasure. When the head of his cock finally bumped her hymen, he stopped and kissed up her neck to her ear. Pulsing muscles clasped his throbbing dick, fitting him like a glove. He didn't want to leave the heat, only wanted more of it wrapped around him.

After moving her arms down to her side, Devon slid his arms up to her head as he shifted his body slightly.

"I'm sorry about this, Kera." As quickly as he could, Devon thrust strong and fast, ending Kera's virginity and embedding himself so deeply he wondered if he touched her womb. At the same time, he bit her ear, hoping like hell the trick would help to ease the pain of his cock.

Kera cried out and tried to buck him off, which in effect had him going deeper inside her.

"Don't do that, Kera," he growled, shaking his head slightly

as he strained to stay still and holding his eyes closed tightly.

"I'm not doing anything," she gasped, struggling to free her arms. "This isn't fun, Devon."

Devon held onto Kera tightly, willing himself not to move as her body became accustomed to him. "Give it a few seconds. Please. I promise it gets better again."

Intense pleasure ran through his veins. The way her pussy wrapped tightly around his cock and her soft skin rubbed against his own felt like paradise. He groaned as her pussy tightened mercilessly on his cock. Although he'd had many women in the past, none had felt like this. None had wrapped around him as if made to do so. And not one was ever this tight.

"You keep that up," he hissed, "and I won't have any control." Devon moaned as he placed his head on her shoulder and concentrated on breathing slowly and deeply.

"I'm not doing anything!" Kera snapped back.

"Oh, you're doing more than you know," he groaned, moving his hips slightly to test the waters. "And the pain will go away soon if it hasn't already."

Kera gasped at his move and moved her own hips upward when he pulled back slightly. Devon hissed at her move and moved his hips slowly in a circular motion, biting the inside of his mouth at the sounds which came forth from her with the movement. He heard her whimper, then a sharp intake of air and a slight moan.

"You feel it, don't you?" he asked. She shook her head in denial. "Yes, you do. You feel the throbbing of need, right down there." He moved his hand down between her legs, touching her clit. Her eyes closed, back arched at the touch. Devon growled deep in his chest again moved his hips in a short but quick motion. "I'm trying to go slowly with you," he moaned. "But fuck! You make it so difficult when you look like that, and feel so fucking *good* wrapped around me."

Devon pushed himself up on his hands, causing his cock to push deeper inside of her. Her hands moved up to his chest, but whether to push or hold him he wasn't sure as he took hold of her legs and hiked them up. The moment he had her in the position he wanted, he let loose and her nails dug deep into his Pecs.

Devon withdrew his cock only to thrust forcibly back in. he couldn't seem to hold anything back and go easy anymore, not like he had planned to begin with. All he felt was this overwhelming need to claim her.

She dug her nails into his chest as he moved. Devon let go of her legs, only to take a tight grip on her wrists, pinning them over her head, never missing a beat as he rammed himself hard and fast back inside her.

"Oh shit!" Kera yelled.

Devon hit all the right spots for her. He saw the intense emotions on her face, watched as her eyes drifted closed and her head moved back and forth with his possession, with each thrust, with her pleasure. He spread his legs to gain more power, and then he let go of her wrists to slide his arms under her and clasp her shoulders. He concentrated on her face as her orgasm began, then closed his own eyes against the strength of her pussy tightening on him as it hit. He groaned at the strength with which her body tightened around him, making it difficult to push and withdraw from her body. Devon groaned from the raw pleasure and from her scream of release.

Her hands tightened around his shoulders, legs wrapped around his hips as she tried to raise herself up against him as wave after wave hit her.

Devon bit his lip in order to hold back his own intense release. He felt as if he needed to make this last longer. Using his forearms against her back, he pulled her with him as he sat back on his knees with her on his lap. With one hand he showed her how to move on him and with the other he cupped a breast. Both of her hands gripped his shoulders tightly and she allowed her hips to move on their own. Devon focused on her closely when she threw her head back, crying out in pleasure. No longer fighting him, she eagerly took everything he had to give.

He let go of her breast and took a handful of her hair bringing her face to his. Devon kissed her deep, pushing his tongue past her teeth, tasting the sweetness that still lingered. The moment she started to kiss him back he took a firm hold on her hips and forced her to pound on him hard. Her moan told him she was close to another orgasm. He knew this one would be enough to push him over as well.

Kera broke the kiss off, wrapped her arms tightly around his neck, threw her head back, and screamed as her final orgasm hit. Devon wrapped his arms tightly around her as his cock erupted deep within her. Over and over, his seed exploded from him, making Devon feel as if it would never end. When, finally, he gained some control back, he noticed Kera was asleep with her head on his shoulder.

He was far from done with her, but for now, he would let her sleep. After all, they had the whole night.

Gently he picked her up, suppressing a groan as he slid out of her body and placed her between the sheets, kissing her breasts as he did so. He was so sensitive that even the smallest bump of the head of his cock against her had him on pins and needles. He cleaned them both up quickly, climbed into the bed, and brought her to his chest. Devon thought he would give her a couple of hours of sleep before waking her. After all, this was their wedding night.

Chapter Four

Kera woke to discomfort between her legs and a very warm body pressed against her back in the spoon position. When she opened her eyes she realized that, much to her disappointment, what had happened to her was not a dream. She tried to move the arm draped over her hip, but when she did, the hand slid up to her chest and closed around a breast. Again, she tried to move the arm and slide her body from the bed, but the hand clenched around her breast and pulled her even closer to the body.

"Have a nice nap? Were you dreaming?" Devon whispered in her ear. His body was stretched out behind her, his arm seemed to tighten around her, and that cock of his was hard, resting between the folds of her ass.

Kera stiffened. "More like a nightmare." She hadn't expected him to wake up as she tried to slip away from him. Not after all *that*.

"You feel good against me," he told her softly as he kissed her earlobe.

"Well, you feel like a damn invasion," she said coldly, dismayed at how hard he was, pressing against her butt. "And, I prefer to sleep alone."

"We might not get much sleep tonight at all." He smiled when she glanced over her shoulder at him. "If I have my way."

The growling of her stomach saved her. Devon laughed softly as he kissed her ear and licked at the lobe. Kera tried to distance herself from him and his intrusive dick.

"We have a long night ahead of us, Kera. Might want to at least make an attempt to get to know me a little," he told her in that low, sexy voice she was starting to like.

"Do I have a choice?"

Devon slid the sheet covering her body down. He cupped her breast again and rubbed the nipple with his thumb. "No."

Again, her stomach growled. Devon kissed her shoulder while he played with her breasts. He laughed again when he heard the sound of her stomach. "I guess I should feed you."

"Then you can let me go," she told him sweetly.

Devon chuckled. "Oh, no. I'll never let you go now." He moved down her body to kiss her on the hip before he got out of bed.

Kera glared at him as he stretched leisurely. She did have to admit he had a very nice body. He was nothing but one large taut muscle as he moved. She watched the power run through him and thought of how he could have made her do whatever he wanted, had he thought to ask. That thought alone scared the hell out of her. The question of why he *didn't* force her, instead giving her pleasure, lingered in her mind. Instead, he seduced her in ways she didn't think possible. And a large part of her wanted him again.

She never took her eyes off him as he slipped into one of the robes at the foot of the bed. Pulling the sheet up to her chest she held onto it tightly, waiting to see if he might pounce on her again.

"Might want to slip a robe on," Devon said over his shoulder. "The staff will bring food in and change the bedding."

Kera grabbed the robe and started to slip it on while holding the sheet up at the same time. "So, you've been through this routine before, I see," she mumbled.

Devon smiled at her. "If you're asking me whether I have had sex with other girls here, the answer is yes. If you are asking if I've been married before, that answer is no."

"I never asked." With the robe knotted tightly at her waist, Kera stood and started toward the bathroom. Devon strolled around the bed quickly and embraced her from behind only to turn her to face him.

"That bothers you," he said with tenderness and a knowing smirk.

"Why should it bother me that you come to the compound and use the girls who have been cast aside and have no choice but to submit to your own sick pleasure?" She tried to move

away from him again, but he tightened his arms. "Please, let go. I'd like to use the bathroom."

"Ah," he said, "I think you're jealous."

Kera saw the teasing look he gave her, and she threw him her sweetest smile in return. "If I were jealous, then that would mean I liked you or gave a shit. In order for that to happen, hell would have to freeze over."

Devon laughed. "Now I know you like me at least this much." He made a small space with two of his fingers. "You didn't say you hated me."

"I'd like you even better if you were with someone else."

"And I like it even better inside that tight, hot body of yours." Devon's eyes seemed to light up, but vanished when Kera tried to slap him again. He took both of her wrists in one hand and pinned them behind her back. "It's just the two of us here, Kera. You don't have to fight what you want. But if I have to, I *will* tie you up again and spank you." His eyes roamed over her body. "And if memory serves me right, you enjoyed both."

"You really enjoyed that, didn't you?" she accused, jerking on her arms.

"As a matter of fact, I did," He walked her forward toward the wall, turned her at the last second, and pinned her chest to it. "And so did you."

"Like hell I did!"

Devon leaned into her, pressing his stiff cock into her covered ass. He licked her earlobe before he spoke. "You were so wet from it that I'll bet you orgasmed before my fingers even touched you."

"Who says I didn't fake it?" she snapped.

"You're right. Who is to say you didn't fake it?" Wrapping an arm around her waist, he went to the knot of the robe. He tugged at it as he continued to press her into the wall. "Let's find out for sure, shall we?"

"What're you doing?"

"I want to see if you faked it or not." He yanked the robe open and removed the tie from the loops.

Devon held her by the arms, forcing her to walk toward the end of the bed. With a move from his knees, he brought Kera down to hers. He snatched roughly on her robe, pulling it from

her body, and then went to work on tying her wrists back to the bed. Only this time, he tied her to the foot of the bed at the floor.

The same fear ran through Kera as before, but she also felt something warm in the pit of her stomach. As much as she didn't want to admit it, the thought of him spanking her was exciting.

He strolled over to a dresser and took off his own robe. She saw the muscles in his ass flex as he moved and his erect cock bounce as he moved about. He held up a paddle and looked it over carefully. A thick wooden thing with tiny heart shape cuts out of the middle of it. Kera's heart began beating in fear. Seeing that paddle in his strong hands made her suddenly realize just how far she had pushed him this time.

"Devon," she swallowed nervously. "Please don't beat me." Kera huddled so far down on the ground that when he walked back over to her she could barely see him.

Devon got down on his knees behind her, raised her ass up in the air and pressed his body to hers. Holding her like this, her upper body was low to the ground. "Beat you?" he asked her innocently while his hands cupped her breasts, pinching the nipples between his fingers, "Never." He nudged her legs wider apart with his own. "I just want to hear you scream for me again." The paddle dropped to the floor. He ran his hands down her belly toward her pussy. With one hand, he opened the silky folds while brushing her clit with the other. "By the time I'm done with you, your body will be begging for my touch."

He pushed two fingers of his other hand deep inside her, still holding the lips open. Kera couldn't help herself and moaned loudly at the pleasure. Devon started a slow in-and-out motion with his hand, while at the same time rubbing his cock against her wet lips from behind.

"Scream for me, Kera," he demanded in her ear. "Come for me hard. Drench my cock."

Even considering the brief time that they had known each other, it didn't take long for Kera to respond to him. With a moan, Kera climaxed at his demand, feeling her own juices run down her legs.

"That's how I like it," Devon said in her ear.

Kera closed her eyes in shame and worked on getting some kind of control over her body, but her regaining control was

something Devon didn't seem to want to allow her.

His hands took hold of her hips, positioned his cock at her entrance, and plunged deeply inside. He groaned as she gripped him tightly and quivered around his cock.

"Yessss!" he groaned in her ear. "Tighten up on me." Devon licked at her ear as he ground his cock farther inside of her. "Ready to fake it?"

Devon sank back on his knees, took hold of her hips, and pounded into her. Her ass smacked against his stomach as his cock slammed into her. Over and over again, he took her ruthlessly.

"Oh God!" he cried. "Let go!"

Kera cried out as her orgasm hit her. Her pussy gripped him like a fist, forcing him to explode. She cried out again as another, smaller orgasm hit, while his cock got larger and pulsed inside of her.

Devon laid his forehead on her back while his cock exploded hot and heavy inside of her. "Want to say you faked it again?" he asked, breathing roughly. "God, I have never had so little control before, or felt this kind of need to have more."

* * * *

Kera was also breathing in heavy gasps, unable to say a word. Her eyes were still closed as she waited for him to untie her. A thought crossed her mind of turning the tables on him one day, but she pushed it aside. Thinking like that meant she was planning to stay with him, which she was not. She wasn't.

His arms wrapped around her waist and held her after he released her wrists.

"The thought of moving is hard," he stated. "I want to stay inside you forever." He chuckled when he heard her stomach rumble again. "Go take a bath."

Her legs were like rubber when she tried to stand up. Only with his help was she able to walk into the bathroom, naked of course. She drew a hot bath and sank into it gratefully. The water felt good on her sore flesh, and before she knew it she was relaxing, eyes closed in pleasure. She didn't get to experience the luxury of soaking at home and wasn't at the Compound long enough for one either.

"Now that is a sight I can definitely get used to seeing."

Kera jumped and quickly sat up in the tub, covering her breasts. "What are you doing?"

Devon dropped his robe and walked up to the tub. Kera felt as if she was going to pass out and she didn't know if it was excitement from looking at his body or the hunger she felt and saw reflected in his eyes. He stood before her in all his strong, naked glory, letting Kera examine his body before he stepped into the hot water.

Kera gasped when Devon took hold of her legs behind her knees and pulled her to him, sitting her on his lap facing him. His arms wrapped tightly around her body as his hands flattened on her back before moving up to cup her head. His mouth roamed and nibbled her neck, jaw, and shoulder. It felt wonderful.

"What are you doing?" Kera asked, shocked, unable to stop herself from tensing up.

"Having a snack before the meal," he answered her, squeezing her ass.

"Stop, Devon!" Kera pushed with all her might, worried she was enjoying it too much, and was surprised that he let her go.

Devon chuckled. "I only came in here to let you know that the food is out there and ready." He moved closer to her again and kissed her lightly on the lips. "And if you want to eat it hot, then move that sexy ass of yours." He kissed her one more time, got out of the tub, picked up his robe, and then left.

Twenty minutes later, Kera walked out of the bathroom to see the bed had been stripped and remade with clean sheets. The petite dining table was set with food and Devon, dressed again in his black silk shorts, lounged on the pillows on the floor.

Kera made double sure her robe covered everything, took a deep breath, and swallowed hard. "I think after we eat, we should just go our separate ways."

She walked over and sat down as far away from him as she could get. He poured two glasses of wine and handed one to her, along with some bread. "Do you know what this time between us is?"

Kera took a small drink. "I think I know enough. What is this?"

"I don't think you really do." He started to fill a plate with food for her. "This place is like a chapel." He waited until she looked

up at him. "And you're drinking wine. Haven't you ever had wine before?"

"Around here it was oatmeal, which I hate with a passion, and at home I was damn lucky to have the leftovers once my father was finished." Kera paused. "And what'd you mean this place is a chapel?"

"I mean, we're now married."

Kera stopped midway from taking another drink of the wine. Slowly she put her glass back down and shook her head, looking at Devon as if he lost his mind. "No. We're not."

Devon took a bite out of some meat and washed it down with the wine. "Call this our wedding night, or honeymoon."

"That can't be," Kera whispered. "Not possible."

"Why?" He cut a leg from the chicken on the platter, and Kera watched him with the knife.

"Because, I have some say about whom I marry."

Devon took a bite of meat and then leaned back once more on the pillows with his legs outstretched, crossed at the ankles. "Not when you become the property of the Compound. Your father signed all rights away before he left town."

Kera slipped her own knife under the table as she regarded Devon. "My father shouldn't have the right to sell me," she said in a tight voice. "I'm twenty-one. Old enough to say no to coming to the Compound."

"He signed all the papers," he told her in a matter-of-fact way. Devon stood up, went to the other room, and came back with papers in his hand. He sat and tossed them to her. "Look for yourself."

Kera glanced down at the papers. Sure enough they stated that all rights to Kera were signed over to the Compound. She was sold, owned by the Compound with only one chance of gaining freedom and that was by marriage. If she didn't find a match, then she was to remain a server of the Compound and could be used as they saw fit.

She looked back up at him. "This isn't right," she whispered, fisting the paper in her hand.

"Eat something." Devon pushed her plate towards her. Slowly she brought some of the meat from the chicken he'd cut up to her lips. "I won't argue with you about right and wrong."

Especially since I agree it isn't right the way the Compound or Treece treats some of you."

"Then why are you here?"

"I'm here because I wanted you."

"And I just bet you get everything you want," she snorted. "Spoiled rich boy sees something unattainable and just has to figure out a way to get it."

"Okay first off, I'm not that rich." He held up a finger. "And second, most of the time I don't get what I want. I have to work at it."

Kera rolled her eyes. "Oh please."

"And for the record, my buddy, Blaine, has been trying to figure out a way to change some of the rules the town has concerning the Compound."

"And if he did that, then what would you keep your time occupied with?" She batted her eyes at him and smiled sweetly.

Devon chuckled, shook his head, and took a big drink from his wine glass before sitting up. "You." He reached to the side where a dish was still covered. Taking off the lid, her mouth watered at the sight of the fruit piled high and two chocolate strawberries.

"Now these, I hear, are to die for." He picked up one of the strawberries and held it up in the air over her head. "Take a bite."

Kera bit her lip before opening her mouth and taking the large strawberry into her mouth. Her eyes seemed to close automatically as the flavors exploded in her mouth. Sweet juice mixed with chocolate filled her senses and slid down her throat. Being poor most of her life, the only way she could get something like this was if she snuck into the fields and picked it herself.

Not waiting to be asked again, she reached up and took the fruit from him, finishing it off in two huge bites, sighing softly at the pleasure.

"You like them, huh?" Kera opened her eyes and nodded while he took the other one and bit into it. "I heard they do something special to them to bring out the sweetness."

"What?" she asked with a mouth full.

"Oh, I'll never tell," he smiled, finishing off the fruit, "at least not yet."

She got a funny feeling from the smile he was gave her. She licked her lips, moved back on the pillows, and watched him cautiously as he finished off his wine and poured himself more.

"You really should eat something," he told her again.

"Why?"

"It's going to be a long night for us. You're going to need all the energy you can get."

"If you think I'm going to do *that* with you again, then you're very mistaken."

Again he chuckled, "Oh sweet, I plan on doing it all night long."

She needed to get away, and do it now, before she fell for him. That was her only thought at the moment. Already she felt strange. There was this warming sensation that started at the pit of her stomach and began pulsing down between her legs. Already her clit started to heat up and throb. And that was something she wasn't going to give in to.

"Stop calling me sweet!" She rose and went after him with her knife. Her anger and the sexual desire and frustration, rising inside her like a burning flame, left Kera feeling strangled with emotions.

* * * *

He grabbed her wrist just as she pounced on him, holding the knife above her head. Devon was very impressed at how strong she was when pissed. Kera seemed to use her whole body to try to get her arm down and that damn knife closer to his face. But since she didn't weigh that much he was able to hold her back with some ease.

"You son of a bitch!" she grunted.

