

The book cover features a close-up photograph of a man's bare, muscular torso and a woman's face. The man's skin is dark and glistening, with his arms crossed over his chest. The woman, with blonde hair, is wearing a pink, strapless dress and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark, making the subjects stand out.

Lora Leigh

NAUTI
BUOY

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by Lora Leigh

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CHAPTER ONE

So that was what had happened to his shirt. Rowdy Mackay leaned against the kitchen doorway, tilted his head and watched in amusement as his stepsister Kelly shuffled over to the refrigerator and opened the door to peer into the interior.

The long gray Marines T-shirt swallowed her slender frame and hung well past her thighs. A pair of his matching gray socks covered her small feet, and gray sweatpants hung from her hips. Not his, he thought in amusement—obviously hers but loose enough to make a man wonder why the hell she was suddenly hiding that curvy little body he knew she possessed. Especially when she had never bothered to do so in the past.

This outfit was a far cry from the snug shorts and T-shirts she used to don for summer sleepwear. Long honey-gold curls fell from the crown of her head to the middle of her back, the loose ringlets tousled and still

a bit tangled from sleep, and damn if she didn't look like she had just dragged herself from a lover's bed.

He knew better, of course. His parents' rules were strict. He might live under their roof during the brief times he was home, but he didn't bring his women here for the night and he knew damned good and well Kelly wouldn't bring a man here. The treasured princess of the house might be spoiled beyond bearing, but she respected her mother and stepfather. So dragging herself out of a lover's arms before making her way to the kitchen wasn't a scenario that was likely to happen here.

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It was one of the reasons he had stayed away as much as possible since she had come of age. One of the reasons he had taken that last tour with the Marines. Some things a man just knew he was too weak to resist, and he had accepted long ago, he was too weak to resist Kelly.

That realization had come along about the time she grew breasts and he was noticing those breasts. Somewhere around the time that she started teasing him with innocent smiles and brushing against him, and he was enjoying it. Feeling like a pervert, but damned if he wasn't enjoying it.

It was then he joined the service just to get the hell out of the house, to get away from her. College wasn't providing him the escape he needed. She was still there, and so was he, too often. And he was weak. Weak men were dangerous creatures. A twenty-two-year-old man had no damned business touching a sixteen-year-old, and he had known it. The only other option had been leaving. So Rowdy had left.

He was still too weak eight years later. His time in the Marines had taught him self-control, finished his education, and brought him into manhood. But his greatest weakness was still his greatest weakness. Kelly.

"I don't wanna cook."

His lips quirked at the early morning grumpiness in her voice. She was talking to herself. Some things never changed. The sun would rise in the east and set in the west, and Kelly would always mutter to herself when she was irritated.

"There's cereal in the cabinet." Rowdy expected her to turn with a smile bright enough to rival the sun. His arms were ready to open for the handful of woman barreling toward him. He wasn't expecting what he got though.

Kelly screamed. The refrigerator door slammed closed hard enough to rattle the contents as she turned to dart through the opposite doorway.

Her face had gone paste-white; her wide gray eyes were filled with fear, her socked feet slipping on the hardwood floor as she suddenly realized who he was.

Who had she expected?

She was poised to run but fighting to stand still. Conflicting emotions ran across her expressive face as her eyes met his, and the room filled with a tension that had never been there before. Her nostrils flared, like an animal testing the wind for danger, certain it was there, knowing it was at risk.

Fear filled her eyes. Beautiful gray eyes that had softened with her love for him for years, now stared back at him, stormy, dark with shadows.

Rowdy narrowed his eyes on her, his body stiffening. No, it wasn't fear. For a moment, there had been pure, shocking terror. A woman aware that she was alone with a man, that she was weak, that her security wasn't assured. He'd seen it overseas in the eyes of a thousand women, and he saw it now.

"Rowdy?" Her voice was high, thin, her hands bunching in the front of her shirt, fisting the material as she shuddered. "What are you doing here?"

"It's home, isn't it?"

He had been ready to catch her as she ran at him. She always ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck, pressing her tight little breasts against his chest and slapping a kiss to his cheek. For eight years, he could count on Kelly's greeting. Until now. He wondered in which direction the sun would rise now. Some things should just never change.

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“Oh. Yeah.” She nodded, her eyes darting around the room before a nervous smile tilted her soft pink lips, trembled there for a moment, then disappeared. “We weren’t expecting you. Did you tell Mom and Ray you were coming?”

“No. I never do.” His battle instincts were humming now. This wasn’t normal. It was so far from normal that he knew with a clench of his gut that he wasn’t going to like whatever the hell had been going on here.

Suddenly, nearly a year of his father’s discomfort when they talked on the phone rose within his mind. Every time he had asked about Kelly, Ray Mackay’s voice had tightened, become tense. When he asked to talk to her, he was given excuses.

The letters he had received from Kelly had changed too. She no longer sent pictures, no longer filled the exchanges with innuendo or teasing comments. She had still written, but it was different, a difference he couldn’t put his finger on, couldn’t explain. He had felt it though, felt bereft without the warmth he always found in the exchanges.

“No, you’re always sneaking up on us.” There was that nervous smile again, the way her eyes darted around the room.

Rowdy held himself where he was, leaning against the doorway, arms crossed over his chest. He could be a patient man when he had to be. But he had also learned that sometimes, there was no choice but to forge ahead and confront whatever enemy waited in the dark. He’d learned to forge ahead just as well as he had learned to wait.

“What’s going on, Kelly?” He straightened from the doorway, dropped his arms and tucked his thumbs in the waistband of his low-slung jeans. His chest was bare, the cooling breeze from the air conditioner drying the sweat that had dampened his flesh. He’d been cleaning the Harley, polishing his baby and getting her ready for her first ride in over a year. He’d dumped his duffel bag in his room and headed straight for the

garage, knowing his father and stepmother would be at the marina, and figuring Kelly would be there as well.

The fact that she wasn't was interesting. Her reaction to him even more so.

"Nothing's going on." That damned quick, nervous little smile was starting to get on his nerves. Her lips were trembling, and he could see the frantic distress in her eyes.

"You're a lousy liar, baby," he grunted, heading for the fridge and watching as she edged out of his way.

She kept her eyes on him, watching him suspiciously as he opened the door and pulled a bottle of water free. Uncapping it, his gaze locked with hers, he brought it slowly to his lips.

Now there was a glimmer of the girl he had left eight years ago. Shyly watching as he drank from the bottle, her little tongue flicking out to swipe over her own lips, as though she were thirsty. A hungry little gleam filled the soft depths of her eyes, darkening them, making them appear stormy, cloudy.

"When did you get back?" She crossed her arms over her breasts, tearing her gaze from his. "Do Mom and Ray know you're home?"

"Not yet." He recapped the bottle and set it on the kitchen isle as he continued to watch her. "I had Dawg pick me up from the airport this morning. We pulled in here about seven."

She nodded, a jerky little movement that had his fingers tightening as he watched her. The suspicion growing in his mind sent black anger swirling through him. Something had changed her, something dark and ugly, and he could see it in her eyes, in the regret and the anger and the fear that filled her expression.

The girl he had loved nearly all her life was terrified of him. She wasn't wary, or nervous, she was flat out scared. This was the same girl

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he had held as a child when her father died. He'd been a scrawny teenager, she had been too young to understand the sudden death that had rocked her world, and had sought out the boy who ruffled her hair, teased her about her skinned knees and protected her from the bullies.

This was the same girl he'd taken to her senior prom when her date had stood her up. The one he had danced with on the dance floor and had to hide his erection because he knew he couldn't touch her, couldn't have her. The girl he had kissed one night when he'd drunk too much, the one he had touched too intimately before he headed back to base four years before. She was his girl, and suddenly, she was terrified of him.

"So where's my hug?" He leaned against the middle counter, watching her closely.

What little color had returned to her face, drained. Her eyes jerked to his, then away, her throat working as she swallowed tightly.

"I have to get dressed. I have to get to work." She turned on her heel, moving for the doorway.

"Kelly." Knowing he was making a mistake, feeling that knowledge to the soles of his booted feet, Rowdy reached out to catch her wrist.

His fingers touched her, curled around the bare skin when she shrieked, turning on him with a flash of fear as she jerked away from him, her body tightening defensively.

"What?" She gave it a good fight. She tried to cover her reaction, but the way she suddenly backed away from him and the fear on her face gave her away. There was no hiding the fact that his touch had terrified her. That being alone with him, that having him near her was suddenly something to fear rather than a way to tease him, was impossible to hide.

"Kelly, where's Dad?" He kept his voice cool, kept himself controlled. But fury was racing through him. Only one thing could cause a reaction

like this, only one thing would have changed the teasing, tempting little minx he had known into a terrified, scurrying little rabbit.

“The marina.” She licked her lips again, her gaze jumping away from him, her expression warring between fear and frustration. “I have to get dressed. I’ll...I’ll be down later.”

She ran from him. As quick as that she turned tail in those sloppy, ill-fitting clothes she was wearing and moved quickly from the kitchen to the staircase in the entryway and rushed upstairs.

She left him alone in the sunlit kitchen, his fists clenched, anger surging in his gut and his suspicions all but confirmed.

He turned abruptly and stalked to the phone, ripping it from the base hanging on the wall and punching in the marina’s number.

He waited through four rings impatiently, one hand propped on his hip, the other clenched around the phone with a force that should have shattered it.

“Mackay Marina.” His father’s booming voice suddenly came over the receiver.

“Hey, Dad, how’s it going?” Rowdy kept his voice calm, controlled.

“Hey, Rowdy, not too bad.” Ray Mackay chuckled. “How did you get to call so early? That CO Of yours sleeping on the job?”

“Hell if I know,” he drawled. “I didn’t sign up for another tour, Dad.” He had planned to, had every intention of doing so until his last birthday passed and he realized that running from some things wasn’t working.

“I’m home. Showed up about seven this morning.” Tension suddenly sizzled across the line.

“You’re home?” His dad’s voice was deliberately bland, the tone mild. But Rowdy knew his dad, sometimes too well.

“Yep. Saw Kelly too.”

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He wasn't a fool, but even if he had been the muttered curse that came across the line would have warned him.

"We're on our way home." Ray confirmed his worst fears. "We need to talk."

Rowdy hung up the phone, stared around the kitchen then breathed out heavily as he wiped his hands over the short strands of his hair.

Hell's fire. He came home to court his favorite girl, to settle down, to stop fighting what he knew was a losing battle. Had he come home too late?

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Kelly let the hot water from the shower flow over her, wash away her tears, though it couldn't wash away the feeling of hands holding her down, of fetid breath on her face, hard, wet lips covering hers.

It couldn't drown out the rage and anger, or the fear. It turned her skin pink from the heat and stung her tender flesh, but it couldn't ease the need that lay just below the memories of a night she feared had changed her life forever.

Rowdy was home. All six-feet-four-inches of hard, muscled flesh and teasing sea-green eyes. He was home after more than a year away, a man full-grown, mature, and sexy as hell.

She wiped at her tears again, her breath hitching in her throat as she remembered one of the few nights she had followed him to the lake. She had known where he was going when he left, knew where to find him.

The houseboat was Rowdy's pride and joy, and it was his escape. And she knew where he would head, to the Point, a serene cove where he and his buddies gathered on the weekends to drink, fish, to let off steam and party out the excessive energy they always seemed to have.

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“Dad’ll kill me.” He had been just a little drunk, and way too sexy. His sea-green eyes had darkened, his expression growing heavy with desire as he pressed her against a tree.

They had been hidden in the shadows from the rest of the group, sheltered. The heat of summer and lust had wrapped around them. He had been a man, and she had been too innocent, too uncertain in how to contain the need that pulsed in every cell of her body.

“I won’t tell him,” she had whispered, her palms smoothing up his chest, feeling the prickle of the light growth of body hair that spread over his torso as his hands had gripped her hips, pulling her against his thighs.

“He’ll know I touched you.” His lips had quirked into a smile. “You’re like pure, raw liquor, Kelly. And you go to my head faster.”

She had fought to breathe, to contain the explosion of satisfaction and joy that rushed through her bloodstream.

“I’m leaving again tomorrow, baby.” At first the words hadn’t made sense. “I took another tour. Damned good thing, because sure as hell I’d end up doing this, and fuck us both up for good.”

Agony had washed over her body even as pleasure had exploded into fragmented, flickering rays of sensation. His lips had covered hers, his tongue teasing her as he sampled her kiss then tasted the tears that fell from her eyes.

“One kiss, baby. Just this. Damn, you’re going to break my heart.”

He had kissed her as though he were starved for her. One hand had curled in her long hair, the other had cupped her breast, his thumb rasping over her engorged nipple, their moans whispering together as the summer night enfolded them.

The hard length of his cock had pressed between her thighs, rasping against the thin material of her bathing suit, caressing her swollen clit.

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Even through the heavier material of his jeans she had felt the throb of his erection, the length of it, the promise of passion and satisfaction.

“Don’t leave,” she had whispered as he drew back from her. “Don’t go, Rowdy.”

“If I don’t, I’ll ruin us both forever...” He had set her from him, staring down at her, his eyes raging with lust. “Don’t forget me, darlin’, because sure as hell, I don’t think I’ll ever forget you.”

He had never touched her again. He had taken her back to the shore and walked her the short distance to the small parking area above the point. He had put her in her car and sent her home. And the next morning, he had been gone. And he had never touched her again. She had lived on fantasy and dreams, because Rowdy made certain there was no chance of a repeat performance. And she had plotted and planned for his return. She had moved out of her mother’s home into a small apartment in town. She had begun monthly visits to the local spa where she was plucked, waxed, toned and lotioned on a regular basis. For too short a time.

Within three months of moving out all her dreams had turned to ashes and fear had taken its place. Her own foolishness had led to her downfall, and pulling herself from the shadows of the terror she had experienced was taking all her strength. She didn’t know if she could survive dealing with Rowdy and her need for him, on top of it.

She leaned her head against the shower wall, her breath hitching as she fought back her tears. He knew something was wrong. There was no way to hide it. She looked at him now and she didn’t just see the man she had been in love with since she was a child and he was a teenager. She saw someone she couldn’t fight, couldn’t struggle from if she needed to. She saw a threat.

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Her fists clenched as she pressed them against the tile, anger building in her chest until she wondered if she would be able to hold back the screams that pressed at the back of her throat.

She loved him. She had loved him forever. Dreamed of him, ached for him, waited for him. And now she was too damned scared to even welcome him home.

Are you my good girl, Kelly?

She flinched at the memory of the rasping voice at her ear as a hard male body held her down, as the slickened fingers of the other hand probed between her buttocks, ignoring her struggles, her muted screams through the gag over her mouth.

She had been bleeding from the numerous cuts he had made on her body after he tied her spread-eagled on her bed. The wounds had burned like fire as they bled, the adrenaline pumping through her, making the blood race through her body and pour from the cuts. It had made her weak, made it hard to think; to work the hastily tied gag loose enough for one piercing scream as she felt him attempt to penetrate her rear.