Devon couldn't help himself and laughed at her. "Come on, Kera. Is that all you've got?"

With a little pressure on her wrist and a twist, he managed to force her to drop the knife. But that movement gave her the upper hand, enabling her to do something he wasn't expecting.

Kera landed her knee squarely in his nuts this time, causing him to let go of her arms and double over in pain like he had never felt in his whole life! Devon rolled over to his stomach, holding his balls and trying not to vomit from the pain. He glared at her from the corner of his eye as she crawled away and

headed for the door.

"You're sick if you think this is a game," she said in a deadly voice. "This is my life you're fucking with and as far as I'm concerned this charade is all over. You may be good in bed, but that is about as far as this thing between us is going to go. Period!"

She got up, backed herself all the way to the door. All Devon could do was lay there watching her, hoping like hell he wasn't going to be sick.

Kera opened the door, which the staff who brought in the food and changed the bedding had forgotten to lock. Helplessly, he watched her run out.

But Devon wasn't worried. She couldn't get out of the Compound without him, and she had nothing on but the robe. The only thing he might have to worry about would be someone else thinking that he could kiss Kera or that she was free. Then Devon would mostly pity the poor bastard, only because he knew what would happen if someone tried to kiss her. Hell, he was feeling it now and all he did was call her sweet.

"Okay, Kera," he said to himself as he tried to stand and winced at the pain. "We'll play hide and seek, but when I get a hold of you, the game is going to be all mine!"

Chapter Five

Kera sat hunched in a corner in the hallway, focusing on all the sounds around her, listening for Devon, and breathing hard. She knew she'd landed a hard hit this time and was surprised he had not sounded some kind of alarm when she ran from him. She closed her hands over her ears to diminish the sounds of others moaning in pleasure. The sounds reminded her of why she was here. And Devon.

Perspiration dampened her forehead and her robe was starting to irritate her skin slightly, scratching her flesh, which suddenly seemed too sensitive. Her clit throbbed harder with a newfound need that she just refused to acknowledge.

Kera kept moving from corner to corner, trying to find some way to get out of the compound and stay hidden by the shadows. The more she moved around, the worse the robe felt on her skin. Within minutes of hiding, Kera was drenched in sweat, her body felt as if it was on fire, and the pounding between her legs became unbearable.

"I know you're around here, Kera," Devon's voice seemed to sing from down the hall. The sound had her closing her eyes, swallowing hard, not only to resist calling out to him, but also to get her breathing under control. "Come out. Come out, wherever you are. You know you can't escape from me."

She heard his footsteps coming toward her, and felt an immense fear of punishment besiege her more than the fear of being caught. The adrenaline pumping through her veins seemed to heighten whatever was going on in her body. "What you feel will only get worse the longer we're apart." His steps were getting closer; so close she could feel them. "I know how to ease the need you feel."

Kera darted out from her corner and headed toward another.

Over her shoulder, in a voice that didn't even sound like hers, she said, "What did you do to me?"

"What makes you think I did anything?" he answered.

She groaned at his words.

"The longer you wait this out with me, the worse it will become for both of us."

Kera moaned as whatever it was in her system hit her with brutal force. Desires unknown to her rushed throughout her, and heat spread to her pussy as wetness ran down her legs. She was on fire, and the need to find something to put it out was her only thought. Her robe seemed too much for her to bear so she tugged it off, a whimper leaving her lips.

* * * *

Devon saw her movements in the shadows. He knew exactly where she was and what she was doing. Right this second, he saw her robe fly across the hall. He strolled over to her. Hearing her faint moaning affected him in more ways than he expected this soon. He went right up to her, squatted down, and brushed her damp hair from her face. Covered in sweat, she tried to fight the drug that was raging in her body; the same drug affected him as well.

"How... could you... do... this?" she asked her feeling of betrayal obvious in her voice.

"If you hadn't tried to run, you wouldn't be in this state now," he told her calmly. "You didn't give me the chance to tell you about this."

"What... is this?" she was panting, struggling to act normal.

Devon gathered Kera to her feet. He saw the raw lust, and confusion, in her eyes.

"Make this stop," Kera begged.

He pushed her against the wall. His mouth crushed hers in a kiss that stole his breath and heated both of them further. She wrapped her arms around his neck, putting as much pressure on his chest with her aching breasts as she could. She moaned into his mouth as he hugged her, grinding his aching, covered cock against her wet pussy. Kera lifted one leg up, grinding her pussy against him.

Devon took hold of both legs, wrapping them around his waist as he held her up against the wall. He freed his cock from

his shorts and thrust into her hot, hungry pussy. She was pure, scorching heat, wrapping around his heavy cock, milking him in an instant.

Kera broke the kiss and screamed in bliss. Her body shook as she came hard, and Devon ground his teeth together while he rode her out. Over and over, he fucked her with almost brutal force, pushing her to the limit and withdrawing, only to do it again. He had heard about the drug in the strawberries, but never in his wildest dreams did he think it was going to be this intense.

“Don’t stop,” Kera said breathlessly.

Devon pounded into her in an almost cruel manner. “When I’m done fucking you tonight, you’ll be lucky to be able to walk.”

She cried out again as another orgasm hit. Devon groaned, feeling her pussy tighten over him and forcing his seed to shoot deep inside. He was breathing heavy with his head on the wall, still hard, and still deep inside of her. The drug in his body far from spent.

“Run from me again,” he told her in a rough, breathy voice, “and I will beat you with that paddle.”

Kera didn’t say a word to him, only gave him a faint nod as she rested her head on his shoulder, breathing hard. Devon pushed them both off the wall. He made sure his shorts didn’t fall down his legs as he started heading back towards the bedroom with her in his arms. Her legs wrapped around his body, his cock still solid as stone and deep inside her, stroking the muscles that gripped his cock tightly. He knew that every few steps he took would be agony on her, but he felt that was the price she would pay for running.

“No! It’s starting again!” Kera moaned out in agony.

“And it will be like that for a while.”

“Why?”

“The drug won’t wear off for some time.”

“You gave me a drug?” She sobbed.

“It’s in my system too. Would I have given it to myself?”

Devon had a difficult time getting them back to the bedroom, Kera climaxed a few more times, but mostly due to the drugs. Because her stomach was empty her body couldn’t fight the effects of the drug like his could.

When he reached the door, one of the guards who was supposed to have been stationed there gave Devon a guilty look and lowered his eyes to the floor. Devon didn't have to tell the man what was on his mind. The guard opened the door for them, closed it, and locked it this time.

Devon walked right back to the dining table, put Kera down on the pillows, and went to the bathroom. Taking off his shorts, he cleaned up, then brought back a washcloth and helped to clean Kera as well.

"Eat something," he told her tearing off a large chunk of bread and handing it to her. "It'll help with the effects of the drug."

"Was this your way of getting what you wanted tonight?" Kera asked with a shaky voice. His firebrand was hunched over holding her stomach.

"Who's to say I didn't already get what I wanted tonight?" He took a large bite of the bread, chewing it quickly and hoping to reduce the effect of the drug.

Kera groaned as another wave hit her. "I can't do this."

Devon crawled over to her. He picked up a piece of chicken and brought it to her lips. "As long as you eat, it'll take the edge off."

"What happens after that?"

He put the food up to her lips. "You'll see."

As Kera ate her food, Devon played with her clit, taking the edge off her need like he told her he would. After he thought she had eaten enough, he went back to the bathroom for a wet cloth to wash down her sweaty body. When he was done he lounged back on the pillows right next to her.

"So what should we do now?" he asked in, what he hoped was a lazy manner. He wanted to give off the impression that he wasn't as affected as she was, even though his cock was still stiff as a board.

"Devon, I can't do this." She sounded like she could start crying at any second. "Please!"

"Okay, but one good turn deserves another." He took hold of her arm, tugging her closer to him, almost on top. "I want you to take my edge off, just like I did for you."

"What?!" she gasped.

"Take hold of my dick like this." He placed her hand around the shaft. "And move it up and down." He showed her how he wanted her to move.

"What's this do?" she asked as she tentatively held him.

"Makes me feel good," he sighed, closing his eyes at the pleasure.

"What happens next?"

"Wait and see."

Kera moved between his legs and sat up on her knees. She moved her hand like he showed her and Devon fought with the pleasure. He was so close to coming that it was torture for him to let her keep going, yet he was unable to stop her. He knew the second that another wave of lust hit her by the tight grip to his cock.

"Easy!" He placed her hand around the base.

"Devon... please," she begged with a sob. "I can't do this anymore."

Devon moved his hand over her back towards her rear. He moved between the curves, dipping his fingers between the crevasses of her ass to her swollen, wet mound. He pushed two fingers deep inside, hearing a sigh of pleasure from her.

"I want nothing more than to have your lips wrapped around my cock," he told her in a thick, desire-filled voice. "But now isn't the time for that. What it is time for is for your sweet pussy to wrap tightly around my cock."

Devon grasped her gently by her arms, pulling her over his body. He turned her so that she was facing away and lowered her onto his waiting cock. The heat and wetness almost made him come, but he gritted his teeth and fought back.

"Up and down, Kera," he instructed her. "Just fuck me hard, up and down."

Kera did as he told her to do. She leaned forward, held onto his legs, and moved her hips strong and fast, up and down. The gasps and pants that came from her lips, as well as the sweet tightness gripping him, really tested Devon's control.

Kera screamed as orgasm after orgasm washed over her. Only when it seemed she could move no more did he shift positions. He sat up, forced her to her hands and knees, and rammed into her like a man possessed. The final scream that

came from Kera was the last for the night. Her muscles tightened down so hard on his cock and with such intensity that Devon thought she might break him. Cries of pure bliss escaped him, causing him to rear back and shove as hard and as deep inside her as he could possibly get.

It took Devon the longest time to catch his breath. He had never had a woman with this much passion before. Furthermore, he'd never had a woman all night. Most of the others in the Compound were women to be fucked without emotion, forgotten, and left behind.

Devon removed himself slowly from Kera's heat and moaned as his sensitive cock brushed her clit. He pushed her hair from her face and smiled. She was out cold. He knew this time she wouldn't be waking up until morning. With his smile still in place, he went about the task of cleaning them both up yet again.

He carried her to the bed and tucked her in. Then he crawled in next to her, enjoying the feel of her heat next to his own.

"Sleep well, Kera," he said as he kissed her forehead, "In the morning, your life changes."

* * * *

When Devon awoke in the morning, he was surprised at how relaxed his body felt. In fact, he was so relaxed that he didn't want to get out of bed or move. He stared at Kera and smiled at the peaceful look on her face. The sheet was tucked under her arms, showing the outline of her breasts. One arm was up by her ear and the other draped over her stomach.

He brushed some of her hair from her face, and then ran his finger down her nose to her lips. She stirred, turning over with a groan. She had to be sore as hell and, strangely, he felt a small sense of pride in that. He had loved every minute of their time together and couldn't wait to have more of her.

Love. Now there was a strange word that popped into his mind. Sure he wanted her, wanted to possess and keep her always, but love? The thought that he could love this woman brought a frown to his face. Things were too new, too uncertain for him to be thinking along the lines of love. Now, he did care deeply for this woman. The urge to protect her, to cherish her, to do everything he could to make her happy, and to help her accept her fate, he felt intensely. But, at this point, love was not

there. Devon wondered if he even knew *how* to love someone. Sure he did. He loved his best friends. He just had never really loved a woman.

He laid back and, snuggling closer to her, wrapped his arms around Kera. It was still very early in the morning, and they didn't have to leave until they were refreshed and fed, so he would let her sleep as long as she needed.

He didn't even realize he fell back asleep until his eyes fluttered open to the sweet smell of hot bread and that warm body he'd loved thoroughly pressed up against him. Kera had turned over and was now laying half on top him with a leg draped over his hips. He brushed the hair from her neck and then ran his hand down her back, which seemed to nudge Kera awake.

"Wake up sleepy head," he said, kissing the top of her head. "It's time for us to get up."

* * * *

Kera opened her eyes slowly, thinking she was still in some kind of dream. But the muscled chest her head rested on and the hand roaming up and down her back was no dream. She pushed herself up fast, pulled the sheet up to her chin, and scooted away from Devon like he was Satan himself.

"Oh, God! This is real," she groaned as she glanced around for a place to hide.

Devon sat up and smiled at her. "I would think your body would tell you that this was no dream. But if you need help remembering it, I'm more than happy to oblige you."

Kera scanned the table of hot food and her face turned red. "Someone came in here and saw us?" she whined. "Like this!"

The grin he gave her answered the question. "Come on." He handed her a new robe. "Let's eat while it's hot. We can fight after if you want."

She took the robe from him, staying put as he got off the bed and put one on also. Only once he was heading for the table, his back to her, did she get off the bed and put the robe on in a hurry.

Kera sat across the table from him. Her body felt so sore she didn't think she would be able to move much. The small feast set up in front of her was ten times better than the oatmeal or even the best meals she had eaten at her father's.

Scrambled eggs, sausage, hot bread, croissants, fruit, and cinnamon rolls were piled high, along with three kinds of juices and two types of coffee.

It was a feast she had only ever dreamed about.

Kera ate like there was no tomorrow. She put at least one of everything on her plate as Devon sat back, drinking coffee, eating some fruit, and watching her.

“Boy, you weren’t kidding about not eating much, huh?” he asked her, teasing and playful.

Kera swallowed with some difficulty, wiping her mouth. “Sorry. Guess I thought I wouldn’t see food like this again.”

“Don’t be sorry. You hardly ate anything at all yesterday.” He refilled his cup and took a grape from the bowl. “Eat until you are very full.”

She felt her face heat up as she glanced down at the plate. “I could smell the bread baking. I knew what was being cooked and what I wasn’t allowed to eat. I guess after a day of oats and a lifetime of my father’s scraps I’m stocking up and pigging out.”

Devon forked up some eggs and chewed on them as he watched her. “Understandable. Think if all I ate was scraps, I’d store up and eat what I could also. But you don’t have to do that now. Take your time. I don’t want you to get sick.” She nodded and went back to her food, trying to take smaller bites. “So why did your father sign you over to the Compound?”

Quickly she directed her eyes down, and she stiffened. “Can we *not* talk about my father?”

“Sure.” He shrugged his shoulders. “What’d you want to talk about?”

Kera took a drink of some orange juice before she answered him. “What happens to me now?”

Devon took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. His body language had Kera stiffening, fearing the worst. But what was worse, really; him or the Compound?

“We get ready to leave the Compound after we have both eaten.” He viewed her closely. “Nothing’s changed from yesterday at the pool, Kera. You’re my wife now.” He sat forward, taking hold of her hand gently. “So hurry up and finish your breakfast so we can get the hell out of here. I want to start spoiling you.”

Kera was a bit shocked at that. Spoil her? What did he mean by that? She wondered as she finished her meal and headed for the shower.

* * * *

An hour later after having a long shower by herself, which sort of surprised her, Kera stood in front of a full-length mirror looking at a girl who just didn't seem like her at all. The day she spent here didn't really change her. What changed her was the one night locked in a room with Devon Noved. And the proof of it was staring back at her from the mirror wearing something she only ever saw in shop windows.

She was dressed in pale pink silk with a top that had long sleeves loose on the arms and tight at the wrist. The neckline was so loose that the top hung off her shoulders and an elastic band fit tightly around her waist. A matching skirt with a high slit fell just above her knees. Around the hemline and slit were ruffles to match those around the neckline and wrists of her blouse. Soft, cotton leggings graced her legs, and knee-high boots with soft pale fur were on her feet.

In the mirror, she watched a maid pull both sides of her hair up with purple diamond combs, letting her hair spill down her back in soft waves. Because it was a warm day the special cloak that went with the outfit wasn't needed.

Devon slid up from behind, wrapping his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. "You look more beautiful than I could ever imagine." He took her left hand and brought it up to his lips, watching her watching him. "I have something for you." He straightened up and draped a purple diamond heart around her neck. He kissed her shoulder as he clasped it. "I had this made especially for you when you knocked me over. I kept my fingers crossed that you were the one." He slid both hands down her arms, picking up her left hand. He slipped a ring on her finger; a very large purple diamond ring with black diamonds encircling it. "And now that I know you are, it's yours."

"I can't take this," Kera gasped in shock.

"You can, and you will." He kissed her hand, and then the finger the ring was on.

Kera looked down at her hand and at the ring. Being so

poor, she knew something like this could feed her household for months, yet she didn't feel bad wearing it. In fact, she didn't have one ounce of regret as she watched the light graze it. The reflection shone on his face as she moved her hand.

"Come on. Let's get out of here before I make a mess of all the hard work these girls did getting you ready." He winked.

Devon took her hand and walked with her out of the bedroom. This time, as she walked down the hall she didn't have a guard escorting her. True, she wasn't alone either, but it felt different. One of the questions on her mind; was she leaving free or still a prisoner? When they reached the front doors, which were opened for them and a few others who were leaving, and she saw a black car parked in front, Kera knew she was no longer considered a prisoner.

A black Royce with a driver holding open a back door waited for them. Kera stopped and just stared at it. Very few people in Treece had cars like this. Upon approaching the car, Kera knew now that Devon definitely had money.

A slight tug on her hand and she was going inside, sitting down on the leather seat with Devon right next to her. The driver closed the door, got in behind the wheel, and the car pulled away from the Compound, taking her to a new life she didn't dream she could ever be a part of. If his life was anything like what she was riding in, then Kera knew, without a doubt, she was going to have to leave. He had a reputation, and she could only tarnish it by staying. He mattered to her now, and she wouldn't mess his life up.

Chapter Six

Treece is a town surrounded by thick woods and rests pretty much right in the middle of it all. Many of the prominent families owned large amounts of the woods and grounds that were called the 'outskirts'. Horse ranches went up, a few cattle ranches and several mansions. At least thirty percent of the woods were owned, and of that percentage, Kera only saw a tiny amount of the foliage during the drive to their destination.

"We're heading toward the outskirts of town," Kera stated as she looked out the window.

"Yes." Devon studied her, trying to decipher what he was feeling for her and why and how these feelings had happened so soon. My home is in the woods. My father was one of the first to buy ground when it finally came up for sale. He built my mother a home."

"So you're pretty rich then, huh?" She gave him her full attention.

Devon crossed his arms over his chest, hoping like hell that she didn't blow up on him. His gut was telling him that she might be looking for a fight. "I do okay."

"Better than okay," she chuckled. "Look at your car. You don't even drive it yourself."

"Normally I do," he stated, watching her closely. "But I hired a driver so I can spend time with you."

"Why?" Kera gazed at him with confusion.

He took another deep breath, picking his next words carefully. "I thought you might be interested in knowing what I do."

She crossed her arms over her chest, turning in her seat. "I thought you were just some golden boy who played around on his daddy's money."

Devon laughed, "Most do. But unless you're like my buddy, Blaine, and have the money gushing out of your pores, then one does have to work for it. Blaine has this huge ass property complete with stables. But, since he never held much interest in horses and I do, he's given me free rein with them. So I breed, buy, and sell horses. I produce and sell some of the best stallions around."

"And they're all at his place?"

He nodded. "Every one of them. I only live about twenty minutes from his place. In fact, all four of us live pretty close to each other or at least have homes within a short drive."

"Four?" Kera frowned.

"Yeah, you sort of met Dane when you ran into me." She made a silent "o" with her mouth, and he went on. "Well, he lives with his grandmother right now, but also has a house of his own. Not sure if she knows about it or not," he chuckled. "Guess if you look at it from another angle, I'm the poorest one of the group. However, Darius and Blaine are out of town a lot so I'm not sure when you'll get to meet them. I've ordered Dane to stay away until I call him."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not ready to share you with anyone right now." Again he took hold of her hand, but this time she pulled it from his grasp.

"Or maybe it's because you know I don't fit into your world." Kera once again turned in the seat, staring out the window. "And you're ashamed of me," she added softly.

He moved closer to her, pressing the side of his face to hers, chin on her shoulder, "I'm not ashamed of you Kera. I'm very selfish."

The car turned in the direction of the woods. Sighing, and thinking about how he was going to help her understand that she did belong right where he was putting her, Devon sat back in his seat and watched the trees go by.

His cell phone went off, causing Kera to jump and turn to look at him. Devon reached into his jacket pocket for it. "Talk to me." There was a pause, and then he continued, "When? Does he know where I'm going to be? Good. Keep it under wraps for a few days. I don't want to be bothered with him or anything else

for a couple days.” He hung up and tried to smile at her. “Sorry about that. I have a cousin that likes to just drop by whenever he’s broke and needing money.”

“You don’t like him?”

“It’s not so much that I don’t like him as I’m tired of taking care of him. But don’t worry about it. Instead, take a look at your new home.” He pointed out the window.

A cabin came slowly into view, surrounded by trees.

It was a two-storey home with wrap-around porches on both floors, along with private decks. The main windows on the second floor were oval with stained glass designs. Off to the side of the house a winding wood staircase led down to the main deck, and a built in hot tub rested on the second-floor deck.

“Oh wow!” she gasped, her eyes wide open.

The car pulled up to a small circular drive and parked right outside the front door. Devon reached around her, opened the door, and got out first. He took her hand, helping her out as she stared up at the house. The driver also got out, popped the trunk and began to unload Kera’s bags.

“Welcome to your new home, Kera,” Devon remarked with pride in his voice.

* * * *

Trees were everywhere and gave the home a secluded feeling, but the lawn around the home was the most immaculate she had ever seen. Flowers of every kind filled circular tubs, landscaping the middle of the yard. Everything was in bloom. White marble stones with brown stepping stones went around a large built-in water fountain. Two large golden fish swam in the water, moving lily pads around. This was what Kera dreamed about as a little girl.

Devon led her up the steps, opened the front door, and Kera’s mouth opened as she stepped over the threshold into a grand front room. A large leather sectional sofa located in the middle of the room was the first thing she saw. The next, a white fur bearskin in the center of the floor. Two grand fireplaces made from white marble were to her left and right as she headed inside. Books in the finest leather graced the walls along with mounted animal heads of every kind. Her feet padded against real hardwood floors glowing with a shine only achieved by a

new coat of polish. Separating the room from the kitchen was a simple yet elegant dining room table with ten place settings. A long hallway lay to her right, between the kitchen and front room. Along the hallway were two closed doors that led to a staircase and another large room at the end.

Devon led her down the hallway to a family room as lovely as the front room. Another white marble fireplace stood facing the entrance and instead of leather furniture this room contained furniture upholstered with a soft cream colored material. One sofa, a love seat, and two large lounge chairs faced a TV mounted on the wall. Gray fur rugs lined the floor, and wooden end tables supported crystal lamps, giving off a homey feeling. More books lined the walls, but in this room Kera noticed that some family photos were also displayed.

"My parents when they were young," Devon said over her shoulder.

Kera looked at him before she headed up to one of the pictures. His mother seemed so happy being in the arms of the man she loved.

"The cabin has a total of five bedrooms. My cousin has taken over one of the downstairs bedrooms for his use, when he comes. My father built all of the beds himself," Devon sounded proud of his father's work as he took her hand and led her back down the hall to the stairs.

"What's in the other room?" she asked, pointing to the other closed door.

"That would be my office."

Devon held onto her hand as he led her up the stairs to a large loft. Low cushioned chairs, a gray fur rug, and a low coffee table were the only furnishings in the loft. Devon then proceeded toward the bedrooms.

"My father had the furniture handmade for each room," he explained as he opened and closed doors, showing her the various bedrooms. "My mother had mentioned some things that she liked, and my father found them for her. And my grandmother," he said, leading down the hallway toward the back of the cabin, "made all of the quilts you see covering the beds. But the one in our bedroom was her prized possession..."

Hearing him talk about how caring and loving his

grandparents were to his parents, and his parents to him, felt odd to Kera. In her world, fathers worked hard to get their daughters married and their sons established. She had never thought a father could be loving, and caring. From an early age she understood her worth, and it wasn't to stand in a home like this.

"Kera?"

Kera snapped her head up, her eyes meeting Devon's suddenly, and blushed when she noticed he had said something to her that she had not heard.

"Sorry," she said.

"You were miles away."

She shrugged. "Guess all of this is a little overwhelming."

"Then be prepared for one more shock." Devon opened the double doors to the last room in the hall. He stood back with an arm stretched toward the room and a smile on his face. "Here is the master bedroom."

Kera felt like her eyes might pop out of her head. Unlike the other rooms, this one was carpeted in ivory. Another large white marble fireplace lined one wall, but it was the bed that drew her in.

Raised off the floor by two steps was a large king-size bed with wooden posts that reached the ceiling. A soft breeze lightly fluttered the curtains draping the open French-style doors.

"The stairs from the balcony lead down to the backyard. My parents used to sneak out in the middle of the night and swim in our heated pond. I'll take you to it later."

Hearing him talk about his family made Kera somewhat sad. She had not really thought about what she had missed out on after her mother died, or how her father betrayed her after he became obsessed with his social standing. Kera stepped slowly toward the bed and touched one post gently as she examined some of the carvings.

"Embracing lovers," Devon told her softly. "That's what my father called them. He said that as long as they were on the bed, the two that lie in it would be at peace."

A matching dresser, armoire, and chest of drawers decorated the room, along with a matching hope chest which sat at the end of the bed, perched up on the steps. Devon headed

over to a door and opened it. It was a bathroom with a shower large enough to fit five people, a double sink, and bathtub/hot tub, along with a toilet located in its own room. He also went over and opened up another door to show her a huge walk-in closet.

"I'm planning on taking you shopping for new things, once I'm ready to share you with the world, that is," he winked flirtatiously. "Right now all of your things are packed downstairs, so you can unpack and put them anywhere you want." She strolled into the closet and fingered a few of the nighties already hanging, waiting. He cleared his throat, sounding like he was embarrassed, "Guess there were a few things I couldn't wait on."

"This is really happening," she mumbled.

Devon came up behind her and wrapped his arms tightly around her. "It's real."

Kera closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "I don't belong here."

Squeezing her tighter, Devon kissed her on top of her head. "Why don't we change our clothes? You can take a look around the cabin while I fix us something to eat for lunch."

"You cook?" she asked him in wonder.

"When I need to," he smiled back. "And believe me when I say 'when I need to'. I don't have a staff of cooks, only one cleaning lady who comes by during the day and leaves at night."

Kera laughed. "Why does that surprise me?"

"Because you think I'm like the rest." Devon released her and started for the door. "I'll go get your stuff and give you some time alone."

* * * *

Kera sat in Devon's bedroom looking at some photos she had found stashed in an old box at the back of the closet. He'd brought her things up for her and she already unpacked, mostly because she didn't know what else to do, and changed. A range of emotions ran through her as she took in images of Devon as he grew up. He was so happy and carefree. She could tell by his face that he had no worries. No wondering if there was going to be any food left for him at supper. No praying that the roof wouldn't leak if it rained. No worrying if he was loved. Moreover, no fears that one day he was going to be sold off as property with no control of his own life.

“Ah, so you did find them!”

Kera jumped when she heard Devon, who was standing at the doorway watching her.

“I’m sorry.” Quickly she closed the photo book, looking at him guiltily. “I didn’t mean to snoop.”

“You’re not snooping.” He smiled. Devon crossed the distance between them and sat down next to her on the bed. Tensing, Kera had to bite the inside of her lip to stay put and not to move away from him. “I still make you uncomfortable?”

“You make me feel like a rat in a cage with the snake lying in wait,” she told him, looking him in the eyes and showing him some of the emotions going on inside her.

Kera stood and made a move to walk away but Devon grabbed her by the wrist, tugging her into his arms. She saw the hunger in his eyes and felt a sudden urge to wrap her arms around him.

“Let go,” she whispered instead half-heartedly.

Devon moved his hands down to her ass and around to her legs before he pulled at her, forcing her to straddle his lap. “I can’t seem to help myself when you’re around. I always have this need to touch you.” Concern filled his eyes as they roamed over her. “I get the urge to protect you.”

“I think you did enough touching last night.” Kera blushed and pushed lightly on his chest. “And the only protection I need is from you.”

Devon leaned close to her, his lips brushing hers. “That was just the tip of what my hunger for you is like.” He sucked her lower lip into his mouth. “And I think you need someone who cherishes you in your life.”

Tremors went through her as he held her close. Her body was responding to him just the way it did last night, even though she would do whatever she could to fight it. She didn’t want to be a possession and felt sure his gentle words were just that. Words.

Devon kissed her quickly and stood up slowly, grazing her to make sure she felt his slight erection. “Come on.” He cleared his throat. “Lunch, or dinner, is ready.”

The dining table was set for the two of them, with glasses of wine and steamed lobster tails that just begged to be tasted. The

aroma of garlic butter sauce aroused the senses. The smell and colors of freshly heated bread, an appealing rice pilaf, and a tossed green salad set off the table nicely.

"You fixed all of this?" she asked as Devon pulled a chair out for her.

He blushed slightly. "Well, some of it."

Kera gave him a funny look, which caused him to laugh. "Okay, none of it. I just do steaks."

"I thought as much."

"But that still doesn't mean I don't want you to have the best dinner possible in your new home." He poured wine into her glass and held up his hand to stop her from speaking. "Let's have a truce tonight."

Kera cocked her head to one side, looking at him to try to work out what his angle was. Unsure, she raised her glass hopefully. "So it is; a truce for tonight."

* * * *

Devon watched Kera eat, smiling when she closed her eyes and savored the food. When she dipped the lobster meat into the sauce, he had to suppress a groan. The butter ran down her fingers to her wrist, and a few times he had to look away when she slipped her fingers into her mouth to lick the juice from them. Anyone observing her could tell that she had never had this kind of food before. To Devon, watching her try everything for the first time was a treat in itself.

More sauce dribbled down one of her fingers, reminding him of how light hit the dew in the morning, all fresh and delightful. Eyes fixed on her taking her fingers in her mouth again to suck the butter off of them, his thoughts went straight to his erection and its demand to be set free.

Watching her dip a piece of lobster into the sauce and then lick the meat as she slowly sucked it into her mouth kept him in a state of constant arousal. It was driving him crazy to watch her. All he could think about was that tongue swirling around the head of his cock, those lips sucking his length deep into the hot depths of her mouth. It was a painful, but enjoyable thought. Then it dawned on him, she was doing it intentionally.

Devon filled his glass and just before he took a drink, he said, "Kera, you are playing a very dangerous game."

Kera looked up from her meal and licked one finger, then another before she responded to him innocently. "What do you mean?"

He set his glass on the table and took hold of her hand. Keeping eye contact with her, he brought a finger to his lips and slowly sucked it into his mouth.

Kera swallowed hard as he sucked the garlic butter from her fingers. When he released them from his mouth, he stood but didn't let go of her hand. Then he leaned over her and kissed her deeply.

"If you keep this up, we won't make it to the cheesecake dessert," he said against her lips. "Instead, you will become *my* dessert."

Kera snatched her hand back quickly, trembling. "I think I like it better when you're not so nice."

Devon sat back down in his chair and grinned at her. "Why is that?"

"I don't understand you when you're like this." She frowned, carefully wiping her hands on the napkin then wiping her lips.

Still smiling at her, he leaned back in his chair. "Maybe I don't know myself either when I'm around you." He saw her swallow hard and took a drink from his wine. "So, I found out that you were trying to finish your schooling."

"Before my father sold me," she snorted. Her tongue came out, made a quick swipe across her lips. And damn if he didn't want to feel that tongue on his body.

"What were you studying?"

She shrugged, reached for a magazine on the table, and started to flip through the pages, "Not sure. I didn't exactly have the chance to really figure it all out."

"Well, you know, once you get settled here you could go back." That had her stopping in mid flip and looking up at him. "If you want to, that is."

"And what would that cost me?"

"Kera you don't have to pay me back for things I do for you. We're married, and if you want to go to school I don't see a problem with it." Devon chuckled, finished his drink, and stood up. Taking her plate and his, he walked into the kitchen. He put the dishes in the sink, picked up a knife, and cut them both a

piece of the cheesecake. Balancing the plates and another bottle of champagne, he went back to the table and sat down.

“Even if I try to run?” she asked the question so sweetly he couldn’t help but smile at it.

He poured them both some champagne into the second glasses on the table and put one of the plates in front of her. “If you run, then I have an excuse to chase after you.” Strawberry swirl cheesecake sat in front of her, yet Kera didn’t touch it. Devon wondered why until he remembered the strawberries from last night. “Not drugged, promise you that.”

“And how can I trust you?”

It was his turn to shrug, “Guess you just have to learn.” He cut off a piece and put it in his mouth. “Try it.”

Kera slowly cut the end off and brought it up to her lips. As she chewed, Devon picked up his glass of champagne and drank. She finished off her dessert in silence. Once they finished the meal, Devon suggested she go up and soak in the bath while he cleaned up. She didn’t hesitate at all.

Doing the dishes gave him the alone time he needed to get his emotions under control. He wanted her so badly he physically ached with it. But he held himself back. She needed some time to get used to her new home and being around him. If he bombarded her with all of his wants and desires at once he could push her away. That was the last thing he wanted. Devon wanted her to like him, maybe even come to care for him one day. He didn’t want her running away all the time.

Once everything was cleaned up, he decided to go out back and work off some of the sexual frustration he was feeling. A couple of days, he kept telling himself while he undressed to work out. A couple of days was all he was going to give her to get adjusted; it was all he could handle before he blew his top. *Damn! I’ve never had to have this kind of control in my life and it sucks big time!*

* * * *

The moon shined brightly as Kera stood at the door of the upstairs balcony watching Devon as he did some chin-ups on a bar fixed between two trees. She could see the power in his arms as he lifted and lowered himself, never letting his feet touch the ground. The muscles in his back strained and worked while

his ass tightened. She liked watching him like this, liked being able to look at him without him giving her that knowing smile, but wasn't too sure if she liked the effect the "watching" was having on her as much.

After her bath she dressed in a simple, short silk gown with matching pale pink robe from the closet. It was one of the outfits he'd bought for her. The silk brushed softly against her skin when the breeze snuck in the French doors. Another thing Kera noticed she liked was how the breeze brushed Devon's hair, making her itch to run her fingers through the thick strands.

Snap out of it Kera, she thought. This man married you against your will. Why should you want to run your fingers through his hair? Why the hell should you want anything from him? He took everything from you! And yet was offering to give one of the things you want most back to you. The realizations were discomfiting and disconcerting. She wanted her freedom. She wanted to choose who she would be with, not have the man forced on her because some potion indicated they would be compatible. Yet, she couldn't deny the effects of this evening's truce. He had been pleasant, almost caring, toward her tonight, as if he really wanted her for who she was, not what she could offer him in his bed. She shook her head in frustration and confusion, wondering how she could want him when circumstances had forced him on her.

With a sigh, she pushed away from the door, slipped out of her robe and into the cool sheets of the bed. She fell asleep quickly, not hearing when Devon walked into the room or even took a shower. In addition, she didn't put up any kind of fight when he slipped into bed, bringing her close into his arms for the night.

Chapter Seven

Kera awoke to a comfortable bed, the tantalizing smell of food, the sun shining in her face, and shouting from downstairs. For a split second she thought she was home and her father was yelling about the lack of food in the cabinet.

With great regret, but a stomach that wanted food, she slipped out of bed and pulled her robe on as she headed to the door. As quietly as she could, she left the room and approached the stairs, going about halfway down before stopping and sitting down to listen.

Two men, one of whom was Devon, were downstairs yelling, and to Kera it sounded as if the topic was money.

"I need it!"

"Damn it, Cameron. All your money went to paying off the fucking loans," Devon yelled back. "You don't have anything left!"

"Bullshit!"

"You just don't understand what you had to pay back. Fuck, Cameron! I had to put some of my own damn money in with it to get your sorry ass out of debt last time!"

Listening to the conversation, Kera hugged herself. It sounded like being back home when a collector was demanding money from her father: money which he didn't have and shouldn't have borrowed.

"Then loan it to me."

"You've got some fucking nerve asking me that." Anger could be heard in Devon's voice then. "Since you still haven't paid me back for the last loan I gave you. You think I have money I can just piss away?"

"You owe me!"

"I owe you shit!" Devon's voice rose up. "I have bailed you out of every shithole you've gotten into, paid your fucking bills,

and carried your ass for years. You need money, and then you do like everyone else does around here and earn it. Get a damn job or something.” Devon paused. “Cameron, I don’t have time for this shit. I just got married and I would like to spend my time getting to know my wife better. It’s high time for you to figure out a way to stand on your own two feet.”

“I’m trying to stand on my own two feet. I want to sell my half of the property.”

“You don’t own any of it.” Devon yelled again. “You signed it over to me the last time you needed money.”

“Fuck!”

“Cameron I can’t afford to help you out this time. Sorry.”

Hearing someone storming out of the kitchen and heading her way, Kera held her breath. A man, who she assumed to be Cameron, stopped when he saw her sitting on the steps, listening.

Cameron Noved stood as tall as Devon, yet not built as strongly. His hair was short, his clothes were somewhat dirty, and his eyes were a dark green. He had the same strong cheekbones as Devon and the same soft lips, but most of his features were brutal. Even his eyes seemed cold and distant.

“Cameron—” Devon stormed out and saw Kera also.

Cameron shot a nasty look over his shoulder at Devon. “I’ll be in my room.”

Kera watched him go to the only bedroom on the first floor, flinching when she heard him slam the door behind him. She looked at Devon, and slowly stood up with the intention of heading back to the bedroom also.

“Sorry about that,” Devon said, stopping her. “That’s not how I had wanted you to meet him.”

“It’s okay. I’ll go put something on,” she finished as she turned to walk upstairs.

She dressed in a pair of jean shorts and a shirt. Barefooted, she went back down. Devon was spooning out breakfast onto the two plates at the settings at the table. He glanced up at her and nodded towards the table. She went over and sat down in the same chair she had last night for dinner.

“So you have family after all,” she said when he came over with the food. Eggs, bacon, fried potatoes, coffee, and orange

juice, along with some toast.

"If you can call him that," Devon sighed, sitting down next to her. He sat at the head of the table positioning her to his left. "Cameron seems to only come around when he's broke. He thinks I have this huge amount of money just lying around." He reached for a slice of toast on the table and spread some jam on it.

"Don't you?"

He snickered, shaking his head and putting his toast down on his plate. "No," he stated, picking up the pot of coffee and pouring some. When he gestured for her, Kera shook her head no. "The last time I helped him out cost me pretty much all of my inheritance. Last bit of it went to saving my home."