God, she hated the memory of it. Hated the feeling of helplessness that followed her, even now. She had been unable to fight; unable to protest anything he did to her. And the nightmares that alone brought left her shaking in the darkest hours of the night.

She had been terrified of Rowdy knowing. Fearing he would blame her, that any chance she had of being held by him in the future would be gone.

Because they weren't finished. He had assured her they weren't finished, that the time would come when she would be his woman. And she had known what that meant. Had known that there were hungers, pleasures Rowdy would give her that she would never experience with another man. Pleasures that she feared had now been taken from her.

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But even more, she had feared for Rowdy. He would have never stayed where he was if he knew what was going on at home. He would have left, with or without permission, he would have returned for vengeance. Rowdy protected those he cared about, and Kelly knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he would have come racing home, even if it meant going AWOL.

She rolled her head against the shower wall, clenching her eyes closed, seeing Rowdy, his gaze suspicious, his expression hard, determined. He would know now. Dawg and Natches had promised to keep the knowledge to themselves only until Rowdy returned home. And that knowledge might very well destroy what was left of her heart.

Shame curled through her mind, lashed at her emotions and left her stomach churning with the sick realization that there was no longer a way to hide from him. As long as he was a world away, she could pretend, for short periods of time, that it hadn't happened. That everything was the same as it had always been, and that the sick bastard who attacked her wasn't now trying to finish the job. She could pretend... But now Rowdy was home. And Kelly knew, once he learned the truth, he would never let it rest. He would find the stalker tormenting her, or he would die in the effort. And the fear of his death overshadowed even the fear of the threat she faced herself. Because life without the promise of seeing Rowdy, of hearing his laughter and the dark promise of passion in his voice, was a life Kelly didn't want to contemplate. A life she knew she didn't want to face.

CHAPTER TWO

Ray Mackay was a big man. At fifty, he was still a powerful man, with hazel eyes and black hair only beginning to gray. His weathered face was beginning to crease with deep laugh lines at the sides of his eyes. Eyes that were usually cheerful, always warm and friendly.

Rowdy was waiting on the front porch of the two-story white and red farmhouse when his dad pulled into the driveway, the dark green Jeep Laredo parking beside Rowdy's Harley.

Maria Mackay was out of the jeep before Ray turned the engine off, rushing up the cement walkway, her gray-blue eyes concerned as she met his gaze.

"Is Kelly okay?" Maria Benton Mackay was still slender for her forty-two years of age, the summer shorts and crisp, white cotton shirt showing off her tanned legs and arms attractively.

"Why wouldn't she be?" He leaned against the railing, watching her with narrowed eyes. "And why do I have a feeling that if I had warned ya'll I was coming home, that I might have found my way barred?"

He could see it in her face, in his father's heavysset expression. They hadn't expected him, and they weren't comfortable with him being there alone with Kelly. And that just pissed him off now. Whatever the hell was going on, one thing should have been set in cement in their heads and that was the fact that he would die before he hurt Kelly.

"I'd never bar you from your own home, Douglas."

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He winced. Maria was the only person who called him Douglas, and the snap in her voice when she said it now was as sharp as a knife. No one called him Douglas, ever. But hell, she had taught him in school and breaking her of the habit wasn't easy.

He crossed his arms over his chest, staring down at her intently as she stepped onto the porch.

"I'm going to check on Kelly." She moved for the door.

"Not yet." He didn't move, he didn't intend for his voice to lower warningly, or his body to tense as he watched a main source of information attempt to escape. But he wanted answers, and she wasn't running off until he had them.

"Go on, Maria." Ray stepped up behind her, his large hands settling on her shoulders as he gave them a comforting squeeze. "I'll talk to Rowdy. We'll be in soon."

She glanced up at Rowdy, worry and regret shimmering in her eyes before she turned to her husband, kissing his cheek gently before moving into the house.

Rowdy had never been comfortable with his dad's demonstrative relationship with Kelly's mother. From the first night he had seen them together he had noticed the care and joy his father showed in the woman. It was a radical change from the relationship he remembered his father sharing with his mother before her death.

Rowdy's attention fixed on his father, watching as he swiped his fingers through his hair before burying his hands in his jeans pockets.

"Was she raped?" Rowdy lifted the bottle of water to his lips, taking a long sip as he watched Ray's eyes darken painfully.

Ray breathed out roughly, his shoulders shifting as he lowered his head.

“Attacked,” he finally muttered. “She wasn’t raped. But she was cut up pretty bad, traumatized. And it gets worse.” He lifted his head and Rowdy wondered if his father could see the pure murder burning inside him now.

“How can it be worse?” He kept his voice even, cool, but he couldn’t still the rage blazing now.

“She didn’t see his face, there were no leads on who he was or why he attacked her. And he’s stalking her now. He wants to finish what he started.”

The water bottle crumpled in his hand, water sloshing over his fingers before he realized what he had done. Forcing himself to release the plastic, he set it on the railing and focused on his father.

“Where did it happen?”

“She moved out right after your last visit,” he sighed roughly. “Nice little apartment in town, next to one of her friends. Few weeks later she started getting crank calls. Caller ID couldn’t trace them. We put new locks on her doors and windows, but you know how she was.” Ray shook his head wearily. “Liked sleeping with her window cracked. She thought she was safe. Thought she would hear it if someone snagged the fire escape ladder. But she didn’t. Her neighbor’s boyfriend heard her screams and knocked the door down, but he’d already hurt her. The attacker got out the window before the boy could catch him.”

Short and to the point. And he was hiding something, Rowdy could feel it. He stared back at his father, silent, probing, knowing he would tell him eventually. Rowdy wouldn’t give him a choice.

Ray glanced back at him, then away. His teeth clenched, rage glittered in his eyes.

“It wasn’t a normal attack,” he finally muttered. Rowdy felt a chill race up his spine.

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“What do you mean by that?” He had to force the words past his throat.

Ray cleared his throat. “He meant to rape her anally. He almost managed it.”

“Motherfucker! God. Damn!” Rowdy flung himself across the porch, his hands running over his head before he gripped the back of his neck in fury. “Son of a bitch!” His abdomen tightened as he fought to hold back a howl of pure rage before jerking back to stare at his father. “Why the fuck didn’t you tell me?”

“Hell Rowdy, what could you do?” Ray snapped, anger suffusing his face. “She begged us not to tell you. You were clear across the world with no hope of coming home anytime soon. There was nothing you could have done.”

“Like hell,” he snarled. “They would have let me come home or dealt with the consequences. That’s no excuse.”

“Exactly.” His father’s face flushed with anger. “You would have gone AWOL to come home, and caused even more of a mess for that kid. Do you think we didn’t know what the hell was going on before you left the first time? You couldn’t keep your eyes off her and she was just a fucking kid. Four years later you were back for three months and it was worse. She didn’t need that.”

Rowdy’s face blanked in shock. “You think I would have touched her, pressured her for sex after she was attacked?” He fell back a step, unsure how to deal with the blow his father had just dealt him.

“I didn’t think you would have touched her when you were home before,” he snapped. “She’s your sister...”

“Fuck that shit.” Rowdy’s hand sliced through the air. “That girl is no blood to me and you know it. And I fucking left, didn’t I? Did I rape her in her goddamned bed, Dad? Son of a bitch, I don’t believe this.” He had

to force himself to lower his voice, but he couldn't hide the astonishment as he stared back at his father.

"Hell, I didn't think you would rape her," Ray bit out. "But she didn't need the stress. She was terrified of you knowing the way it was, so damned hysterical over it I had to swear I wouldn't tell you. And Son, a woman doesn't get that upset over a man knowing, who should have been treating her like a sister rather than a woman."