"I don't understand," she frowned, picking up her fork and starting to eat.

Devon took a sip from his cup before leaning forward, elbows on the table with chin resting on his hands. "I never knew and don't want to know what Cameron did with his money. My father raised him as a son after his parents were killed. We both had a good education. When my father died, he left us both with a comfortable living and the education to keep that living nice. Now like I said before, compared to my three friends I'm the poor one in the group."

"So you had a silver spoon instead of gold." She picked up her glass, drinking the juice and keeping her eyes off of him.

"My father insisted that we both work for what we have." Devon narrowed his eyes on her. Instantly Kera felt uncomfortable. "He also spent just about everything he had. The house and grounds were split between us, and we both got some money. I love horses and invested what I had into breeding stock. Like I told you before, Blaine has given me his stables to breed and keep my stock. Cameron went on a spending spree, blowing everything he got from my father. Not even two years after my father's death, I got this letter stating how he has put up his half of the ground and house as collateral on some bullshit investments and crap. Almost went bankrupt in trying to save my home," he shook his head, sat back and went back to his food.

"But I bet your friend Blaine helped you out. He gave you the

money to get into the Compound to get that piece of ass you wanted so badly, huh?" The question had him stopping with his fork next to his mouth. "Don't answer that. I know." Instead of eating, she pushed herself away from the table. "I need some air."

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Devon pushed his own plate away when she stood and walked out. Only a few minutes went by before his gut was telling him that her simply "going out for air" wasn't that simple. She was up to something.

Standing up, he went to the back door, not really expecting her to be standing there getting the air she claimed she needed.

"Kera!" he yelled. No response. "Damnit," he looked around, stepping off the back porch, hands on his hips. Yep, she was running. It was the only thing that made sense at this moment.

Kera was a runner. Hell, the first time he saw her she was running away. Now the real question that was left for him to answer was in what direction was she headed?

Into the woods he went, looking around, listening for any sounds that someone might be running. A crunch to his right and Devon was taking off running in the direction of the sound.

He saw the trail Kera had unintentionally left behind, saw the path that she was taking and knew exactly where she was heading, even if she didn't. When he saw a flash of her hair, he smiled, running in the opposite direction.

Devon caught her right at the meadow by the hot springs he had intended to show her today, before Cameron showed up and messed up his plans. He snaked his arm around her waist, and they both fell to the ground in a roll. Kera hit and kicked Devon as he pinned her arms to the ground, sliding between her legs.

"So what made you run this time?" Devon grunted when he rolled her over and a knee found his gut.

"Get off!" she screamed. Kera managed to free her arms twist her body around and crawl out from under him. Devon cursed as a leg connected brutally with his chest.

"Damn it!" He grunted again.

Devon took hold of her waist, slipping his hands inside the waistline of her jeans. With a firm grip on her jeans, he yanked her back to him, making sure to bump his now hard cock against

her ass. It seemed that every time they fought he suddenly became hard as stone. Quickly dropping his weight on top of her, he held her arms out to the sides. Hooking his feet under her ankles, he stopped all of her kicking at once.

“Done yet?” he asked breathing roughly.

“Not even close!”

“What the hell did I do to piss you off now?” again he grunted as he spoke, struggling to hold her down.”

“You breathe!”

Devon chuckled, but 'he wasn't amused, “Oh that's nice.”

“So who do I really belong to, Blaine or you?”

“Do you want to know why the men have to pay a fee to get into the Compound?”

“I know enough,” she huffed, trying again to get out from under him. “You used me then just like you used the other girls, and when you get tired, I go right back so you can get someone else; someone that fits in.”

“When did I ever use you?” He frowned, “And I swear if you don't stop that shit about not belonging I'm going to put you over my knee.”

Kera tried to make another lunge to get up, but with Devon's weight on her back, it was impossible. “Get off, you fuck!”

Devon smiled. “I see your temper is back in full swing.”

He moved her wrists so that he could hold both with one hand then moved his free hand to the bottom of her shirt. Quickly he gathered it over her head and off her arms, throwing it to the side, taking hold once more of her wrists before she could start swinging.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?” Kera yelled at him.

Devon didn't answer her. Instead he unclasped her bra and tore it away from her body as well. Before his hands moved their way down to her jeans, he pulled his own shirt over his head and threw it next to hers. Somehow he managed to unsnap his jeans and remove his shoes while lying on top of Kera to hold her down.

His hands moved around her hips to the front of her jeans. Gripping the snap, he opened them and forced the zipper down. Quickly he moved off of her, only to tug her jeans down and off

of her legs. Kera turned over swiftly, modestly covering her chest with her arms. And then she tried again to kick him. Again.

Devon ran a finger down her thigh, letting her see the hunger in his eyes and in his body.

"You're an ass," Kera hissed at him.

Arching an eyebrow, he stood and hovered over her, looking down at his prize. "Perhaps I am."

Kera stared at him with wide eyes as he started to slide his zipper down, opening his jeans completely.

"If you think you have something down there that is going to impress me, think again." She glared at him. "When you've seen one dick, you've seen them all." She looked him up and down. "And I know for sure that I'm seeing a dick now."

Inwardly laughing at her humor, Devon answered Kera with a wiggle of his eyebrows and a grin that should have made her think twice about taunting him. With her arms still crossed over her chest, Kera tried to scoot herself away from him. Devon slid his jeans down his legs, showing her his hard cock, standing free and proud. He kicked the jeans away from him as he took the two steps he needed to stand in front of Kera.

"Fuck you," she said with hate in her eyes.

Devon bent over and picked her up from under her arms. "Not yet, but later maybe."

With a turn, he threw her into the heated pond. He watched with a smile as she came up for air, looking like she was pissed at the world and not just him.

"You son of a bitch!" she cried out in anger. "That's twice you've done that to me."

Devon walked to the edge and jumped into the water. While he was under, he swam to her and jerked her panties down her legs. He could hear her yelling at him, but being underwater, he couldn't make out one word. When he finally came up for air, he was laughing and trying to fend off her hits.

Taking a hold on one of her wrists, Devon pulled her to him hard, turned her around, and pitched her in the air again. It took a few more throws and dunks before she realized he was playing with her and relaxed.

For at least thirty minutes, Kera and Devon splashed each other. Devon would throw Kera, and she would swim back to him

under the water, only to dunk him. Kera was heading back toward him for another attempt when she stopped suddenly. A change came over her, one that he could see in her eyes.

Devon saw the change in her face. For the brief time they were playing together, he got to see her laid back, having fun, and really enjoying herself. Now he saw her expression drop and her protective shell go back up. Obviously having fun was something she didn't do often.

"You okay?" he asked.

Each emotion running through her showed on her face, making it so he could read her like a book. Kera glanced away from him and started to swim to the other side of the pond. She managed to make it to the edge before he wrapped his arms around her waist and dragged her back against his chest.

"Let go," Kera murmured half-heartedly.

Devon turned her around to face him. "I don't think so."

He locked his lips to hers in a burning kiss as hunger rose between the two of them. For Devon, it was the hunger to taste her, to possess her, and to brand her to him. Tongues started a mating game of their own, fighting for the power to dominate the other. 'Roaming his hands over her body and wrapping her legs around his hips, he continued to kiss her.

Devon strolled back toward the other side of the pond where a large, flat rock rested. He seated her upon it as he continued to kiss her deeply, inching her closer to his body. She felt so good in his arms, matching his hunger and need. Every time the head of his cock brushed the hot wetness between her legs he had to fight himself not to push his way into heaven, not to make them whole and complete.

Kera, for reasons unknown, broke the kiss. "No," she breathed out as she tried to push him away. It was a very poor attempt. "I can't—we can't."

Devon cradled her face in his hands. He pushed her head back to expose her neck to his mouth. Even though she told him no, she was still holding onto his chest, fingers digging into his Pecs. Slowly, lightly biting down, he nibbled on her neck, then licked and blew on the reddened skin. In this manner he worked his way to her tempting breasts.

He nudged her down and trailed his mouth along her body,

pausing to suckle on a nipple as he went. The head of his cock bumped against the heat of her pussy and twitched, wanting to sink into the wetness, but he held off. The urge to taste her sweetness was a powerful drug, one that caused a battle within, one he planned to win. His body demanded he sink into her, but his senses wanted to taste every inch. He wanted to love her body the way he should have loved her the first time.

“Devon...” Kera said breathlessly.

Devon sucked a nipple hard into his mouth, bit the tip, and then twirled his tongue around it. She cried out in pleasure as he took her other nipple into his mouth and did the same thing.

“Not right,” she moaned out.

Devon popped the breast he was sucking on from his mouth. Clasping her leg, he wrapped it around his hip as he licked the valley between her breasts up to her neck. Very lightly, he moved a hand to her entrance to test the wetness. His cock swelled more as the outer lips soaked his fingers and her scorching heat tempted him.

He kissed her, hot, deep, and, demanding, skimming his way up her body, rubbing the head of his cock against her dripping lips, letting them drench him. He readied her for his penetration, winding her so tight that when he surged into her, she would scream with pure bliss. Oh, having her juices run along his throbbing cock felt heavenly.

Even though this was not the first, or even second, time he would be entering this sweet tight body, it sure felt like it. He groaned into her mouth as wet heat closed around the head, burning him with pleasure. The muscles of her vagina gave only slightly as he tried to push more into her before he realized Kera was trying to push him out instead of letting him enter.

“Don’t fight what’s between us,” he said against her mouth. He moved a hand between them and played with her sensitive, swollen clit. “You’re wet for me, in need of me. We fit together.”

Her hands moved to his shoulders in a defensive motion and Devon placed more of his weight upon her body, holding her hands between them. Her silky skin rubbing against his was close to his undoing. He pushed another inch into her silky heat and groaned again as her muscles stretched to accommodate him. She was so tight, so hot, that the way the muscles stretched

for his thickness felt like the first time he had entered her. The only thing missing was the tissue claiming her innocence, the innocence that was now his.

She closed her eyes, parted her lips slightly, and arched her back as much as she could with him on top of her. He pushed more into her as she wrapped her legs tight around his waist.

Devon smiled. "Is that the spot?"

He rotated his hips in a slow circular motion as he inched farther inside of her, doing everything he could to make this pleasure last longer. His full attention was on her face as he moved his hips, noticing when he again hit the one spot that sent tremors running through her body, tremors he felt against his sensitive, throbbing cock.

"Please!" she cried, digging her nails into his shoulders to pull him closer.

Devon nibbled then licked her on her earlobe. "I'll give you anything you want, as long as you don't try to run again."

He jerked his hips, pushing another inch inside of her and rubbing the newly discovered spot to excite her. He found he loved to tease her, loved to make her as hot and as wet as he could. He wanted to make her want and need him just as much as he wanted and needed her.

Many other women in his past had bodies men drooled over, but this was the one and only woman who would ever satisfy Devon to the fullest. This was *his* dream come true. Kera's passionate nature equaled his.

With another sharp push of his hips he buried the rest of his cock to the hilt, triggering her first orgasm. As she screamed her vagina tightened brutally around his cock, making him moan as well. The hold her pussy had on him when her pleasure hit was all he ever needed to make him want to come back and do it all over again. Nothing ever gripped him so hard and had him pushing his own release back, like Kera did.

Devon bit his lower lip to hold back the urge to let his orgasm loose. His balls tightened as she clenched to an almost painful point before easing. And still the tremors within her rippled around his cock like tiny fingers massaging his shaft.

"You are so hot and tight," he moaned as she moved her hips slightly. "This is not going to last as long as I would like."

He braced himself against the rock and watched her face as he slowly withdrew from her heat, smiling at her pleased cries as the head rubbed her spot again.

"I believe that would be your G-spot," he told her, his voice thick with desire.

Opening her eyes, Kera looked at him through a glaze of lust as he slowly slid back into her. Another sharp intake of breath let him know he brushed her G-spot.

"And again, that's the spot." He grinned, watching her eyes close again as her body stretched to hold him tightly within. "Let's go for a ride."

Kera snapped her eyes open as Devon rose up on his hands. His legs pushed hers farther apart as he moved up on his knees. He glanced down at the junction of their bodies, mesmerized by his cock sliding in out of her sheath.

"Feels good!" he moaned watching as he slipped back into her heat, feeling the tightness close around him like a fist. Keeping a slow, steady rhythm, he loved her with his body. "You are so fucking tight!"

"Noooo!" The end in sight, Kera cried out as another set of spasms rocked her.

Feeling her contract around him tightly took his last bit of resolve. Devon threw his head back and moved his hips in long, hard, and fast thrusts. He pounded into her, enjoying not only the feel of her tight pussy stretching for him but also the pleading and moaning of her pleasure.

"It's so fucking close!" he cried. "Give me one more, Kera. Come for me one more fucking time!"

Devon picked up his pace and slammed into her as brutally and as fast as his hips would move. His balls slapped against her ass as they started to tighten the closer he came to his release. Sweat rolled down his back to the crack of his ass as he worked to give her one more orgasm. He fucked her hard and fast, fucked like a man haunted. Peering down at her, he saw sweat gathering in the valley between her breasts and leaned down to lick at the salty liquid. Not once did he miss a beat with his hips.

"Oh shit!" Kera screamed.

Her pussy tightened down ruthlessly on his cock, nails dug

deep into his arms, and legs wrapped tightly around his hips as her orgasm slammed into her. He kissed her ferociously, thrusting his tongue past her teeth as his cock erupted almost painfully. He spurted deep into her womb, emptying not only his seed, but also his heart and soul. Devon Noved realized he was starting to fall in love with Kera.

He braced most of his weight on his arms as they both came down slowly from the intense passion that washed over them.

Drowsy, Devon kissed her neck and said, "If this keeps up, you are going to be the death of me."

Chapter Eight

Devon and Kera didn't say a word to each other as they headed back toward the house. He noticed Kera wouldn't look him in the eye, and every time he said something to her he only got a nod of acknowledgment.

Just before they turned onto the path leading to the back porch, Devon grabbed Kera's arm and encased her in his own. Quickly he swept her into a kiss to express his satisfaction. Before he could get carried away, he heard the sound of someone clearing their throat. Cameron came striding around the bushes with a smile on his face.

Kera pushed herself out of Devon's arms, her face blushing. "I'm going to take a shower."

Devon glanced at her as she headed away, then noticed the way Cameron watched her. The expression on Cameron's face, as he looked at Kera was one Devon didn't like at all.

"What's up?" Devon asked.

Cameron looked at Devon slipped his hands into his jean pockets and took a deep breath. "Dane called while you were out playing. He told me to tell you that you can either go over to his place tonight for dinner, so he can meet her, or he's heading over here."

Devon shook his head, "Great." Devon stared at Cameron as he turned his gaze in the direction Kera had gone. Until now, Devon had not realized what kind of man his cousin really was. It was something he didn't like, and Cameron was someone he didn't want around Kera.

"You leaving?" Devon asked.

Cameron nodded, "Yeah. With Dane heading over, I think it's best. He doesn't like me."

Devon didn't argue. None of his friends cared for Cameron, mostly because of the fact that Cameron turned out to be a bum. Only Devon bailing him out repeatedly kept him from being considered completely worthless. However, now that he was married, he refused to let Cameron guilt him into loans. Devon was going to give his all to his bride. Cameron could learn to stand on his own two feet.

Cameron left, the same way he showed up, with nothing; no luggage, no goodbye. Devon went inside and up the stairs to let Kera know they were having a guest after all.

She was still in the shower when he went into the bedroom. Standing in the doorway to the bathroom, he just watched her as she enjoyed herself under the flow of water.

Damn if she wasn't a vision! Just looking at her made him instantly hard, but his desire to have her again was going to have to wait. If Dane was heading over then he wasn't going to have much time for anything but a fast shower himself.

The water turned off, glass door slid open, and she walked out of the shower and had the towel around herself before she jumped, noticing him. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough to know I need to take a cold shower." He pushed away from the doorway, walked up to her, and kissed her on the cheek. "We've got company coming over." He reached behind her and turned the water back on.

"Who?" she asked suspiciously.

"Dane." Kera's face began to heat as he started to undress before her. "Guess he can't wait to meet you after all." Devon had his shirt off and was working on his jeans before she started to move out of the bathroom. When the jeans fell down his legs, she was gone.

Not even an hour later, Dane Knight pulled up the drive in his bright red, '67 Mustang convertible. Devon's hair was still wet from his shower and Kera was pacing nervously in the living room, biting at her thumb nail.

Dane stood at six foot-two inches tall and was solidly built, like Devon. He had shaggy blond hair and sparkling blue eyes. Growing up, Dane had been the prankster. He loved to flirt with the women, tease the fathers, and drive his grandmother up the wall. Between the four of them, Dane and Blaine were the two

who messed around the most, until Blaine got himself shipped off to who-knows-where. Dane used to give Devon a lot of shit about how many more ladies he'd been with. And he also made it clear he didn't care for the idea of Devon stopping the wildness and settling down.

It was one thing when Devon began his horse business. The business was the first indicator that he was growing up. With Blaine and Darius gone, Dane only had Devon to hang out with and, being the golden boy Kera thought Dane was, he had a lot of free time.

"I've brought a shitload of Chinese food, so I hope like hell you're hungry." Dane smiled and held up two large bags that looked like they were about to burst open.

"I thought we had a deal." Devon put his hands on his hips, narrowing his eyes at his friend. "You were going to give me time with her alone."

"And I was, but you have got to hear the shit being spread around town like a wild fire with explosives!" Dane kept smiling. "I mean, *everyone's* in shock you got married." He handed a bag to Devon. "There's talk of a bet about which one of us is next. Oh, and they've heard."

"Let me guess," Devon took a deep breath, raising his head up to the sky and acting like he was thinking hard, "You had to flip a coin to see who would get the call first."

Dane laughed and walked right into the house. Devon followed.

"Wow." Dane stopped in the middle of the room to stare at Kera. She stood at the table, her body language telling Devon she was very nervous about this meeting.

"Stop drooling on my rug." Devon went up behind Dane, slapping him on the back of the head and taking the bag from him. "Kera, this is one of my very childish best friends, Dane Knight. Dane, Kera." He put the bags down and strode into the kitchen for a bottle of wine from the fridge.

"The last time I saw you, you were knocking Devon right off his feet." Dane went right up to Kera, taking both of her hands and extending her arms out from her body. "I do have to say you look a hell of a lot better standing up than as his personal blanket."

Kera blushed and took the glass Devon handed her. He also gave one to Dane, “Knock off the romantic shit. She’s mine.”

Dane chuckled and took a drink. Kera turned from them both and began to unpack the food.

“So what’s been going around town?” Devon sighed, putting his glass down on the table to help Kera with the food.

“Oh you know,” Dane shrugged, also putting his glass down and helping. “Just the usual talk— people wanting to know who you married.” Taking the plate Kera handed him, he sat down, and then began opening boxes of food, putting some on his plate.

“They know who I married,” Devon snorted.

Dane nodded, “Yep. Sure do. And it’s the usual bullshit about that too.”

“That he married trash,” Kera added. Devon gave her a dirty look, which she only shrugged at. “Come on, Devon. Stop living in a fantasy land. I am what I am.”

“Honey, just because you don’t have money doesn’t mean you’re trash,” Dane said as he pointed his fork at her. “I know a lot of girls with their pockets lined with gold, and they are the trashiest bitches I’ve ever known.”

“How’s your grandmother doing?” Devon asked.

Dane was about to take a bite of his food but stopped and dropped his fork on his plate, “Man, why did you have to mention her?”

“I was just asking,” Devon quickly defended.

“We were having a pleasant time and you had to bring her ass into the conversation.”

Kera started smiling at the two of them arguing good-naturedly. She ate, saying very little.

“So, are you going to the Charity ball?” Dane asked curiously. Wiping his mouth, he picked up his wine glass and took a sip.

“You know I don’t fit in with them, Dane,” Devon sighed. “I don’t make enough money, and I sure as hell don’t have the extra for those kinds of charities.”

Dane snorted, “Bullshit. Besides, my grandmother is in charge of it this year and has informed me to invite you. She’s also not taking no for an answer and wants to meet Kera.”

“Why?” Kera asked.

“She wants to meet the woman who has made Devon a respectable young man of Treece,” he squeaked his voice and wrinkled his nose, which had Kera laughing.

“Jesus, Dane, between you, your grandmother, and the rest of the town, Kera and I aren’t going to get any time alone.” Devon sighed.

“Now who’s whining?” Dane smiled.

“Why don’t you go,” Kera said. Both of them looked at her. “I’ll stay here and—”

Devon shook his head. “Hell no! Don’t even go there or think that. After what you tried to pull today, I’m not letting you out of my sight.”

“I won’t run.” She rolled her eyes at him.

Devon snorted, “Try to bullshit someone else, babe.”

“Look, you’ve got until tomorrow night,” Dane stated. “Take this lovely thing shopping. Get her a gown that’ll knock the others off their feet. Make a small appearance and then go home. My grandmother will be happy, and you can be home before midnight to have that alone time you want so much.”

Devon kept his eyes on Kera, thinking over what Dane suggested. He didn’t like sharing her with anyone right now, and he sure as hell didn’t want to go to a damn party where he knew she would only be ridiculed and made to feel inferior. Just thinking about that damn place had his stomach rolling.

“How’s the horse business doing?” Dane asked, getting Devon back to the present.

Devon knew a quick change of topic when he saw one. He gave his attention back to his friend. “Good. One of my mares is getting ready to have a foal soon.”

“Got a buyer for it yet?”

He shook his head, “Nope. I like to wait and see what they look like before I put them up for sale.”

“Has he taken you over there yet?” Dane asked Kera. She answered by a quick shake of her head. “Man, you need to take her over to see them. He’s filled Blaine stables to the max. Last time Blaine came home, which was like six months ago, he was really impressed with the horses and the breeds.”

“I plan on taking her over there soon,” Devon added. “We

just got here yesterday.”

“What about tonight?” Kera asked. Devon turned his head sharply at her. “I mean, it’s something I can see you taking great pride in. You also said that the stables weren’t that far away.”

“She’s got a point.”

Devon opened his mouth, but was stopped from answering by his cell phone going off. He stood up, reached into his pocket for his phone and answered it in the kitchen. “Yeah.” His foreman was on the other end, talking so fast that Devon had a hard time understanding him. “Slow down. What happened? Is the foal okay? No, I’ll be there in a few.” Hanging up, he walked slowly back to the table. “Well, I guess we get to go tonight after all. My mare gave birth, but didn’t make it.”

“Damn, man, sorry.”

“Yeah, well. Guess I need to head over there to visit with the foreman.” Devon rubbed his face tiredly, stood up, and began to clean the table off.

“Well, I’ll head out.” Dane also stood up, stretching his body before helping with the clean up.

* * * *

Kera stayed seated, watching the two shake hands. Dane gave her a big smile as he headed for the front door. She didn’t know what to say to Devon. He appeared to be upset over the loss of his horse, which gave her a bit of hope that he wasn’t like all the others.

“If you want to go check on your horse, I’m fine with it,” she shrugged, trying to act like it wasn’t a big deal. Kera really wanted to go check out the stable that Devon talked so much about. She needed to find out more about him.

“It’s okay,” he told her. “We can go tomorrow some time. I’m going to have to head to town anyway to find you a gown for this ball.”

Her gut dropped. “You sure you want to go to something like that?” Kera looked to the floor for a second before standing up and finishing the clearing of the table. “With me?” she added under her breath.

Devon snaked his arm around her waist when she tried to brush past him. He pulled her close, holding her tight. “Am I going to have to put you over my knee and spank you until you

stop thinking that you're not worthy of this life?"

"You should be worried about being shunned by your friends," she stated. "They'll turn their backs on you if you stay with me."

"And what if I turn my back on them? Besides, I only have a couple of friends anyway."

"This isn't a laughing matter, Devon." She pushed hard at his chest until he let her go. Taking a couple steps back and crossing her arms over her chest, she narrowed her eyes on him. "This town has a very clear set of rules on where people belong. Upper and lower classes don't mix. Ever. Reputation is everything."

"The upper class, as you put it, can't have everything if they refuse to follow the rules, Kera." Leaning back against the counter, he crossed his arms over his chest. "Just because the upper class can afford to go to the Compound doesn't always mean they come out with the same type of woman."

Kera rolled her eyes and snorted, "Please." She turned and headed out of the kitchen with Devon following right behind her.

"You're afraid to go."

Again she rolled her eyes, even though he couldn't see it. "Give me a break."

"You know, I've discovered real fast how you work," he went on. "When you're scared, you fight, and I'm going to bet that when you don't know how to get out of something you don't want to do, you initiate a conflict as well."

She started up the stairs, refusing to look back at him and acknowledge how right he was. "You're full of shit."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

Halfway up the stairs Devon grabbed her arm. He turned her, climbing the stairs to stand on the same step face-to-face with her. "Then prove me wrong."

"Fine." She jerked her arm from his hand. "I'll go to this damn party of yours, just to show you how right I am and how wrong you are."

A slow smile spread across his face. "Then I'm looking forward to this game." He finished going up the stairs, whistling as he went.

Devon surprised her by not trying to fool around with her. He changed his clothes, crawled into bed, and turned to his side. Not once during the night did he touch her either, but come bright and early he was waking her up with a hard shake to the bed.

“What the hell is your problem?” Kera rolled over, pulled the covers up over her head, and tried to go back to sleep. Devon yanked the covers off of her body.

“Get up! I have something for you.” He almost seemed excited. Huh.

“Go to the bathroom and deal with it yourself,” she groaned.

A slap to her ass and she was flying out of the bed with the intention of hitting him back, but she stopped when her eye caught sight of a gown hanging on the back of the bathroom door.

Kera's eyes about bulged out of her head gazing at the silver silk, satin, and synthetic lamé gown, covered in embroidery with clear and silver beadwork, hanging from a silk hanger. Diamonds, sprinkled the straps as well as the tight-fitting bodice, caught the morning sunlight and glimmered.

In complete awe over what she was seeing, she walked over to it and carefully, touched it, just to see if it was indeed real.

“Nora, from the shop, is going to come out and help you get dressed,” Devon told her. “She’s also going to do your hair and make-up.”

“Devon, I can’t wear something like this,” Kera said softly.

“Sure you can. And I bet it’s going to look fabulous on you as well.”

The party was at six, so by four Devon was pushing Kera up the stairs to take her bath and be ready for the makeover.

Nora Mathews, an employee of the store the gown came from and make-up expert, showed up at five to help. When Kera came out of the bathroom, the woman was waiting for her.

Nora was kind and had a friendly smile. Her bright brown eyes sparkled with good humor. She was the same height as Kera and had the same figure, strangely enough. First she helped Kera with her hair. It was dried, curled, and piled up on her head with curls hanging everywhere. Make-up was next, before she slipped into the priceless gown. One zip up the back,

a shake of the small pleats that cascaded down to the floor, and she was dressed in something that could pay for her college tuition. She sat down on the bed to slip the matching silver shoes, with the same beads and diamonds, on her feet.

Kera truly felt like a princess in a fairy tale right then. She turned around over and over again, watching herself in the mirror. Believing she was the person looking back at her was difficult.

"You are gorgeous!" Devon remarked breathlessly. He smiled, placing his coat and a fur-lined wrap on the bed. Kera stopped her twirling and faced him. "I have something else for you," he said, gliding up behind her. "I came across this and thought it would be perfect with the gown."

Devon opened the blue velvet box in his hand, keeping whatever the box held hidden from her view until the very last second. Opening his hand, he held a large marquise-cut diamond necklace created from six large stones that formed a circle. Kera held her breath as he placed the necklace on her throat and clasped it. Another quick glance at the box revealed matching stud earrings and a note that read \$50,000.

"I've looked at this necklace many times on my way home from school," she said touching it gently. "Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would hold it, let alone get to wear it."

"Well, this dream gets better." He kissed her on the shoulder and met her gaze in the mirror. "This is now yours." He grinned when she looked at him in the mirror in shock. "And I demand you wear it for me, with nothing else, later on."

Kera turned around, astounded. She gazed at Devon as if he had lost his mind, then she did something that neither one of them would have expected. Kera kissed Devon.

"Thank you," she said, blushing.

"Come on." He turned her around and placed the new wrap over her shoulders. "If you keep looking at me like that we'll never get to the ball."

Kera blushed even more, which caused Devon to laugh as they walked out to the waiting car.

Chapter Nine

Devon rented a limo for the night, which drove through town slowly. The moon was full, giving off a romantic radiant light. Town was quiet, except for the many different cars and limos that all seemed to be heading in the same direction.

There were several different mansions in Treece, and each one was just as grand as the other. Kera heard the stories about how each important family that owned those houses would take turns hosting charity parties. They raised thousands and thousands of dollars that were supposed to go to the not so fortunate ones like her. And if it did, well she never saw any of that charitable money. But then again, any time her father got some cash he disappeared for a time, even as much as a few weeks.

Kera felt her fear increase and her heart pound a little harder with each block they passed. She couldn't figure out if she was more frightened of going to this party or the fact that she was coming out in public as Devon's wife in a gown that was worth more than what she had ever seen in her life. She, herself, was still trying to come to grips with both of these things.

"You okay?" Devon asked, sitting across from her.

Kera could only nod her head. She couldn't speak, and knew if she did she would only squeak. That was how scared she was right now. In addition to the fear was the feeling she didn't belong here, which kept reoccurring over and over in her head.

She knew where they were heading. Hell, she used to walk past the iron gates every day on her way to school. The mansion was the biggest, grandest home in the whole of Treece. The property line was over a hundred acres and had a massive iron fence going around it, with double iron gates and two cameras to see who was coming and going. It was the one place girls like

Kera only dreamed about entering. Now, she was about to drive through those gates and up to the front door. The thought alone gave her the chills.

"You're shaking." Devon stated.

"I don't belong here." Kera whispered.

Devon leaned forward, taking her chin gently. "You belong by my side, and you belong here." He smiled. "Have I told you that you look good enough to eat?"

Kera rolled her eyes at him, pulled away from his hand, and went back at looking out the window. She tried to relax but found it almost impossible. Her nerves were wrecked. There was no way she was going to fit in with these people. She came from the poor side of town.

Kera gave in to her fear slightly when the large house got closer and closer. Her hands were fisted in her gown and sweat started to gather on her forehead. Tonight, men dressed in tuxedos were lining the drive with women in sparkling gowns and jewels.

"You shouldn't have brought me." Kera told him.

"You'll be fine."

The door was opened for them the second the limo stopped. Devon got out first, took hold of her hand, and half-pulled half-tugged her out. The first thing she noticed was the perfectly trimmed grass. All kinds of flowers in all colors bloomed everywhere and in the center of the lawn sat a white marble water fountain. Three cherubs with their backs to each other bent over pouring water from pots.

Hand in hand, they walked up the steep marble steps. Other couples joined them and Kera felt the eyes of the women upon her instantly. It didn't settle well. She didn't like being stared at, and tonight she would have many sets of eyes upon her.

"Welcome to The Chateau," Devon told her.

Kera was speechless as she walked through a double set of glass doors. White marble stone at her feet, golden walls, and row after row of crystal chandeliers lighting a large foyer. People were standing everywhere, and many of them seemed to stop talking to look at Devon and her. He smiled. She didn't.

Devon took her to a set of stairs going down into a ballroom right out of *Cinderella*. More eyes followed her as she walked on

Devon's arm. She tried to smile a couple of times when men came up to shake his hand, but she found it was too false. They were only coming up to check her out.

"Relax," Devon whispered. "The only one you have to worry about biting tonight is me."

"Great," she mumbled, rolling her eyes. "More shit to worry about."

Devon chuckled, and Kera went back to watching the ladies dance around the room in their elegant dresses and flashy jewels. Everyone seemed to be having a great time, yet Kera knew deep down that it was all too good to be true. Her gut was screaming that this was all going to come crashing down on her any second.

"Excuse me sir, but might I inquire as to where you have found yourself such a fine thing as what is on your arm tonight?"

Devon looked over his shoulder and Kera felt as if her heart was going to beat right out of her chest, until she saw Dane standing behind them smiling widely.

"Damnit, Dane," Devon chuckled. "That 'sir' shit will get your ass kicked every time. And don't sneak up on me like that!"

"Well, you are older than me." Dane's baby blue eyes turned and looked at her. "How are you doing, Kera?"

"I feel like prey in a lion's den waiting to be eaten," she stated. Devon chuckled so she elbowed him. "Everyone's staring at me."

Dane took her hand and brought it up to his lips for a soft kiss. "Because you look better than them," He smiled a big flashing white smile at her.

Kera couldn't help herself. She began to relax and even smile a little.

"Behave yourself." Devon stated, taking Kera's hand. "So who are you with tonight? Or should I even ask?" Dane narrowed his eyes on Devon, who laughed. "Ah, so she has you once more by the nuts, huh?"

Dane chuckled dryly. "You have no idea. She's hoping like hell I'll find a bride at this shindig." He waved with his hand to the crowd of people. "Most of what's here are snobs and bitches. Current company excluded, of course." He looked at Kera with a kind smile on his face.

Kera smiled. "I feel out of place here."

"Oh, but darling you fit in very nicely." Dane grinned. "In fact, I think you look better than the rest."

Kera blushed.

"Smooth talker," Devon muttered. He looked around the room. "Where *is* your grandmother?"

"Rubbing elbows with the rich and famous, I think." Dane answered. He grabbed two glasses of champagne from a tray and handed one to Kera. "And I bet trying to arrange my wedding."

"Well, I need to find her." Devon looked at Kera. "Think you will be all right with him?"

Dane placed his hand over his chest. "You wound me, sir."

"Call me sir again and you bet your sweet ass I'll hurt you."

Kera smiled. "I'll be fine."

Devon kissed her on the cheek. "Be back in a flash."

Shaking his head, Dane watched him leave. "Poor bastard has no idea what he is walking into." He looked at Kera. "Gram is in a mood and will have her hand on his arm until she is pried away with a damn crowbar."

Kera laughed. She couldn't help herself.

"Come on." He tilted his head to the side. "Let's check out the food."

Kera placed her hand in Dane's crooked elbow and walked around the room with him. He pointed out different people to her, even introduced her to a few. Some thought she was his wife and seemed very shocked to find out she was Devon's. A couple of girls even looked down their noses at her.

"Don't pay any attention to them." Dane told her. "They're all so damn jealous because you landed him, not them." They stopped walking at the far end of the ball room. "Devon's been the one to grab since Blaine left town years ago."

"Devon mentioned him before, and the other one, Darius. Said they haven't been around for years, but not why."

"They were shipped off to boarding school. Darius comes around once in a while, but as for Blaine, well, we haven't really seen him in a while," Dane shrugged his shoulders. "He's called a few times. He keeps saying he going to come back, but as of yet, no Blaine."

"Well at least you have friends," she sighed. "People tended to stay away from me because of my father."

"Well you have friends now." Dane took a drink of his champagne and smiled tightly.

"Be careful." Kera warned. It 'hadn't taken her long to realize Dane hid behind his humor. "Your reputation could suffer if you socialize with me."

Dane almost choked on his drink, "Hello! My reputation is already in the toilet. Half the fathers in this town keep their daughters close because they're afraid I'm going to ruin them."

"And do you?" Kera fought a smile, which was damn hard to do.

"Used to," he winked roguishly.

"Devon!"

Both Kera and Dane snapped their heads around as a beautiful blonde rushed toward Devon, took his face in her hands, and kissed him in front of everyone.

"Oh shit," Dane groaned, hiding his face with his hand in mock despair.

Kera was about to say something else but stopped when Dane swore again and quickly rushed over to an elderly woman who was making some kind of ruckus.

"So you're the latest notch in his belt."

Kera snapped her head around to another blonde standing behind her. "Excuse me?"

"It's all around the ball tonight that you're his wife. However, I find that just a bit too hard to believe"

Kera felt a slight tingle of anger mix with her fear. She had known she was going to get some kind of hell for being here tonight, 'but she wasn't expecting it so soon.

A brunette walked up and stood next to the blonde. Together they blocked her view from seeing Devon, or the woman kissing him.

"Well I must say, Beth," another said from behind Kera, looking her up and down, "he has gone down in his style."

Keep your mouth shut, and everything will be okay. Just keep the lips shut. Damn it! Don't do it. "Maybe snobs weren't his type after all." She looked them up and down also. "After all, bitches in bed are known to be cold as ice." *Crap. Couldn't do it.*

"Well, well, well," the blonde purred, glaring at Kera with so much hatred Kera could have fallen over dead from the glare. "You can dress them up as fancy as you wish, but one will ever take the trash out of them." Her voice lowered, almost becoming dangerous. "You don't belong here. Never will. And as much as you try, you will never satisfy a man like Devon Noved. A stallion like him can never be happy with anything that isn't pure bred."

"And isn't he a dish in bed?" the brunette stated. "I never wanted that ride to end."

"Oh, I have to agree there," the blonde was now smiling cruelly. "What I wouldn't give to have him in my bed one more time."

Kera made to move away, but the blonde grabbed her arm, holding her in place.

"Why the rush?" she asked Kera in an overly sweet voice. "I have some things to share with you. Maybe give you a few pointers to keep him satisfied with you a bit longer. After all, it would be a shame if he tired of you so soon."

"I'm not interested in the shit you have to say," Kera stated sternly. "And if you don't get your damn hand off of me, I'll break it."

"Don't threaten—" Kera tipped her drink just enough that it poured right out of the glass and onto the front of the bitchy woman's red gown. "You bitch!" The blonde raised her hand to slap Kera.

"Ladies, is there a problem?"

Dane came up behind the two with a cold smile on his face. The woman holding Kera's arm let it go and both straightened their spines.

"Look at my gown! It's ruined," the blonde moaned with what Kera thought was decidedly second-rate acting.

"Oh I don't know, Beth, seems to me it looks just fine." Dane pushed past Beth to stand next to Kera. He crossed his arms over his chest and grinned. "Not starting trouble again, are we?"

Her lips thinned out and she was breathing hard through her nose, "I would never do that. We were just introducing ourselves to Devon's new... um..."

"Wife," Dane finished for her with a glare.

"I must say, I do have a hard time believing Devon got

married.” Beth looked Kera up and down once more.

“And why is that?” Dane cocked his head to one side.