"She is mine!" Something inside him snapped then. He had thought over the years that there were things he didn't have to tell his dad. Things the other man would understand without words. Such as the fact that Kelly belonged to him, as soon as she was old enough, mature enough. He had been wrong, and the knowledge cut through him like a knife. "I've known she was mine since we were fucking kids. I left, didn't I? I stayed away until I thought she was old enough. What the fuck more did you expect from me?"

"You're too old for her..."

"Then what the hell are you doing married to her mother? More age separates the two of you."

"I wasn't raised with her mother," Ray snarled. "I wasn't taught to treat her like a sister."

"You condescending old bastard!" Rowdy raged. "You wouldn't have anyway and don't try to tell me you would. Damn you, Dad, I can't believe this."

Rowdy shook his head, trying to make sense of his father's sway in loyalties. Hell, he expected his father to love Kelly; he'd practically raised her. But this? To think she needed protecting from his own son?

"Rowdy, I love you more than life." His father heaved a tired breath. "But I know you, boy. I know the kind of man you are and your tastes in women. And if you think word wasn't circulating about the little games

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you and some of those women got into then you're wrong. Even before you were out of high school, I knew. And that girl is like a daughter to me..."

"Screw this." Rowdy could feel the heat swirling in his head then, a rage like nothing he had ever known. He had lived his life believing in his father's trust in him, never breaking his word, never giving his father any reason to think he wasn't the man he should have been. "I have never hurt a woman. Ever."

"No, not that they weren't willing. And I'm not judging your sex life, Son. I'm protecting Kelly's."

Shock seared him. He stared back at his father, disbelief warring with an anger he was afraid he would never be able to quench.

"Protecting her from what?" he snarled at the implied accusation. "What the hell do you think I would do, Dad?"

Rowdy shook his head as his father stayed silent, staring back in the older man's eyes and seeing the conflicting pain, the division of loyalties.

"What the hell did I ever do to make you think I would hurt her?" he asked, confused, bitter now. Anger burned low in his gut, but the disbelief held it back, for now.

"Son, when a man and woman consent to certain sex games, it's all well and good. Hell, I'm no saint, and I figure you got some of it from me. But Kelly's just a kid, and after this..."

"Wait." Rowdy shook his head. "Sex games? Are you saying you've taken what you've heard and based that on whether or not you're going to believe I wouldn't hurt her?" He stared back at his father in astonishment. "Hell, Dad."

"I'd kill any man who would touch that girl the way I know you were carrying on with Calista James," Ray growled, his voice dark, deadly.

Calista James. Well, fuck!

Rowdy shrugged his shoulders then straightened them as he faced his father.

“Kelly is mine.” His lips pulled back from his teeth. “I don’t give a fuck what you think about my sexual practices or what you think I would or would not do with my woman. And I guess neither of us are the men we believed each other to be, Dad. Because if anyone had ever asked me who believed in me the most, I would have said you.” He shook his head then, weariness suddenly surging through him. “I’ll get my bag and head back to town.”

“Rowdy.” Ray caught his arm as he moved to the door. “I’d give my life for you, boy, but you didn’t see her in that hospital, you didn’t hear her begging us not to tell you. Terrified you would think she was dirty, that it was her fault. You didn’t hear her crying as her mother rocked her, crying for you. And you sure as hell weren’t the one who cleaned out her apartment and saw the blood on those sheets. I did. And I know you. You’re a lot like me. You’ll want everything from her, and I can’t allow you to hurt her like that.”

Rowdy jerked his arm from his father’s grip, his eyes burning as he stared back at him. The description of what she had endured was ripping through his soul, hotter, brighter than any distrust his father could feel. But his father was standing between him and Kelly. If he didn’t get the hell out of there, he was going to lose the tenuous control left to him, and God only knew what would happen then.

“I’ll clear out now. But I’ll be damned if you’ll keep her from me. And you remember that.”

Rowdy jerked the door open, stalking into the house before coming to an abrupt stop. Kelly stood at the top of the landing, her face paper-white, her long, damp hair hanging over that fucking shapeless T-shirt, her hands clenched in front of her.

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Her lips were trembling, her eyes big and dark and filled with tears.

Rowdy glanced away, fighting for control before he turned back to her and began to walk steadily up the steps. The tears gathered in her eyes, until one dropped as she stepped back, allowing him to stand beside her. God, he wanted to wipe that tear away, wanted to erase the shattered

pain he saw in her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, her voice ragged. “I’m so sorry, Rowdy.”

“Why?” He asked the question softly, aware of her mother standing further up the hall, his father in the entryway.

“I wasn’t careful...”

“No.” She flinched as he snapped the word out. “Don’t be sorry for that, baby. That wasn’t your fault.” His arms hung limply at his side, his own world lying broken at his feet. “I’ll be at the boat if you need me. I’ll always be here if you need me.”

And for now, that was all he could give her. Right now, it was all he had. He moved away from her, turning and stalking to his bedroom, ignoring Maria’s whispered “Douglas?” as he pushed the door open.

His duffel bag was still on his bed, unpacked.

“I’ll get the rest of my stuff later.” He picked up the Marine-issue bag and turned to face his father as the other man followed him into his room. “The houseboat is mine, I paid for it.” They’d agreed on that. Six summers worth of hard work had paid for the Nauti Buoy, and he claimed it.

“The boat is yours.” The houseboat had been his mother’s last request before her death. “Rowdy, I know you don’t understand—”

“Sure I do, Dad.” He turned back to his father then, a tight, cold smile on his lips. “I spanked Calista a little bit, screwed her ass and did it in front of witnesses.” He watched as Ray Mackay’s face nearly turned purple. “And to add to that distasteful little venture, me, Natches and

Dawg shared her for a while. I understand completely.” He was aware of Maria standing outside the door; he prayed Kelly was out of earshot.

“And you know what? I came back for Kelly. And I wouldn’t care what you thought of it, or what your wife thought of it, any kind of pleasure she would have wanted at my hands, she would have had. And still will. I don’t care what it is. And I really don’t give a damn what you think about that either.”

“Don’t make me kill you, Son,” Ray rasped, his eyes burning with fury.

Rowdy grunted mockingly, shaking his head as he glanced at Maria, then back to his dad.

“Hypocrite.” He pushed past his father and stepped into the hallway. And there was Kelly, eyes wide, staring back at him in horror or surprise, he wasn’t sure.

“You know where to find me,” he reminded her. “Don’t make me come looking for you, baby. The fight wouldn’t be pleasant.”

“God, damn you, Rowdy...” His father’s snarl echoed behind Rowdy as he stalked away from them all.

But he saw her eyes before left. Fear, yeah there was plenty there. But there were other emotions as well, and those were all he had to hold onto now.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER THREE

The slamming of the door echoed through the house as Kelly turned back to face her mother and stepfather. Ray was furious; her mother's anger glittered in her blue-gray eyes. Kelly stared back at them, shocked at what she had seen, what she had heard.

"I can't believe you two." Her voice was hoarse, amazed. "I can't believe you would do that to him."

"Kelly, let it go for now. You need to rest..." Her mother reached out to her.

Kelly moved back, shaking her head, seeing the horrible mistake she had made in confiding to her mother after the rape. She had thought her mother would keep her word and not reveal to Rowdy's father what Kelly told her. God, she had been so stupid. How could she have been so stupid?

"Fix it." Her voice was a hollow rasp.

"Kelly, you don't need to deal with this..." Ray began.