“Well, you know.” She moved her hand in a way that was supposed to mean Dane already knew all about Devon and how he was with the ladies. “You know he only did it out of pity. I mean, why would a man like him want to marry someone outside of his social class?”

“Watch it Beth,” Dane warned.

Kera pulled away from Dane on shaky legs, so angry she could spit. She wanted to cry, scream, and hit Devon. Hell, she wanted to throw something at his head.

“Kera?”

“I need to get out of here,” she said under her breath, looking for an exit. She made it to a side door before Dane caught up with her, stopping her from escaping by grabbing hold of her arm. “I knew I shouldn’t have come here.” Kera said.

“Horseshit.” Dane snorted. “You belong here a hell of a lot more than those bitches.”

Kera put her hands up to him, backing away. “I know you’re trying to help, but stop. I know what I am, and this” —she indicated the room full of people with her hands— “is not it. Devon needs to let me go and find someone who fits into his class of people.”

Dane cocked his head to one side and placed both hands on his hips. “Wow. They really rattled you, didn’t they?”

Kera snorted. “Forget it.”

She made to turn but was stopped when Dane grabbed onto her arm again. He dragged her to the other side of the room into a niche where they could be alone.

“I don’t usually get in the middle of other people’s shit, but from what I’ve seen of my buddy over there, Devon is crazy about you.” When she rolled her eyes in denial, the humor left his voice. “No bullshit. If he wanted this crap, he would’ve married one of them years ago. But he didn’t. He picked you! He wants you. I just hope to hell that one day I can get as lucky as he did. Stay here. I’ll go get him to take you home. One thing’s for sure, you do need to get the hell out of here, and I’m sorry I pressed for the two of you to come. You’re way too good for most of these people.”

Dane left her standing there. Alone.

Kera looked around the room. Women were staring at her, some whispering. When her gaze landed on Devon, he was in a corner still *talking* with that blonde. The woman had her hands all over him.

Kera grabbed another glass and quickly downed it, feeling the burn as it went down. When she grabbed yet another, she finally caught Devon's eye. He frowned at her, clearly not understanding what was going on, and ignoring what the blonde was saying. Kera tipped her glass in a toast to him, drank the whole thing down, then turned and walked out before Dane reached him. She headed outside to the garden, hoping some fresh air would cool down her temper.

Kera walked outside in a daze. She couldn't seem to get that woman's smile out of her mind. For the first time in a very long while, she had begun to feel happy. She'd felt as if she were Cinderella at the ball. However, that changed when she had heard what the other women at the ball had to say. Most of it had to do with her and was not kind. Hell, it wasn't even neutral.

"You have got to be kidding me!"

She stopped when she caught the tail end of a conversation. She tried to act as if she had not heard a thing, but the more she heard, the more difficult it became.

"He was dynamite in bed. It's hard to believe that he picked someone like that to be his wife."

"Well, if you ask me," another said, "I think he has lowered his standards. Why in the world would he pick someone like that?"

Another chuckled. "Who knows? Maybe he felt sorry for her."

Kera's good mood disappeared again, festering itself into something boiling inside, waiting to blow. Before she had a chance to talk to Devon about it, he became involved in the business of his responsibilities, which encompassed seeing to the success of the charity ball, then being cornered by someone who definitely knew him. The moment she was alone, women surrounded her, women that seemed to be old mistresses to Devon that wanted only to make her feel out of place. Well, their heinous efforts had worked. She wanted to go back to her world, back to her poor life.

Women, in the best that money could buy, huddled in the garden. Jewels of all sizes sparkled in the dim light as they laughed.

"You know, I can remember when he used to deck me out like that," one woman said, "Great sex always got you great clothes."

"Oh, do I ever remember!" a red head said. "The necklace I got after a weekend with him, oh honey, that story could melt candles."

"And when he gets bored, he just moves on, as if you were never there."

Kera could only stand there as the women talked about how Devon had used each and every one of them then let them go. As Kera wondered how long she and Devon would last she felt her anger soar so high she shook with it. What she needed to do was to get Devon to let her go now instead of waiting until later. If he waited, she wouldn't have anything left of her heart because he was starting to wedge himself in. If Devon took her whole heart, Kera knew deep down she would die.

Her head throbbed with the churning emotional roller coaster the night had been, and with each painful pulse her anger increased. She would be so glad when the party ended and she was out of there. "That son of a bitch," she hissed to herself, walking between one of many rows of fruit trees around the grounds. "Bringing me here just to shove it in everyone's face." She kicked at a small rock petulantly, wishing it was one of those women, or even Devon for ignoring her fears. "Fancy dress bullshit."

"Running away only gives them what they want."

Kera stopped and looked up sharply at a man leaning against a tree smoking a thin cigar. "Excuse me?"

The man blew out smoke before he closed his mouth on the blunt and looked over at her. "Them." He indicated with his head towards the mansion. "They're all like vultures waiting to strike at the first sign of weakness." He turned, leaning his shoulder on the tree looking at her with the most intense green eyes. "Believe me, I know."

"And what would you know of it?" Kera crossed her arms over her chest defensively. "You look like the type of guy that

belongs with them. How would you know how they've been?"

The guy smiled, rolling his cigar between a set of perfect white teeth. "Don't judge all books by their covers honey."

Kera lowered her eyes and looked behind her at the mansion longingly. She had so wanted to have a good time. For so many years, she'd longed to go through those doors. But her dream had turned into one big nightmare.

"Don't sweat it so much," he went on. "There will be other parties, and some you will actually enjoy."

Kera looked back at him. "Who are you?"

He smiled, pulling his cigar out of his mouth. "Blaine Cedric."

Kera frowned. "So you're the one Devon and Dane have mentioned," she looked him up and down before snorting. "Funny. I thought you'd be bigger."

Blaine laughed, "Yep. You're perfect for Devon, without a doubt." Blaine dropped and stomped his cigar out before folding his arms over his chest. "So what are you doing out here alone?" He paused, thinking. "Hell, the real question is what are you doing dressed and out of a bed?"

"Excuse me," Kera didn't care for the constriction in her voice as she spoke, or the uncertainty either.

"Is Devon somehow in the doghouse?" Blaine smiled as if he were pleased by that thought. "He should be. He needs to get his ass in a bind for a change." Devon's friend stuffed his hands into his pockets and pushed off from the tree. "Give him lots of hell. I've heard he's had it too damn easy since I've been gone."

Kera said nothing more as he turned his back and walked away. Mostly because there wasn't a damn thing she could say. He stumped her, and that was definitely a first for her.

Chapter Ten

“You sure are quiet,” Devon said in the car. He’d noticed right off how she worked at distancing herself from him. No response came from her. Her head was turned, her gaze focused on the town slipping into nothing on their way back to the house. His only guess was that those women had said something to her, but what, he could only fear.

“So what did they say to you?” he tried again, bracing himself for the damage.

Again, she said nothing.

Devon kept quiet as the miles went by, his anger rising at how little she trusted him. He knew those women upset her, and he damned himself over and over for not getting her away soon enough. He knew how they were, each one as bitter as a lime, and he had hoped like hell Dane would keep them away. Not one of them understood or believed they had been a fling and nothing more.

When they drove into the driveway, yards from home, he tried again. “What did they say to you?”

No response.

“You have to talk to me sometime.”

Still she said nothing.

“Fuck,” he groaned. “Say something.”

When the car stopped, she looked at him. “Fine. You’re a fucking asshole.”

Devon groaned and shook his head as she got out of the car and stormed toward the front door. Devon stepped out of the car slowly.

“Kera...”

She stopped at the front door, took off one shoe, and threw it at him. Devon ducked as it barely missed his head.

“I’m not a damn whore you can show off at will,” she

screamed. "You had no fucking right to do that to me."

"No," he told her in a menacingly calm voice. "As I recall, you are now my wife." He took two steps toward her. "And I can do whatever it is I want, which includes taking you to balls and such."

The other shoe flew toward his head. "All I am to you is a piece of ass. And to think I was starting to trust you, to fucking *like* you of all things!"

Kera dashed into the house and slammed the door in his face. When he opened it, a vase smashed against the wall next to him.

"God, I hate you! I wish to hell I never met you," she yelled. "Never bumped into you!"

"So we are back to your tantrums, I see." He took off his dinner jacket and placed it on the sofa. "Must I remind you what will happen again?"

"Oh yes, how could I forget? You like to tie people up just so you can get your fucking way!" She glared at him as he unbuttoned his shirt, slipped it down his shoulders and arms then placed it on the sofa. "You are nothing more than a fucking bully."

"And as I recall, you got off pretty well that night," he reminded her. Enough was enough. The temper tantrum was starting to get irritating.

She picked up a brass figure and threw it at him as well. "You sick son of a bitch!"

Devon shrugged, trying his damndest to look and act calm when inside he was boiling, both at those women at the party for what they obviously said and Kera for not talking to him. He watched her reach around her back to unzip the gown she was wearing. She slipped out of it and stood in only her strapless bra and bikini panties.

"Take your shit!" she said as she pitched the gown at him. "I don't want anything more from you."

"Oh, you are going to get more of me, Kera," he hissed. "You're going to get so much more." Back to taming the shrew. Oh, well.

* * * *

Devon stalked towards her. Kera saw the intent in his eyes

and fled. She ran toward the stairs and up to the bedroom. She ran from her heart and from the pain. With tears streaming down her face, she slammed the bedroom door and tramped to the bathroom. Tears streamed from her eyes along with the frustrations of the past few days. The only thing that kept going over and over in her mind was why. Why did it all have to hurt so damn much?

In a daze, Kera started a shower. As she stared, the water hit the tile floor, she yanked the pins from her hair, then the jewelry he had bought her. She placed them on the counter before she removed her undergarments. Everything that she had on her body she piled on the floor. By the time she stepped into the steaming water, her hurt was gone, replaced with numbness. Anger at him for what he had done to her. Anger at her father for selling her to the highest bidder. Anger at all those women for telling her all the dirty details of their love lives with Devon. However, most of all, she was angry with herself for letting her heart care about him.

Over the running water, Kera heard him enter the bedroom. She closed her eyes and waited for him to open the door to the shower. Taking a deep breath, she braced herself for the fight that would end here and now.

* * * *

When Devon opened the shower stall door, Kera was on him. She hit him with everything she had and even managed to get in a few kicks to his shins. Devon grunted when her foot made contact, but focused most of his energy on trying to catch her hands. After taking two good hits to his knees, one punch to the gut, and a few slaps to the face, Devon managed to pin her wrists up against the wall, pressing his body into her.

"Finished yet?" he asked breathing hard.

"If I had a fucking knife, I would slice your damn dick off just so you couldn't hurt any more women," she spit back.

"And just who the hell have I hurt?" Struggling to hold her, Devon was confused.

"Wouldn't it be easier to count the ones you didn't fuck?"

"It might be, but it would also be easier if I knew what the hell you're so pissed about," he grunted as he fought with her.

"I'm pissed because you're a dick!" She tried to jerk her arms

free but he only tightened his grip.” And I’m pissed at the way you keep trying to manhandle me!” a tear slipped from her eye. “And I’m pissed because, because...”

Devon hissed when her knee made light contact with his nuts. He let go of her, watching as she moved around him and out of the shower. Kera took her robe from the back of the door and glared at him as she slipped it on.

“You just had to do that again.” He groaned, trying to stand, and pressing his forehead to the wet tile.

“You’re a complete asshole! God, how I hate your guts!” taking a step back away from him. “Parading me around in front of all those fucking women like a bloody prize. What the hell is your problem? Isn’t your ego big enough? You certainly do not need me around to stroke it, you egotistical bastard!”

“I think I liked it better when you weren’t saying anything.” He moaned in pain.

Kera walked into the bedroom and Devon could hear the sounds of her dressing. “I’ve had enough of you and your shit. I’m out of here!”

Devon stood on shaky legs and stumbled into the bedroom. “You’re not going any fucking place. We’re not done here.”

Walking to the door she spat out, “Watch me,” in such a manner Devon was sure her words contained venom. The bedroom door slammed shut.

Having recuperated from her knee job and pulled on some shorts, Devon ran out of the room and took the stairs two at a time. Running up to her, he grabbed her by the wrist just as her hand gripped the knob of the front door.

“We’re not done yet,” he hissed.

“I am done with you!” She tried to yank her wrist from his grasp but Devon only tightened his hold. “Let go!”

“I told you at the pool, I’ll never let you go. You’re mine. You belong to me, and that is that! No more wanting your freedom bullshit!” Taking hold of both her arms, he pushed her against the wall, none too gently. “You leaving me is *not* going to happen, no way, no how! Hell will have to fucking freeze over before you walk out of my life!” She was his and the sooner she learned that the better. He didn’t care what she chose to do with her life as long as she stayed with him.

"Is this what you told each and everyone one of them? Did you make them feel like they were special too?"

"Oh," he murmured, realization dawning as he pressed his body to hers, "This has nothing to do with what they said to you, after all." Devon held back a smile. "This has to do with the fact I slept with them." The smirk quickly turned into a full smile. "You're jealous." Thank goodness for that. She feels something for me.

"And you are fucking crazy!" she spat back.

Devon took hold of her face firmly. "Oh, you have that right. A man has to be fucking crazy to want to keep a tantrum throwing thing such as you." He looked at Kera closely. "You push and push and keep fucking pushing. And I take it all! Now, it's time for me to push back."

"Ah!" she screamed, "You son of a bitch!"

When he tried to kiss her, she slapped him across the face. He stood back and let her hit him again and again, not trying to block the blows this time. She obviously needed to work all this out and he was willing to be her punching bag.

Only when her crying started to take her breath away did she stop hitting him. Devon folded her in his arms, hoping to soothe her and let her grieve now that the anger had been released.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, hugging him as she cried. Devon knew she cried for how she and he came to be, cried for the freedom she would never have. He also knew she cried for the cold nights, for the countless times she must've gone to bed still hungry. She cried for the affection she never had. All this Devon had found out. Everything from her past he knew, even the difficult times in the cold of winter, as well as the lack of food.

He picked her up, and she wrapped herself around him so perfectly he knew there was no chance in hell they would make it back up to their room. So he headed over to the sofa and sat there instead. Kera raised her head from his shoulder. Tears ran over her face, but something in her look had changed. She had found her serenity.

Kera suddenly kissed Devon. She took his face into her hands and held him in place so she could explore at will. For the first time, Kera took the lead.

Roaming her hands over the contours of his chest, she traced each and every muscle. Devon groaned into her mouth when her nails scraped lightly over his nipples. He had to fight to keep still, bunching her shorts in his fists as he kissed her with as much need as she kissed him.

She broke the kiss, and using her hands she pushed his head back. Devon couldn't recall ever getting this much pleasure from just being kissed before. Her lips and tongue moved on his neck, mimicking the actions he had made on her countless times over the last two days. It was a sweet torture he wanted to hold on to forever, and each inch she moved down was another new sensation for him.

"Ahh, you're killing me," he moaned when her tongue flicked a nipple. "I'm dying so fucking slowly. Don't stop."

Kera scooted between his legs down to the floor. Her warm hands closed around his hard cock the moment she tugged it from the shorts. "I'm just getting started," she told him softly.

This woman pushed him to the edge so damn fast.' She didn't waste time teasing him but instead went to town. She sucked as much of his cock into her heated mouth as she could. She sucked forcefully and long on him, dragging out as much of his pleasure as she could. She swiped her tongue over the head and flicked back and forth on the base as her head went down. When the head of his cock grazed the back of her throat, Kera moaned. He felt those vibrations, moaned, and she kept it up. Each time the head touched her throat, she moaned.

Up and down, she sucked him savagely and fast. What her mouth couldn't close on, her hand did. She stroked and sucked the base of his cock, then vigorously on the head. With her other hand, Kera cupped his sack. She fondled it gently, and then she did something he never would've expected in his whole life. She scraped one nail over the entrance to his ass. That was all it took for Devon to beg.

"Stop!" Devon yelled at the top of his lungs. "Stop, or I'm going to..." But it was too late.

Kera lightly scraped her teeth on the underside of his cock. She also pushed a finger deep into his ass, which caused Devon to come powerfully and fast. He was very surprised that she took all he had, greedily swallowing each and every drop, yet still

sucking on him for more.

His eyelids were half closed, and he was so relaxed he didn't think he could move, but he did watch her as she stood.

"Hurt me again and there will never be a next time between us."

Devon smiled weakly. "I could never hurt you. But if you leave me, I will die inside."

"But being in a loveless relationship hurts me," she told him with a deadly calm voice.

Devon stood and moved in front of her. Kera took a step back. "You're not in a loveless relationship," he whispered.

Kera took another step back. "Maybe we should finish this when both of our tempers have cooled off," she said with her hands in front of her in a defensive posture.

"We finish this now." Devon backed her up to the dining room table. He touched her cheek gently. "Right here, right now, we finish this." He took a deep breath. "No more fighting. No more hating. Take off your clothes."

Kera watched him closely as she pulled her shirt over her head, then pushed her shorts down her legs.

"Get up on the table."

* * * *

Kera started to shake in anticipation as she scooted up on the table.

Devon pulled a chair out, sat down, and spread her legs wide for his view. "Now, I feast," he said in a deep, sensuous voice. "The first time I did this, you were tied to the bed." He picked up her foot, rubbing his lips over her ankle." And your screams sounded like heaven when you came."

His tongue darted out, causing Kera to shudder. She looked down, watching his finger as he moved from her knee, up her thigh, then back down to the knee, each time getting closer and closer to her pussy.

"I would have enjoyed it more if you were holding my head in place, begging me to lick the sweetness that is there for only me." He gently brushed his finger over the sensitive lips, then back down to her knee again. "To have your hips grind over my face as I suck hard on your swollen clit."

He brushed two fingers over the lips, rubbing the juices over

the flesh, and then parting them so he could view her clit.

"Ah." His voice was so husky in his need. "You are so wet for me, so needy, and waiting for only what I can give."

"Please!" Kera said breathlessly.

Her words were so faint that Devon wasn't sure if he heard her. "All you had to do was ask."

Devon pushed two fingers deep inside her as his mouth clamped onto her clit. Kera screamed as the first orgasm of the night raced through her body. Her hands dug into his thick hair as her legs wrapped around his shoulders, trying with all her might to bring him even closer.

"Mmm," he said against her pussy. "More!"

Devon started a fast and almost brutal fucking motion with his hand as he sucked furiously on her clit. Kera bucked against him as one orgasm after another hit her savagely. She never had a chance to come down from one before another hit.

Devon kept his fingers deep inside of her. He wanted to watch her as she came down from her high, a thing he wouldn't replace for all the money in the world. Her eyes were glazed, body sweaty, and she was as limp as a baby.

Standing up, he removed his fingers and pushed the chair away. Taking a firm hold on her hips, he dragged her to the edge of the table and flipped her over to her stomach. Keeping the firm grip, he positioned the head of his cock at her pussy and, with an intense push, buried himself to the hilt into her heated core.

Devon groaned loudly as she stretched for him and he groaned at the pulsation around his cock. He only gave her a few seconds to recover, and then his hips started to piston hard and fast. In and out, he rammed within her. Each thrust brought them both closer to the goal they sought, yet Devon was not going to give in to his desires.

When he thought he was about to lose his load, he slipped out of her. He shoved two fingers deep into her pussy and continued to fuck her until she cried out her release. With the head of his dick, Devon rubbed her pussy lips and bumped it against the little pink ring that was suddenly teasing him.

"Our next ride," he told her in a rough, sexy voice, "is just about to begin."

Devon held onto her hips in an iron grip. Bruises from his

fingers started to form even as he held her in place with the help of the table. The head of his cock was already at the small ring just waiting for him to push inside. He tried twice to do it easy and gently but the muscles just wouldn't give to him. So Devon shoved inside her pussy two more times, making sure that he was well lubed up, and then went back to her ass. His hands were big enough for him to hold the cheeks wide and to hold her in place. With determination, Devon, forced the tight ring to give and let him in.

"Wait!" Kera shouted.

Devon didn't listen to her. All of his energy and attention was focused on pushing past the resistance while not hurting her. Of all the times he had done this, no one was as tight as this. For a moment, he thought it wouldn't give, but then it did. A slight pop, and the large head of his cock was forcing its way inside. Holding Kera still to give her time to get used to this and not shove his length in, which would hurt her, took more will power. Soon her cries of uncertainty for him to stop and her fighting turned to moans of pleasure. He hissed as he slid home, biting his lower lip when she pressed back slightly. Her tightness closed over him almost painfully as his balls touched the wet core of her pussy.

After a few moments, Kera relaxed, and he slowly pulled out, leaving just the head of his cock in. Devon pushed and found he had to be somewhat harsh to get the whole length back inside. Over and over, he did this until she caught the rhythm he wanted and relaxed enough for him to slide in and out easy. Before he was ready, however, she was pushing back toward him, urging him to go faster.

Devon closed his eyes on a groan and rode her with a newfound energy. His own climax was so close, and to prevent it, he made his strokes short. He just couldn't make this last like he wanted to. Devon moved a hand around to her clit, and with fast circular motions, he rubbed it.

Kera screamed her release. Her whole body shook over the table and squeezed down on him so that nothing in the world could have prevented him from blowing his load into her bowels, even if his life was on the line.

Devon cried out with her, holding her hips as savagely and

as close as he could. It seemed forever before either was ready to move. Devon lay over Kera's back on the table feeling like a man who had just come back from heaven.

"God, Kera." He breathed out in barely a whisper, kissing her back. "You complete me like nothing I ever have had or like any other."

"How would you know with so many?"

Devon felt her words cut him like a knife to the chest. He eased from her, feeling as if someone poured cold water down his back. *The past comes back to bite me on the ass.* Devon pulled her back against him and went over to the sofa, sitting down with her on his lap.

"Everyone has a past, Kera," Devon spoke softly, brushing her hair from her face and trying to get her to look at him. "I guess when I was out making mine, I never thought it would come back and hurt someone like this. I didn't think it would hurt me so much either." She finally looked up at him, and a tear slipped free from her eye. He brushed it aside. "I never meant for tonight to hurt you. I only wanted to show the town what a great and beautiful wife I have."

She gave him a faint smile.

The pain he was seeing in her eyes tore at him. He could only imagine what those women said to her. Hell, the fact that Christa came up to him and kissed him in front of everyone was probably enough to cause pain like this.

"Listen to me, and listen very carefully because I am only going to say this once. Before I laid my eyes on you, I was that playboy. Dane, Darius, Blaine and I would go out on the town and try our luck with any girl we could. If you want to use the term whores with us, then feel free. We were. If she would lie down for us, we jumped on her."

"That sounds like it would fit the guy I saw."

"How do you know Blaine?" he asked, forcing himself to stay calm. The predator in him came to surface. He didn't like how she lit up while they talked about Blaine. As far as Devon was concerned, Blaine was the biggest playboy around. Hell, one of the reasons he left town was because he was starting to go through all the girls alone, leaving hardly any for the Compound to match up. Shit, the poor bastard was kicked out of Treece by

his father until he grew up. Everyone was waiting for him to come back, especially the ladies. With Devon now off the market, Dane staying aloof, and Darius, Lord only knew where and what he was doing, Blaine was the last of their pack to get married. That was something Devon didn't think he would ever see. He couldn't picture his buddy Blaine going to the Compound and picking out a bride.

"I saw him tonight in the gardens."

Devon felt his heart pound. It had been many years since he saw Blaine and to know the guy was at the ball, but didn't come in was a shock. "You saw him?"

"Yeah." She frowned at him. "What's wrong?"

Devon shook off his feeling of betrayal over his friend not coming and seeing him. He gave Kera a smile. "Nothing. I haven't seen Blaine in a very long time. I miss him, that's all. Darius calls and comes by more than what Blaine seems to do."

"Oh."

"Listen, Kera." He took a deep breath. "What I was trying to say is that I have done a few things in my past, but I didn't choose my past. I chose you, and I want this to work between us. I need this to work."

"I'm not sure it can," she whispered.

He took another deep breath. "How about this? As much as I hate to say this, I will. Give me a couple months.. If things don't work out between us, and you feel nothing toward me, I'll let you go." When he looked in her eyes, he swore he almost saw regret in them. It gave him hope. Hope that maybe deep down she didn't want him to let her go. "Call it a truce if you want."

"A truce?"

Devon saw the tears threatening to fall from her eyes. "Yes, as much as I hate it. I'll give you some time, not sure how long though, to get to know me, and hopefully to care about me. If nothing is there, I will let you go and give you the means to live as you wish."

"What about your investment? The money you spent on me?"

He touched her lower lip, grazing it with his thumb. "I never bought you, Kera. You're not a piece of property to me." He smiled tenderly. "But if you feel nothing for me and things don't

work out, then your jail sentence is over.”

Kera chuckled. “Yeah, you have been kind of like a jail keeper, or what do they call them guys? Um... a warden.”

Devon laughed. “We have a deal then?”

She bit her lower lip, and he held his breath. “Deal,” she answered softly.

Devon smiled tenderly. He took a deep breath and pulled her into his arms, hugging her as he rested his chin on top of her head. “It’s a deal. I promise. You won’t regret it.”

Chapter Eleven

The weeks went by, and Devon and Kera worked at getting to know each other. Kera managed to stay as far away from Cameron as she could when he came to visit, because every time they were around one another, he made her feel uneasy. He watched her constantly, which bothered her and Devon. And she worked at not throwing things when Devon poked at her, a difficult task for her. Many times, she let her temper get the best of her, and each time that happened, Devon would kiss her in a way that had her forgetting what they were fighting about.

They were in one of their tiffs when Cameron came unexpectedly for a visit. She was strolling around the back of the house, thinking about her life when she turned and found Cameron standing behind her.

Kera turned, startled. "Where did you come from?"

Cameron smiled a smile that had her insides crawling and the caution flag going up. She backed up, hugging herself.

"I heard the two of you were getting along," Cameron stated. "So I had to come and see for myself." He licked his lips, his gaze roamed up and down her body. "I must say, I'm very impressed he tamed you. I never thought it would happen."

"I'm not a fucking animal," she informed him through clinched teeth.

"No, you're not," he stated. The way he stared at her had her thinking up something quick to get away. "But I bet you are in bed."

Has he lost his mind? "I have to go, Cameron. My stomach is suddenly turning."

Cameron laughed the whole time Kera walked around the house. The sound sent chills of dread crawling on her skin. Why, she didn't understand. All she did know was that when he was around, her skin crawled, and the need to run overwhelmed her.

Instead of taking a chance of running into him again, Kera headed up to the bedroom. She started to wonder if he was here again in order to try to get money from Devon. It seemed to be all he ever did when he came here, the fucking leech. Why didn't he go out and earn his damn money like everyone else did?

Up in her room, Kera walked to the balcony and sat down in one of the chairs. She looked around at the trees and the grounds, wondering if, after the time Devon promised her, she could really leave. She didn't want him to know she was having a hell of a time coming to terms with it herself, but she was falling for him. Never did she think the word love would come to her when all of this was pushed at her, but now she was thinking differently. She was falling for Devon, but afraid of getting her heart broken again.

On a sigh, she stood up and went back inside. She heard the shower running and started wondering why Devon would be taking a shower late in the afternoon. Biting her lower lip, she walked over to the bathroom door and peeked in. She watched him as he took his shower, letting her gaze roam over his body.

His back was to the door, so she got her full view of him. His back was so strong, flexing as he moved his arms. Even his ass was tight as he moved. The feel of his body under her hands and the memories of his strength had her gut turning and a dampness starting between her legs.

Before she could get caught, she turned and went to the bed. Sitting down she waited, but for what, she wasn't sure. She didn't really want to talk to Devon, but going back downstairs meant she was taking a chance of bumping into Cameron again.

"Hey."

Kera turned. She hadn't heard the water shut off or him moving around. That was how deep in her thoughts she was.

"Hey."

"You okay? You look like you've seen a ghost or something." She watched him knot the towel around his waist and shake his wet hair about. "Just another run-in with Cameron. Sorry, but your cousin gives me the creeps."

"That's his special charm." Devon smiled.

"What are you doing taking a shower?"

He headed over to the dresser, opening it up, and pulling

some clothes out. "Oh I was chopping some wood. I got all sweaty and smelly. I thought we could have a nice fire-side dinner together." He looked over his shoulder at her, dropping the towel but keeping his back to her. "Might romance you some, show you my sexy side." He smiled.

Chuckling, Kera stood. "Well, lately all I have gotten to see is the ass side." She let her gaze roam over his backside as she headed to the door. "So this might be something new." She stopped at the door, smiling back at him. "How about lobster again?"

Devon laughed at her sexy smile and didn't stop smiling as he dressed and went back downstairs.

* * * *

Devon fixed steak dinner for them. They ate, teased, and picked on each other throughout the meal. After quickly chasing around the house and some extra hot sex on the stairs, Kera was sleeping a deep and peaceful sleep. Her body felt sore, but relaxed and her mind at peace. She was wearing one of the new silk pajama sets that Devon bought her and was draped over his body. One leg was over his hip, one arm over his shoulder, and her head was on his chest. He had his head on top of hers with an arm draped over her back. For the first time, both were at peace with each other, the first time that they slept like this. It was also the first night Kera let Devon hold her the way he wanted without a fight.

Rolling over in bed, something slowly woke Kera from her sleep. Opening her eyes slowly, she could barely focus on anything. Hands with a grip of steel yanked her from the bed, and four men jumped Devon the second he opened his eyes.

"Don't kill him!" the one holding Kera yelled. "His death won't give us anything but trouble."

"Devon!" Kera screamed. She was jerked from the bedroom as Devon fought with the four men. Kera watched Devon knock two away and run to the hallway as she was being dragged down the stairs.

"Kera!" he yelled.

"Devon! Help me!" Kera managed to free her arm from the iron grip and kicked the guy in the leg. She managed to get only a few feet away from him before he grabbed her brutally again

and slapped her in the face.

Kera screamed again when she saw someone hit Devon relentlessly at the back of his head. He went down hard.

“Get off of me! Devon!” Kera watched in horror when Devon didn’t move. “Devonnnnnnnn!”

* * * *

“Kera!” Devon woke up and sat straight up in the bed yelling.

“Lie back down,” the doctor commanded.

“Where is she?”

“You have a nasty knot on the back of your head, as well as a minor concussion. Stay still and let me mend this cut on your cheek.”

“Mr. Noved,” a man at the foot of the bed said, “you’ve been out for a couple of hours. I came out here with the information on your cousin. But from the state of the house, it looks as if I am too late.” He looked around the room.

“I don’t give a shit about him right now, Helms,” Devon hissed in pain. “We need to find Kera.”

Again, he tried to sit up.

“Mr. Noved, your cousin has her,” Helms informed him.

Devon stopped and glanced at the man who headed his security. Calmness washed over him, like the calm before a storm. A calm that only a man set on murder would have.

Kirk Helms stood at the foot of the bed watching a doctor put smelling salts under Devon’s nose. The room was a wreck. Furniture turned over, drawers rummaged through, and other things broken. However, what brought Helms out this way at this time of night was the information Devon had sent him to find, and Helms acted like he didn’t want to give.

“Your cousin,” Helms went on, “is in a lot of trouble. He’s been taking girls over the border and selling them to the brothels.” Helms sat down on the bed and looked Devon in the eye. “And he owes some very nasty men a lot of money or a fresh girl.”

Devon looked at the man as if he had lost his mind. Then the things he had heard over the past few months started to make sense; Cameron always needing more money, yet spending much more than he had. The desperation had been clear...

“How long?” Devon asked quietly.

“From the information I have found, at least a year.” Helms answered.

“He’s going to sell them Kera.” Devon moved from the bed and pushed the sudden dizziness away.

He started cursing himself. All the signs were in front of him, yet he had seen none of them—how Cameron always watched Kera, how he had taken a sudden interest in her, and how he had stopped asking Devon for money lately. Instead of wondering why, Devon had just assumed his cousin was finally turning a new page in his life. But to sell his wife was a new low that Devon found difficult to believe Cameron capable of.

“He’ll take her to the woods,” Devon said to himself, pulling a pair of jeans over his legs. “He doesn’t know that I know he has her. And he doesn’t know that I know he’s going to sell her.”

“You are in no condition to go any place,” Helms said. “This is what you pay me to do.”

“And you don’t know what kind of temper she has,” Devon said in a matter-of-fact tone. “It won’t be long before she pisses him off to the point where he could do anything to her. Plus, the property rests right next to the border.”

“Mr. Noved. We have men out looking for your cousin and wife as we speak.”

“And you, Helms, don’t know dick about Cameron. He can hide for weeks, even months, in those woods.” Anger flared in Devon as he looked at his man. “Moreover, he’s damn good at hiding, and I bet he knows the best ways to get over the border without being seen. I’m going after that fucker and will kick his ass myself.”

Helms sighed, throwing a heavy sweater at Devon. “Then at least dress for it. I don’t want to have to carry your ass out of the woods as well as your wife’s.”

Devon smiled as he pulled the sweater over his head. In less than five minutes, Devon, Helms, and a small group of men headed into the woods towards the border.

* * * *

Kera was breathing frantically as she was dragged through the deepest part of the woods. She had tried many times to yank her arm away and each time she tried the grip would tighten. When she tried to bite the hand she was rewarded with a

backhand to the face. Now she could barely feel her arm below where the man gripped her, and her face stung like hell. There had to be a bruise by now on her cheek from him. When her foot caught on a fallen limb, Kera crashed to the ground. She started to cry as pain shot up her leg.

"I can't go any further!" she yelled at him, tears falling down her face.

"Get off your ass and move!"

"I can't!" she screamed as she felt her ankle started to swell. Sharp pain washed over her ankle and up her leg again.

"Arghh!" he yelled loudly, causing some birds to take off in fright. "It wasn't supposed to happen like this! This was all supposed to go smoothly. The son of a bitch wasn't supposed to fight back." Cameron started to pace around her. "If he would have just given me the damn money then none of this would have happened."

"Do you think he will let me go?" she hissed at him. "Think, Cameron! He'll come for me," she told him. "There is no way in hell he will let this go. You should have thought twice before you took me from his arms."

She shifted so she could sit and feel her ankle with her hands. Kera was able to feel the swelling, but that was all. From what she could see it didn't look good either. Kera was starting to think the thing was broken with the way her toes were numbing up.

"He doesn't know I have you, smart-ass," he hissed. "And I am damn sure in time he will get over you and find another sweet piece of ass to fill your shoes. Now get the fuck up!"

Cameron took two steps towards her and forced her back up to her feet by grabbing hold of her top. Kera screamed as fresh pain radiated up her leg. In his disgust, Cameron shoved her back down to the ground. On her way back down, her foot twisted more, and Kera thought she felt it pop.

She was crying from the pain. Nothing in her whole life hurt as much as this did. Not even the loss of her virginity had hurt like this, or the way Devon had treated her. Cameron started to pace again, looking at her every so often.

"Enough fucking around!" he yelled at her.

"Are you really that fucking dumb?" Kera yelled at him.

“Have you seen my fucking ankle, you moron? I can’t go anywhere. I can’t... fucking... walk!”

Cameron grabbed her violently around the wrist and forced her to stand on her bad ankle. He half dragged, half carried her a few more feet before he dropped her again.

“We’ll rest here. I think we’re too far out for him to find even if he does suspect anything.”

Kera wiped the tears from her face, and even though she was crying in pain, she laughed at him. “Just keep telling yourself that one, dipshit. He’ll find you and kick your ass.”

Cameron stomped over to her, grabbed the front of her top, and viciously slapped her face again. She saw stars from the force of his hit and her face burned from the blow. He dragged her to her feet and leaned in so close to her that when he spoke, spit came out. “You were a bitch before he fucked you, and now that he has brought you to your knees, you’re just a fucking cunt now. One would think after he shoved his dick in that pretty mouth of yours, it would shut you up some. But no! A little fucking money in your pocket and Miss Bitch thinks her shit don’t stink.”

Kera started to laugh, which caused him to push her to the ground roughly. “And what are you? You’re going to sell me for your pocket change. Do you really think that once this gets out you will ever be allowed at the Ceremony at all?” When all he did was glare at her, Kera went on. “Oh, I get it. You can’t get it up, can you? You need a girl that doesn’t know a damn thing, but thinks you are the greatest lover around. You’re nothing but a sick bag of shit; nothing more, nothing less.”

Cameron looked at her with pure hatred in his eyes. “When I sell you I won’t need to come back to Treece, but you keep that smart mouth of yours going and I will show you just what I do have, girl. I’ll make you scream until nothing comes out but a whimper.”

* * * *

Devon stopped suddenly and went down to his knees. He inspected the ground closely, touching it lightly with his hands.

“He’s trying not to leave a trail, but he is.” He grinned.

“How well does he know these woods?” Helms asked.

Devon stood up. “As well as I do. He’s heading south. It’s the

only part on the border that isn't patrolled on a regular basis."

"That would explain how girls are getting out without us knowing. Do you think he'll stop for the night?"

It was a well-known fact that many girls ran away from home. Girls like Kera, in the sense they didn't want to be a part of the matchmaking. These girls ran mostly because, being trapped in the same social class as Kera, they usually only ended up serving in the Compound. It never crossed his mind that they were being taken over the border and sold.

"My guess would be that he will want to get her across as soon as he can, but if I know her at all, then she will start to slow him down very soon," Devon smiled. "Being bullied isn't something she stands for."

"We still have time to find them." Helms said, looking up at the sky.

"Yeah," he glanced up at the sky as well. "But in the woods, that's not much." He gave Helms a dirty grin. "It's the perfect time to take him." Helms looked at Devon with questions in his eyes that he didn't voice, so Devon went on. "Let's just say that my dear cousin sucks at hide-and-seek."

* * * *

Kera sat across from Cameron with a small fire between them. She watched him eat the small amount of food he had taken from the cabin and thought how much of a pig he really was. The woods were so dark the only thing that could be seen was what the flames touched.

"You need to eat."

"I find looking at you turns my stomach," she replied. "Something about a chicken shit for a man sours the stomach."

Cameron laughed at her. "He's not going to save you. You know as well as I do that he'll just move on to the next piece of ass."

Kera smiled back at him in a sweet manner. "You keep saying that. Man, you really do believe your own shit. When the little girls back home give you those paid blowjobs and tell you how big you are, do you believe that as well?" Her smile turned even sweeter but with a twist of cruelty to it. "Oh, I know, you still think the Easter Bunny comes and hides eggs, huh? And that Santa Claus is real?"