"That was so unfair of you." Her lips were shaking, her body trembling with anger and pain. "He's your son."

"He's an idiot," he grunted. "And he should have kept his hands off you."

"I wanted his hands on me," she cried out. "Don't you understand that? Have you two lost your minds? He's your son, Ray."

Lora
Leigh

“And he’ll always be my son.” Ray shook his head in confusion.
“Rowdy’s a good boy, Kelly, he’ll understand in time—”

“Do you know what you just accused him of?” she yelled back at him in shock. “Do you even see what you just did to him? You told him you couldn’t trust him not to hurt me, Ray.”

“The boy needs to learn control.” For a moment, he hesitated.
“That’s all I was trying to tell him.”

She turned to her mother. “This is Rowdy’s home.”

“He’s a grown man, Kelly.” Maria swallowed tightly. “He’ll be okay. You’re my concern—”

“Kelly, Rowdy will understand, he’ll just have to think about it,” Ray argued. “He’s always been hardheaded. He’ll come around and see you’re not like those women that crowded around him and Dawg...”

“You don’t even know what you did,” she whispered. “Neither of you do.”

“Kelly, everything will be okay.” Ray shook his head, his smile soothing. “Rowdy will be fine.”

“No, he won’t,” she whispered, wrapping her arms over her chest as she turned back to her bedroom. “No, he won’t. None of us will be.”

She closed her bedroom door, locked it and moved to her bedroom window as she heard Rowdy’s Harley leaving the drive. She stared through the glass, watching as he turned onto the main road, speeding toward the marina. He wouldn’t stay there. He’d pull the Nauti Buoy out of her berth and either head to one of the larger marinas, or head to the point.

It was all her fault. She shook her head, lowering it, and fought with fear, guilt and the ever-present shadow of the threat she could feel moving around her daily. She had prayed for Rowdy to come home, and

NAUTI BUOY

now he was. And she had single-handedly ruined his life. The only man she had ever loved, had really depended on.

Now what?

ad

Ray hadn't been in a bar in over ten years. Not since he started dating Maria, and realized what love really was. He had known her forever. She and her husband had been regulars at the marina, their boat docked close to the office. Hell, during their younger days, when pleasure had been all that mattered, he and James, Maria's husband, had shared Maria at one time. Once, long ago, Maria should have belonged to him, but his own ignorance had been Ray's downfall.

That was how Ray knew his son had come by his darker passions naturally, how he knew what awaited Kelly if she became his son's lover. And yeah, he knew Rowdy would never hurt her, but he also had seen the horror the girl had been through. Kelly was a warm, vibrant girl, just as her mother was, with a capacity to love that would humble any man. Ray's first wife, Layne, had been an aloof woman. He'd cared for her though, loved her in a lot of ways, and the child they had together was a fine man. Ray knew that. But he was a man, in every sense of the word.

He stared around the smoky establishment, looking for the boy. Hell, he couldn't stop thinking of him as a boy. Or calling Rowdy one. He was still his son, no matter how many ways Ray might mess up. And he had messed up. Ray knew that.

Rowdy was sitting alone at a far corner, a beer bottle between his hands, his head lowered. The weight of the world was settled on his son's shoulders and Ray understood why. Rowdy came home expecting open arms and found a mess instead. Not just a mess, but a betrayal, because

his dumbass father never had gotten the hang of how to discuss certain things with his son.

Sex was a private thing to Ray. The things he and Maria did in their bed, he'd be mortified if anyone knew. And he knew his wife felt the same way. Some things should just always be private. His boy had never been that way. Rowdy had always been a sexual creature, ever since he figured out how special girls were.

Ray stopped by the bar and purchased a bottle of Jack Daniels, snagged two glasses and made his way across the room. It was time to talk man to man, with no shame. That called for an iron backbone. Or plenty of whisky.

He slammed the bottle on the table as Rowdy lifted his gaze. Yep, the boy was pissed off, clear down to his bones and Ray didn't blame him.

He pulled out a chair and sat down.

"Some thing's just call for a good drunk," he said heavily, uncapping the whisky and pouring two small glasses full. "Childbirth. Your son's first date. Your daughter's near rape." His throat tightened with the pain as he tossed back the dark liquid and poured another shot of courage.

"And when a man fucks up and gets pissed off because he feels helpless, and hurts the people he loves the most."

He stared straight into Rowdy's dark eyes, feeling his son's pain as though it were his own.

"I was pissed, boy," Ray sighed. "I swore to her I wouldn't tell. While she was all doped up on the pain medication the hospital pumped her full of, and hysterical, she told her mom about what happened at the lake with you before you left last year. She loves you. Always has. We've known that." He swallowed tightly. "And I knew how bad you wanted her." He paused, glancing away for a long second before pulling his gaze

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back to his son's. "I never told you how much pride I had in you when you walked away, did I?"

He saw his son's surprise.

"I didn't figure you knew why I'd left." Rowdy leaned back in his chair before picking up the whisky and throwing it back. He grimaced but held the burn of it.

"I knew." Ray sighed heavily. "I knew when you were twenty-two and as though overnight, she turned from a clumsy little urchin into a woman-child. I saw your face the day you realized it."

He watched the flush that rose over Rowdy's face, the discomfort.

"She was a kid." He cleared his throat uncomfortably. "She's not a kid anymore, Dad. She's twenty-four, and a grown woman."

"And you were and still are a man." Ray shook his head wearily before sipping at the whisky. "A good man. One any father could be proud of. You didn't touch her, you did what you had to do and made no excuses or cast any blame. Though you could have. You left your home because of the girl—many men would have resented her. You would have been well within your rights to have protested how much Maria and I spoiled her."

"You should have told me that then," Rowdy grunted. "She kept stealing my damned shirts. She still does it. I should have made you throw both Kelly and Maria out."

A grin tugged at his son's lips. Ray shook his head. Rowdy was willing to forgive, no questions asked.

Ray cleared his throat again.

"I made a mess of things today." He rolled the glass between his fingers, staring at it rather than his son. "I was trying to tell you, I thought she was still too frightened right now to deal with what she felt, what she wanted last year, hell, four years ago even." He cleared his

throat. “I worried, because I know the man you are.” He lifted his head, glaring at his son fiercely. “You pissed me off, boy, and I made a mess of it. I think you’re a fine, proud man. More than I ever hoped you would be. But still a man. One that’s wanted that girl for a lot of years. Sometimes, hunger like that ain’t easy to fight. No more than certain desires are.” Damn, he needed another drink.

He poured another, aware of the way his son watched him, his eyes narrowed, his expression thoughtful.

“Hunger like that goes beyond lust, Dad,” Rowdy finally sighed. “I’ve fought it for too long. I don’t know what it is yet. I don’t know how deep it goes. I know I came back for her.” He shook his head when Ray started to speak. “Hear me out. I had no intentions of living in that house, of breaking so much as one of your rules, but that bastard’s stalking her.” Ray’s gut clenched. “I’ll camp outside her bedroom window if I have to, but you won’t keep me away from her.”

Rowdy leaned forward, his arms braced on the table, his fists clenched. Ray looked away from his son for long moments, wondering what he was supposed to say, torn between his love for his son, and his love for the daughter that should have been his as well. Hell, he felt like a whipped dog. Tired and helpless and not sure how to defend those he loved. All of them.

“You’ve been checking into it?” Ray knew he had. Rowdy had spent the afternoon at the Police department, the rest of the day with some of the buddies he’d joined the Marines with. Men who had come home after their first tour, settled in and started their lives.

“I’ve been checking into it.” Rowdy poured himself another shot. “I talked Betty Cline into letting me see the hospital records and Rissa Richards at the phone company about the phone tap.”

NAUTI BUOY

Pride suffused Ray. Hell, that was his boy. Hard-eyed, determined and ready to fight. He was more man than Ray had ever imagined. Rowdy wasn't drinking himself silly because Kelly had been attacked, but instead, he was plotting and planning murder. It was enough to make a redneck proud.

Ray breathed in hard. He had discussed this with Maria earlier, knew what he was about to do was hard on her; it would be harder on Kelly.

"Come back home, boy," he muttered. "I'm a damned fool when I get riled and we both know it. That's your home. As much as it is mine. And you're my kid. I want you there."

Rowdy's lips quirked. "The duffel bag is still on the bike. I was coming back tonight anyway."

Ray cleared his throat again. "I trust you, Son."

Rowdy's face changed then. If Ray thought it was hard before, it was more so now. Rowdy leaned forward, his eyes meeting Ray's straight on.

"She's mine, Dad." He kept his voice low, fierce. "Any other time I would have never disrespected your rules or your home. But I won't pull back now. I won't lose her because some bastard tried to destroy her. And I won't play footsie under the table because of your sensibilities. Do you understand that?"

Anger flared in Ray. Damn, it was hard, forgetting his son wasn't a kid anymore, that he couldn't set rules and limits to protect him as well as Kelly. But Ray was man enough to realize that rules and limits were set for children, to teach them to be adults, to understand boundaries. He had taught Rowdy the fundamentals, the Marines had taught him the rest. All he could do now was trust his son's judgment.

He rubbed his hand over his lower face before breathing out roughly. "Hell. Fine. Whatever. But..." He glared back at the boy. "You don't play with that girl, Rowdy. You better be damned serious before you end up in

bed with her. Son or no son, I taught you respect. She's not one of those little tramps you and Dawg screwed with when you were younger."

It was a warning he'd made when he first realized how sexual his son was. Good girls were solid gold. Not necessarily virgins, but the girls that understood a handy bed meant more than a place to fuck. A good girl understood responsibility, values and herself. A woman like that wasn't a toy, she was a partner.

"I know how to treat a woman, Dad," Rowdy grunted. "All women. Not just Kelly."

Unlike Ray's generation, Rowdy didn't differ how he treated women in regards to their sexuality. One didn't deserve less respect, or more, for the amount of experience they had in bed. Rowdy had argued that with his father many times. But love...that made a difference, and Ray knew it. And he knew his son was learning it.

"So you'll come home?" Ray's throat was tight with emotion. Damn, he hated that. Hated knowing there was more he should say and not knowing how to say it.

Rowdy looked over at him, his expression somber, his eyes, that deep sea-green, serious and thoughtful. He tossed back another shot of the whisky, his lips quirking as he set the glass down.

"I missed you too, Dad," he murmured.

If that knot in his throat could have gotten tighter, it did. Ray swallowed then tried again. Finally, he poured another shot, drank it down and slapped the glass on the table before going for broke.

"I love you, boy." His voice was so rasping he was ashamed of it. "And I'm damned proud of you. Damned proud."

"I love you too, Dad." That was his boy. Equal parts hellion and warrior but never afraid to say the words. "And I'm proud of you too."

NAUTI BUOY

He poured the glasses full again, they toasted each other and settled down for a serious drunk. Hell, Ray had been waiting on this day for nearly thirty years. There just wasn't anything like having that first good drunk with your son, and knowing it meant something. Meant something damned fine.

ad

Kelly heard the Harley coming up the drive with her stepfather's truck as the clock flipped over to two in the morning. Her mother had been pacing the house, muttering to herself, worry creasing her brow.

Maria turned to Kelly, her eyes dark as she watched her.

"Are you sure?" Maria asked, her voice soft, uncertain.

"For God's sake." Kelly felt like snarling the words. "Mom, have you and Ray lost your minds?" Sometimes Kelly thought the attack had been more traumatic on them in a lot of ways. Kelly was never really certain how she felt about it. Frightened, yes. Terrified sometimes, especially when the crank calls came. Knowing he was still out there kept her nerves on edge.

"He's always wanted you." Maria had never been comfortable with that. Kelly had known it, though they never talked about it. Just as her mother knew Kelly had always wanted Rowdy. It was like some odd fact of life.

"I'm not a little girl anymore," she sighed, curling up on the sofa, watching her mother pace the living room as the vehicles shut off. "You know they're both drunk, don't you?"

One of Rowdy's friends had called from the bar. He hadn't been too sober himself, warning them that the two men were heading home, thankfully being driven by friends rather than driving themselves.

Lora
Leigh

“Ray hasn’t been drunk since before we got married.” A smile curved her mother’s lips, and Kelly swore she looked a little too sensual to suit her. A daughter shouldn’t see things like that, she thought with a burst of humor.

“Well, he’s drunk now.” She winced as it sounded like a load of bricks fell on the porch.

“Hell boy, I thought you were holding me up.” Ray’s voice drifted into the house.

“Thought you were holding me up.” Rowdy’s laughter was muffled. Maria moved for the doorway and pulled it open with a quick jerk as

Kelly rose from the couch to stand just inside the living room doorway.

Her eyes met Rowdy’s as a slow, sexy smile curved his lips. He gripped his dad’s arm tighter and led him inside the house. Neither of them were too steady on their feet.

“Maria, he’s a lousy drunk,” Rowdy grunted as his father threw his arm over Maria’s shoulder and planted a loud, smacking kiss on her cheek. “He didn’t even make it through the first bottle.”

Kelly wrapped her arms across her chest, a smile tugging at her lips as Rowdy winked at her.

“He never did, Douglas, you just keep forgetting,” her mother chastised him firmly.

Rowdy winced. “That’s not my name.”

“That’s what your birth record has. I didn’t see a Rowdy there anywhere, Douglas.”

Rowdy gave her a mock glare. “You’re not being nice to me, Maria.”

“That’s not my job,” she pointed out calmly. “Now move your big feet out of the way so I can get him upstairs. You two should be ashamed of yourselves.”

NAUTI BUOY

“I can be ashamed later,” Ray piped in as she led him to the stairs. “Hell. We had fun, sweetheart.”

“I can tell.” Maria laughed softly.

Their voices lowered as they moved away, and finally disappeared. A few minutes later the door at the back of the hallway closed and everything was silent.

Kelly watched Rowdy. His hair was still too short. The spiked military cut suit him, but she had loved his long hair when he was younger. The way it framed his face, emphasized his green eyes. He looked like a fallen angel come to tempt mortal women when his hair was long. Short, he looked like the warrior she knew he had to be. A fighter, a Marine. Tall and tough and hard.

He turned to her, placing his hand over his chest, the dark blue material of his cotton shirt stretching across his shoulders.

“Kelly darlin’, you look like an angel standing there.” His smile was a tad goofy and too damned sexy.

Unfortunately, she knew better. She was wearing another of his shirts, one she had stolen the last time he was home. A pair of loose sweatpants and socks that bunched at her ankles. She looked messy and frightened, and she knew it.

She licked her lips nervously. Facing him was one of the hardest things she had ever done, knowing he knew what had happened to her, terrified he would blame her. She blamed herself. What she had done was stupid, leaving that window up, stubbornly refusing to give up that pleasure despite the danger she had been warned of.

“I missed you, Rowdy,” she whispered, trying to still the trembling of her lips. “I’m glad you’re home.”

His expression sobered as he moved toward her slowly. She forced herself to stay still, not to retreat. But he was so big, and powerful.

Lora
Leigh

Strong. The memory of hard hands holding her down, a rough voice muttering in her ear as her face was pressed into the pillow, haunted her.