"I've seen him move from one nice ass to the next. I was very surprised he picked you. You don't fit his type, not really." Cameron gave her a disgusted look. "You're too much of a smart-ass."

Kera didn't let anything show on her face as she stared at him. He shoved the rest of his food into his mouth and stood. He strolled a few feet from her, turned his back, and started to piss. Kera took this moment to tug the thickest log toward her. Something in her gut told her that he wasn't done with her yet.

Cameron zipped his jeans and headed toward her. Roughly, he grabbed hold of her top and brought her to her feet. Kera managed to hold onto the log behind her back and pushed back a cry of pain. She waited to see what he would do. However, she was unable to hold the expression of pain from her face.

Cameron wrapped one strong arm around her and held her chin in place before him. "In fact, you're more my type. The feisty girls are so much more enjoyable to fuck. They fight so well." He lowered his eyes and licked his lips as he focused on her mouth. "It's such a turn-on to hear them beg for me to stop."

He kissed her brutally, forcing his tongue past her teeth. The fighting she was doing only fueled him on, so Kera did the one thing she knew would get him to stop kissing her, she chomped down on his tongue. He let go of her suddenly and smiled, which she rewarded with a savage slap to his face.

"Oh this is going to be tasty." He spat blood out of his mouth. "The others didn't fight nearly as much as I know you are going to."

Cameron pushed her to the ground and then covered her body with his own and, somehow, Kera managed to hold on to the log still. He kissed her face and neck, biting her as he went and leaving bruising marks to go along with the bites. He roamed her body with his hands, ripping at her pajamas to expose her flesh. Kera cried out as her legs were forced opened by his rough hands. The whole time, Cameron whispered in her ear how he loved it as she fought him. He had managed to rip her top from the shoulder down to expose one breast when he heard the snapping of a twig. Still atop of Kera, he stopped cold and glanced around them. Kera took the opportunity to scratch the side of his face. Hard.

“Bitch!” Cameron cried. He stood quickly and dragged her with him before backhanding Kera, knocking her back to the ground.

Kera took her log and swung it with as much force as she could at Cameron’s knee. He went down, screaming in pain, and Kera clambered to her feet —foot— and took off, running and limping as best as she could into the woods. Twice, she fell painfully to the ground, screaming as pain radiated up her leg.

“You fucking cunt!” he screamed. “Just you wait until I get my hands on you! Bitch! I’m going to fuck you so hard you’ll be bleeding by the time I’m done!”

Kera ran. Her ankle throbbed so badly and was becoming numb to match her toes, yet she didn’t care. All she wanted to do was get as lost as she could in the woods so Cameron couldn’t find her.

Her side hurt, her leg hurt, and her breathing was in gasps, yet she kept running. Every time she fell she pushed the pain away and forced herself back to her feet. Eventually, after yet another tumble, she stayed put and cried. Agonizing pain emanated from her foot, and the fear of Cameron coming out of the trees and grabbing her seemed to freeze her on the spot.

“Somebody.” She mumbled in the dark, pushing herself back up on her shaking legs. “Please.” Kera managed to stand on her two feet and scream, “Help me!” before she again forced her body to run.

Out of nowhere, an arm shot out from the dark, snaked around her waist, and pulled her into a strong grip. Another hand shot out and covered her mouth the split second before she tried to scream.

“Shhh!” someone hissed in her ear. It was a voice she had grown to know so well.

Chapter Twelve

The hand moved from her mouth slowly, and Kera turned in his arms, wrapping both of hers around his neck. She cried softly into his sweater covered neck.

“God!” She gasped for breath, her mouth muffled slightly by his sweater. “What took you so fucking long?”

Devon chuckled, wrapped his arms tightly around Kera, and closed his eyes in bliss. “Call it a hit to my head.”

“Kera!” Cameron yelled. “You can’t run where I won’t find you, you fucking bitch!”

“Stay here,” Devon told Kera.

Kera reached out and held him again. “Don’t. Please don’t,” she begged as she cried. “Don’t leave me.”

“Shhh.” Devon hugged her tightly again. “You’re safe. Helms will stay with you.” He kissed her gently before he nodded to Helms, who came over and started to look her injuries over.

Devon stood up keeping his eyes fixed on his cousin, and walked toward Cameron. He was almost on top of him before Cameron turned around. Shock spread all over his face when he looked at his cousin. Shock and fear.

“Now what, Cameron?” Devon asked quietly. “Where do we go from here?”

The shock on Cameron’s face disappeared and hatred replaced it. “You got everything, and I got shit!”

“You spoiled prick.”

“You took my inheritance! They gave you everything and gave me shit,” Cameron spit back, looking at Devon with so much hate Devon wondered if they had ever truly been close. “Well, I am taking the one thing that is yours. I’m going to find her, fuck her good and hard, and then sell the bitch. Pay back everything I owe and get the fuck out of this dump.”

“I took your inheritance? You dick!” Devon yelled back. “I

had nothing to do with you pissing away the money you had. You're the one to blame. You were the one that went through your fucking money like it was water, not me. I'm the one that bailed out your sorry ass from every fucking shit-hole scam you came up with. Just like I'm going to now!"

"She's mine, Devon! All you're going to do is fuck her life up then dump her for the next one." Cameron breathed out in a rush, his chest going up and down as he sucked more air in. "So I'm just speeding up the game and taking her off your hands. Just like I took the others when you were finished."

Devon saw Helms sneak out from behind the bush. He held a Tazer gun in his hand and pointed it at Cameron's back.

"You won't find her," Devon told him calmly.

"And why the fuck won't I?" Cameron sneered.

Devon examined his cousin with no emotion on his face. "Because I already have her."

Cameron looked at Devon like a man who had just lost everything. His arms dropped to his sides, and disappointment washed over his face. Helms shot the gun and about fifty thousand volts went through Cameron. He went down to the ground at Devon's feet. Devon stared at him and felt pity for his cousin, pity for the man who had been like a brother to him as well as his best friend.

Devon headed back to the spot where he had left Kera. She was sitting on a log as one of Helms's men checked over her ankle. When she looked up at him, a big smile spread across her face. For the first time since they had been together, he saw her light up when her eyes met his.

"Her ankle is in bad shape. I think it's broken," the guy said.

"Sure does hurt like a motherfucker," she told them in a tired voice.

Devon knelt as the guy stood. He ran his hand over the now black-and-blue ankle lightly, and then touched the bruise on her cheek. Helms brought Cameron out from the brush with cuffs on. When Devon glanced over his shoulder at him, Kera tapped him on the shoulder to bring his full attention back to her.

"Hey, can we go home now?" she asked with a sigh.

"That's the first time you've called it home." He smiled. "I like it." Devon stood up with Kera in his arms. He kissed her with as

much love as he could. "I'll carry you all the way back home, but for a price."

She saw the teasing in his eyes and smiled. "Will an 'I love you' do?"

Devon smiled. "I thought you would never say it!" He kissed her again. "But just know this, my dear; I fell in love with you the first time I saw that temper come out. Man, it's such a turn on for me!"

Kera laughed as Devon started the long walk home. "Then I'll just have to make sure I throw things at you more often."

"Just make sure it isn't anything I can't replace."

She bit his ear. "I make no promises," she whispered.

* * * *

Kera was lying on the bed, cleaned up, dressed in a pair of shorts and one of Devon's shirts with her foot wrapped tightly in a bandage and propped up on a large stack of pillows. It throbbed. Throbbled like hell, actually. In the other room, Devon was taking a shower. She could hear the water, and in her mind she could see it trailing down his body. The thought alone had an effect on her that caused her to grin.

"I hope that smile is for me."

Kera looked up. Her grin turned into a bright smile when Devon came out of the bathroom with only a towel wrapped around his waist.

"How's the foot?" he asked, walking up, sitting down at the foot of the bed, and touching her ankle gently.

"Hurts like hell," she answered with a tight smile.

"Well, a cracked bone tends to hurt." He picked her foot up, pressing gently to check on the swelling. "In the morning, we will go to town. Helms thinks that all you will have to wear is a brace and not a complete cast, but I'm going to have the doc check you out anyway."

Kera sat up gingerly, taking Devon's face in her hands. She brought him down to her waiting lips, kissing him tenderly. "Thank you," she said against his lips.

Devon grinned. "You kiss me like that and I'm not going to be responsible for my actions."

Kera grinned herself and chuckled. "Is that so?" She licked his bottom lip. "Does this mean I have my own weapon to use on

you?”

Devon chuckled then kissed her deeply. The kiss stole not only his breath but hers also. Their tongues dueled as Kera pulled Devon down on top of her.

Devon broke the kiss and rested his forehead on hers, breathing as though he had run a mile. “Don’t get something started that can’t be finished.”

Sensing he burned with need, Kera wiggled under him and wrapped her uninjured leg around his waist. “Who says it can’t be finished?”

Devon growled. “Are you sure? Your ankle hurts like hell, you said.”

“Yes, but I want you more so I’ll ignore the pain,” she saucily replied.

In a flash, he yanked the shorts that Kera was wearing off, tossing them over his shoulder. Devon then sat up on the side of the bed, taking Kera with him.

Sitting on his lap with legs hanging on his sides, Kera pulled her shirt over her head. The moment she was free of the garment she kissed him deep, pressing her body as close as she could get.

Devon skimmed his hands down her chest, cupping her breasts while he kissed her with the same hunger and need that she kissed him. He squeezed the mounds gently, perking the nipples to hard peaks.

Devon didn’t stop Kera when she went to work at opening his towel, or when her cool hands closed around his burning cock. With her strokes, he moaned into her mouth at the pleasure and worked to push his cock into her hands.

“God, you make me burn,” he said against her lips before trailing his own down her chin to her neck.

Kera reared to give him better access to her body, her hands still stroking him in a lazy, soft motion. “Love me, Devon,” she whispered. “Love me.”

He moved a hand down her body to her hot pussy. Slowly two fingers entered her hot depths, releasing moans as her muscles gripped them tightly.

“I’m going to love you until you can’t handle it,” he told her as his mouth and tongue grazed up her neck to her chin.” Then do it

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all over again.”

Devon removed his hand and positioned his cock at the scorching heat. Groaning, he nudged at her entrance.

Hooking his arm under her bad leg, Devon hiked it up. “Use your other leg to move. We don’t want to injure your ankle more than it already is.”

Kera braced herself with hands on his shoulders. She put weight on her good leg and wiggled her ass enough so that more of his cock slipped inside. Devon moaned. He hooked his other arm under her leg, and holding her open and up, Devon controlled how slow, or how fast they fucked.

“Watch,” he told her. “Watch me enter your body. Feel me stretch you until you can stretch no more. Feel me love you with all my heart, body, and soul.”

Kera glanced down and saw her body take each splendid inch and width of his cock inside. She felt her muscle stretch, felt the tightness that he always commented on, and loved how full she felt. Each time he slipped his cock deep inside her, Kera felt like it was their first time. And she loved it, loved the feeling of him stretching her to the max.

“Don’t go slow.” Pulling her gaze from the sight and tossing her head back, she moaned. Kera guided his mouth down to her aching breasts, crying out when he sucked a nipple into his mouth. “Fuck me hard.”

Devon did as she asked. Groaning, he slammed her onto his cock. He used his arms to raise and lower Kera onto his cock. He sucked in his own breath when she ground her pelvis against him. She knew pleasure raced down his spine each time she did this. And each time he only wanted more, needed more.

Devon moved her in a steady but intense rhythm, and she ground her clit against him, making extra sure to hit each and every opportunity she had.

“Just like that.” Kera moaned.

“You okay? Your ankle?” At her nod, he added, “You like that, do you?” Devon nipped at her chin, licking the pain away before he moved his mouth back to her awaiting lips. “Let’s see if you can handle this then.”

Devon picked up the speed. He pounded her onto his cock. Sharp and quick his arms moved her. Every few seconds when

he brought her down, he would swivel his hips in a way to hit her sensitive clit and bring forth a sharp intake of breath from her.

“Oh shit!” Kera cried out.

Devon never stopped his movements or the rhythm. Slamming her down as hard and as fast as his arms would let him; he never stopped or slowed when she cried out. Her orgasm raced within her as quickly as her blood pumped through her veins.

“Oh God, Kera.” He moaned against her lips.” I’m so fucking close. I feel like I can barely hang on.” Devon kissed her passionately, thrusting his tongue deep into her mouth, tasting the still lingering sweetness.” Come for me.” he told her softly. “Come for me again. Push me over the edge, Kera. Wrap that sweet pussy tightly around my cock.” Devon finished his last words with a deep yell.

When Kera’s second orgasm hit, it started a chain reaction. His cock erupted. Pleasure hit Kera forcefully, and new sensations washed over her in tidal waves. She felt the explosion from him, felt the convulsions from his cock deep inside her, and loved it.

His hips jerked up with each burst of pleasure. Strong arms hugged her, holding her in place to ride out each and every sensation of pleasure that came. He hugged her in the manner that she would know forever; the manner of love.

“I love you, Kera. I’ll never let you go.”

Kera grinned, resting her head on his shoulder. She waited as well for the pulsing pleasure to stop, wanting it to go on forever. “I’m going to hold you to that.”

* * * *

Six months later

“She’s beautiful,” Kera gasped, reaching out to touch the motherless colt.

The horse was all black with one patch of white on her head in the shape of a heart. She whined and nudged Kera’s hand, and Kera laughed. It was love at first sight.

Devon finally brought her out to the stables and it was just as magnificent as what she imagined it to be. Hell, it was bigger

than many of the houses from her old neighborhood. Even the main house had her mouth dropping open in awe.

Devon explained to her that everything, even the house, had been redone after Blaine's father passed away. It was somewhat like the man was trying to erase all traces of his past, or, as Devon suspected, his father. The two never got along and it was worse after his mother died trying to have another baby for her husband.

The stables housed at least eighty horses and each stall had a horse in it. Devon pointed out which were his best breeders, and which few he raced. Out in a pasture, more horses grazed with colts close by, and it all belonged to Devon.

"Have you named her yet?" she asked, leaning down to kiss her on the nose.

"Not yet," Devon answered. He was reading something on a clip board, signed what it was he was reading, and handed it to the foreman who was waiting. "I wanted to see what she looked like first." He came up to them, pet her head before getting down on his knees, looking over her legs. "She has strong legs: Might be a good racer."

"Well I think she's just precious." Kera rubbed her face against the horse, gave her a quick kiss, and turned to walk away. One step and the horse was whinnying again.

"I think she likes you."

Kera went back over to the horse. "I like her also."

"Then why don't we call her Precious, and I give her to you?"

That had her stopping her hand midway down the side of the animal, staring open mouth at Devon. "What?"

"You heard me."

"Devon, you can't give me a horse. I know nothing about them."

He shrugged. "Then I guess you better start learning because I think she's picked you just as much as you've picked her." He stood up, took the horse by the head, and got real close to its ear. "Do you want Kera as your owner, little Precious?" The horse seemed to answer him by a nod. "Then you've got it."

"Devon, I—"

He silenced her by pressing a finger to her lips, "Shh. My mind's made up. The horse is yours. So we better get you some

riding clothes and start on riding lessons. I expect her to be ridden every day."

Kera couldn't help herself and lunged into his arms. She hugged him tight, smiling. "God, I don't know how to thank you."

"You just did." She pulled back enough to look him in the face. He kissed the tip of her nose. "Seeing you happy is all the thanks I need. I love you Kera."

She jumped up into his arms, wrapping her legs around his hips. "I love you. And if you take me into your office, I'll show you just how much on that immaculate desk of yours."

Devon laughed, and was just about to do such a thing, when someone cleared his throat behind them. They both turned.

Dane stood on the other side, leaning back against one of the empty stalls. "Now that's a sight I definitely like seeing."

"What are you doing here?" Devon let Kera down, went over to Dane, and shook his hand.

"Oh, I come bearing bad and even worse news," Dane sighed. "The bad news is my grandmother is putting the pressure on me to marry."

"That shouldn't be a shocker," Devon crossed his arms over his chest. "She's been threatening to cut you off for how many years now?"

"Yeah, but this time she is extra serious. She's having girls over for dinner and shit. Do you have any idea how hard it is to eat when you have a girl either trying to get her hand down your pants at the table, and another giving you hopeful looks? The last meal, I had to break it to my grandmother that I had already slept with the two she invited. I thought the woman was going to have a heart attack."

Kera couldn't help it, and laughed.

"Yeah, you would think it would be funny," Dane smarted off at her. "Last night was the worst. Beth White's little sister, for Christ sakes!"

"How'd that go?" Devon asked.

"She tried to blow me when I excused myself to use the bathroom!" Dane's voice rose and Kera broke out laughing hard. "This isn't funny."

Kera nodded, held up her hand, and tried like hell to get herself under control. "I'm sorry."

"We've got to get Blaine or Darius back here. I need some serious backup, damnit."

"So what's the worse news?" Kera asked, wiping the tears from laughing from her eyes.

Dane rubbed his face and took a deep breath, "You two are not going to believe this one. Cameron somehow got out of all charges. He's free, and gone."

"What?" Devon yelled.

"The judge said that the arrest was bad, or some shit like that. It was a technicality that got him off. That damn Helms guy fucked up."

"Great," Devon groaned.

"What's that mean?" Kera asked.

Dane took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "It means we all have to watch our backs. Cameron's free, and Lord only knows what he's got planned to get even with us."

* * * *

Cameron Noved slowly walked up the dark steps to a front door of a house he really didn't want to go inside. When his foot touched the top step, the old door opened. No sound came forth, as if the hinges weren't as old as they looked.

He walked inside and stopped. The door stayed open, letting moonlight from the full moon into the old house. It helped him to see the dark shadow standing at the far end of the foyer, next to the stairs.

"Mr. Noved. Right on time."

"Who are you?" Cameron asked.

"That's not important right now. What is important is that I have a job which requires your special talents." The man spoke lower, his voice deep and raw. "And the payouts will be very much worth your while."

An envelope was tossed to him, held closed with a rubber band. Cameron slowly bent over, picked it up, and looked inside. He gazed at all the hundred dollar bills which were inside.

"I require girls, Mr. Noved. I need young, pure girls for my clients. Each cherry you bring me will pay out one hundred thousand dollars, and fifty thousand for used merchandise. The lower class will do just fine, but there is one I wish for you not to obtain. You'll find her name with the cash. Now, do we have a

deal?”

Cameron licked his lips, swallowed hard, and glanced once more at the cash. It was more money than he had ever seen; even more than what he got when his father died. And he would get more with each girl he brought. Life, Cameron figured, couldn't get any better than this.

“Yeah, we have a deal. Where you want me to deliver?”

* * * *

About the Author

Jaden Sinclair lives in a small town in Kansas with her husband of fifteen years, two boys and a few pets that keep her hoping. Between sports and the animals, it's a wonder at times how she is able to keep the flow of her writing going. But she does.

She has many series in the works and out for your enjoyment, and most know her for her Shifter series. Between werewolves, vampires, sci-fi, new worlds or simple romances, one never really knows what will come out next. So to keep up with what she doing, visit her website: www.jadensinclair.com or just simply email her at jadensinclair@gmail.com. She'll love to hear from you!