“So why didn’t I get my welcome-home hug?” He stood in front of her, his arms at his sides, his eyes dark and glittering with hunger.

He still wanted her. She could see it in his eyes, just as she had seen it during his infrequent visits over the last four years.

“I...” She swallowed tightly, glancing away as her hands tightened on her arms.

“Just a hug, Kelly-baby?” He whispered the words, his lips quirking gently. “I dream of your hugs, darlin’.”

She stared back at him in surprise.

“You don’t believe me?” He reached out, his arm lifting slowly, his hand moving to her as his fingers reached out to lift a strand of curls from her shoulder.

She glanced quickly at where he held her hair, biting at her lower lip as she tried to still the pounding of her heart. She had dreamed of his touch for so long, waited for him, longed for him. Oh God, this wasn’t fair, she wailed silently. This was Rowdy. He wouldn’t hurt her. She knew he wouldn’t hurt her.

“Rowdy...” Her throat tightened as she fought herself, the fear and the needs warring inside her.

“It’s real easy, baby,” he crooned, his dark velvet voice washing over her. “You just lift your arms and put them around my neck.” He let go of her hair, fingers curling around her wrists as he lifted her arms, urging them up until they curled around his neck. “Then you come up real close to me, so I can hug you back.” His arms went around her, slowly, so slowly, pulling her against him until her head rested on his chest.

“There we go.”

NAUTI BUOY

She was shaking, but was it fear or something more? She didn't know what she was feeling, didn't know how to assimilate the sensations and emotions washing through her.

"I came home for you, Kelly," he whispered, his breath caressing her ear as she jerked against him. "I came home to touch you, to taste you, to claim you. Do you know what I would have done if I had known you were home when I pulled in?"

She shook her head, a jerky movement as a small whimper left her lips.

"I would have come to your room and kissed you awake. I would have seen your pretty eyes opening, knowing it's me beside you, my lips touching yours. I want that real bad, Kelly. Even though I know if Dad caught me he'd skin me alive." He breathed in roughly; the feel of his chest rasping against her breasts sent a shudder racing through her.

"Now," he whispered, "I really don't care if does skin me."

She stiffened against him, needing to draw away, needing to get closer to him. God, she hated this. Hated the fear holding her back, hated not knowing, not understanding the emotions raging through her mind and body.

"Rowdy..."

"Shh." He stilled her protest as he rubbed his head against hers. "Just settle here against me, baby. Let me hold you for a minute; let me know you're okay. Just that."

"But I'm not okay." Her hands clenched in the fabric of his shirt as she finally admitted it to herself. "I'm scared, Rowdy. I'm so scared." She pressed her head against his chest, the words slipping free after nearly a year of burying them. She was terrified.

Lora
Leigh

“I know, baby.” He kissed her head, his hands running over her back. “But I won’t let you be scared of me. You know that. I’d never hurt you. I’d die before I’d hurt you, Kelly.”

She heard the pain in his voice, felt it tighten her chest. No, Rowdy would never hurt her, but fear was an insidious disease, and fighting it took more courage than she thought she had.

“We’re going to take this nice and easy,” he crooned. “We’re going to go upstairs and you’re going to sleep, baby. I’m going to lie right beside you so you know no one can get to you, no one can hurt you as long as I’m there. Okay?”

“In my bed?” She jerked back, staring up at him. “Ray will skin us both alive.”

“Dad will deal with it.” His expression hardened, determination glittering his eyes. “He already is. You’re not sleeping, you’re not eating. We’re going to change that, starting tonight.”

“Oh, are we now?” The highhandedness in his voice pricked at her.

“Kelly.” He tilted his head, staring down at her, a smile quirking at his lips. “Are you going to fight me, baby? Really? Remember the last fight we got into?”

“You put another snake in my drawer, and I’ll start calling you Douglas,” she sniped. “I can’t believe you’d threaten me like that.”

She stared back at him, incredulous. She hated snakes, any kind of snake, especially those mean little green snakes.

He smirked, his gaze drowsy, his expression so sensual it was enough to make her panties damp. And they were damp. Yeah, she was scared spitless at times at the thought of touching him, having him touch her, but he could make her so wet, so fast, that it wasn’t even surprising anymore.

NAUTI BUOY

“I’m just going to lie beside you, that’s all,” he whispered. “If you can’t sleep, then I’ll lie on the floor. But I’ll be there, Kelly. Will you trust me enough to let me be there?”

She was breathing roughly, the realization of it forced her to try to regulate it. She hated this weakness, this fear. Even the sessions with the psychologist hadn’t been able to erase it.

“I would trust you with my life, Rowdy,” she whispered, knowing she did.

“Come on then.” His arm wrapped around her as he led her to the stairs. “Let’s go on up and see if we can get some sleep. I don’t know about you, Kelly, but I’m dead tired.”

She hadn’t had nightmares in months, she thought as he turned out the lights and led her upstairs. She wasn’t sleeping well, but when she did sleep, she wasn’t waking screaming as she did in those first months. It should be safe. She could have something she had always dreamed of. Rowdy in her bed, sharing his warmth with her. Maybe even holding her. Surely she could handle that?

ad

Kelly finally eased into sleep hours later. Rowdy felt her relax against him, felt the soft sigh that left her lips. Moving slowly, he eased the blanket further over her shoulders, feeling her head on his arm, her silky hair against his chest as he held her. It was killing him, the pain, the fear he knew she had to have endured. He could feel his heart breaking in his chest even as a killing rage burned in his soul.

She was his. She had been his as long as he had known her and by God he wasn’t letting her go. She knew him, knew he would cut out his own heart before he’d hurt her—that trust was still within her. If it

**Lora
Leigh**

weren't, she would never have been able to sleep in his arms, to allow him to hold her, her sweet body tucked so close against his own.

He stared into the dimly lit bedroom, his eyes narrowed, his mind working. Whoever dared to hurt her, to stalk her, wouldn't be breathing for long. He wouldn't be breathing two seconds past the time Rowdy learned who he was. And that was a silent promise, a vow he made to Kelly. She would never be hurt again.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER FOUR

Maria opened Kelly's door the next morning, not really expecting what she saw. Ray had warned her the night before, but he had been drunk, amorous, so she hadn't really taken him seriously. Perhaps she should have, the shock wouldn't have been so great.

She was used to coming in to find Kelly napping in the large wingback chair on the other side of the room, the television droning in the background. The room was silent now, and Rowdy was staring at her through slitted eyes from the bed.

He was wrapped around her sleeping daughter like a living vine. Kelly lay on her side, her back pressed against Rowdy's front, her head sheltered beneath his chin. One hard leg lay over her daughter's fragile ones, his arms surrounded her as her hair tangled over them. He was bent over her, wrapped around her, and Kelly was sleeping peacefully.

Kelly was still dressed in the large T-shirt and sweats she had worn last night, and Rowdy had changed into a pair of his own sweats. Rowdy was lying atop the blankets and all modesty was intact as he held her covered body, but it was still a shock. Kelly was her baby, seeing her sleeping in a man's arms, especially Rowdy's, was disconcerting. She had expected the closeness they had before her marriage to Ray to develop, but not in this way. As siblings, very close friends, but never this. This terrified her.

Lora
Leigh

The sensuality that seemed to wrap about the two whenever they were together had always worried her, deeply. She had been terrified for years that Rowdy would break her daughter's heart. What she saw now filled her with conflicting emotions. Rowdy would protect her and, ultimately, that was Maria's greatest wish. Her daughter's protection. But what he could do to her baby's heart was almost more than she could bear.

She breathed in deeply, realizing she had pressed one hand against her chest at the surprise that had gone through her. She just hadn't expected it. Kelly was so skittish, so wary since the attack that Marie hadn't truly expected her to trust Rowdy, not after the amount of time he had spent away in the last eight years and the changes the Marines had wrought. He was tougher, harder. More determined. The steel in his eyes had come in the first year, and had only grown stronger. And Kelly knew what Rowdy was. She knew the man he was and the men his cousins were.

As she stared at the two, Rowdy's frown darkened, his gaze narrowing at her. "What?" he mouthed.

Ray had warned her, she had known herself what was coming.

"We're going to the marina." She mouthed the words back at him, hoping her daughter would continue to sleep.

He nodded with a subtle shift of his head, never really moving. Content. That was how he appeared. Content where he was, holding Kelly close.

She backed slowly from the room, her hand lingering on the door panel for a moment as she fought the worry building within her. Maybe Ray was right. Maybe Rowdy was all Kelly truly needed to get past the rape and the explicit phone calls they tried to shelter her from.

NAUTI BUOY

They were worse than Kelly knew. To the point that Maria and Ray turned off the phones and the answering machines whenever they knew Kelly would be home alone. She didn't need to know the filth that bastard was spouting. Or the threats. It was bad enough that Maria knew the calls were still coming.

Rowdy was home now though, they could protect Kelly more effectively. And if Ray was right, Rowdy would eliminate the threat altogether. She prayed Ray was right. Just as she prayed that her daughter could handle what Rowdy was sure to ask from her.

ad

Kelly came awake slowly, her senses alive, her skin tingling beneath her clothes at the warmth that surrounded her. There was no momentary fear, no surprise. Rowdy was holding her. She could feel him wrapped around her, spooned against her as though she had been made for the position.

Languorous pleasure suffused her, a drowsy, dreamy sensation of erotic promise. It wrapped around her, veiled her within it, and heated her from the inside out. It sent fingers of warmth to race over her breasts, hardening them, peaking her nipples as hunger raced through them. She wanted to feel him against her there, his hard chest rasping over them, the light mat of hair creating erotic friction. She wanted his mouth there, his lips, teeth and tongue. She wanted everything, wanted all of him.

She was aware of something else as well as she lay there, her body tucked into his. He was hard. His erection pressed against the crevice of her buttocks, a thick intruder, waiting. It was hot, thick, pressing against her in erotic promise, or an implied threat. The barrier of the

blanket between her and Rowdy did nothing to stem the feel of him, or the heat.

She bit her lip, stiffening in his arms, her muscles tightening. Pleasure and fear combined inside her. And the pleasure was stronger. The culmination of what felt like a lifetime of fantasies and needs rose inside her, blocking the fear, pushing it back until nothing mattered except Rowdy.

“Easy, baby.” His voice was drowsy, calm. “It’s just a hard-on.”

He snuggled against her, tucking her closer to his chest as her hands gripped the bedspread and she fought to level her breathing. His voice held an edge of teasing indolence and carnal delight. As though it were an everyday occurrence for her to wake up with a man’s hard-on pressing into her ass.

“I hate to say this,” she wheezed. “That’s not a hard-on, Rowdy. That’s a baseball bat.”

His snorted chuckle vibrated against her back, and only pressed his erection closer against her rear. She stiffened further.

“Want me to move? I’m pretty comfortable right now.”

Oh, she just bet he was. She forced herself to breathe deeply, to push back the panic threatening, building in her mind. This was Rowdy. From the time she was thirteen years old she had been teasing him, brushing against him, doing anything, everything to get a reaction from him. He had never hurt her. Hell, he had ignored her for years. Until four years ago she hadn’t even had a clue that he was aware of her as more than just a pesky little stepsister.

He hadn’t taken her, hadn’t touched her, he had always treated her with a warmth and a caring and kept her at arms’ length.

He wouldn’t hurt her now.

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“You’re thinking it to death,” he murmured as he rubbed his chin against her hair. “Scared?”

“Of your baseball bat?” She fought for humor rather than hysteria. “I don’t know, Rowdy, I hear you’re pretty fond of it. Lots of practice and all.”

She felt his hand move, his fingers running over hers, sending tingling spirals of heat to build beneath them.

“You’re a little minx,” he growled at her ear, a velvet-soft sound that rippled through her senses. “That wasn’t very nice.”

A grin tugged at her lips at his chastising tone. She relaxed against him, feeling her body conform to his, settling against hard muscle and aroused heat.

“I’m not nice, remember?” Her eyes closed as he chuckled at her back. The vibration was at once comforting and arousing.

It was an old argument going back years before. It usually occurred whenever she told him what lousy taste he had in women, and pointed out their faults in vivid detail.

“I do remember.” His lips smoothed over the top of her head, the caress sending trailing fingers of pleasure to wash through her body. The slightest caress, no matter how subtle, had the power to make her tremble. “You have a mean wit sometimes, Kelly.”

She gave an amused snort at that. “I just didn’t care to tell you the truth, Rowdy.”

His girlfriends weren’t exactly the kind of woman he brought home to dinner. As a matter of fact, he had never brought a woman home to dinner. Kelly would never have been able to tolerate that. She wondered if he had known that.

“Do you remember when you were seventeen, and you bought that scrap of material you called a bathing suit?” he mused softly.

She remembered the bathing suit, bought specifically in the hope of teasing him past the control she always hated so much.

“I didn’t think you noticed.” She turned her head, staring up at him, close.

His eyes were darker, tiny pinpoints of emerald glittered in the sea-green iris, mesmerizing her, filling her vision. And his lips. Her eyes darted to his lips, so close. And she knew how they felt rubbing against her own, firm and warm, stoking fires inside her she hadn’t imagined existed.

“I noticed,” he whispered, his voice rougher now. “All summer. I think my cock still has the imprint of my zipper in it.”

His hand stroked up her arm, his palm creating a heated friction that had her nerves prickling with awareness. She could still feel his erection like heated iron resting against the crevice of her rear, but his lips drew her.

“Are you going to kiss me again, Rowdy? Anytime soon?”

“Maybe.” The seductive croon had a shiver racing through her.

“When?” Now would be a good time.

“When do you want me to?” His hand slid from her arm to her stomach and rested there.

She felt his fingers, long, broad, resting against her, with only the fabric of the shirt between them. And it was moving, slowly easing above her hips, passing her abdomen until his hand rested on the bare flesh of her midriff.

“Now.” God, if he didn’t kiss her she was going to die from the need of it. “It’s been four years since you kissed me, Rowdy. Let me taste you again.”

“My little Lolita.” His lips lowered, brushed against hers. “How long have you been teasing me now?”

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“Since I was nine?” She breathed a laugh against his lips.

The first day she had seen him. He had been as handsome as sin and a god in her eyes when he saved her from a bully in that park.

“Hmm. I was fifteen. You were the sweetest little girl. Staring up at me with those big gray eyes so full of tears because that bully had taken your hair bow.”

“And you got my hair bow back.” She was panting for breath, her lips brushing his with each word.

“I got your hair bow back.”

He took her breath. His lips captured hers in an all too brief, fiery kiss. No tongue, no more than a taste of him on her lips before he drew back.

“Rowdy...” She reached for him, needing more, aching for more. “That’s not fair.”

His fingers played against her midriff, rubbing in slow sensual circles, creating little starbursts of sensation that exploded in her sex, swelled her clit. Her nipples were fiery aches, begging to be touched, caressed. His hands were so close, the heat of them warming the tight, aching mounds.

She stilled against him as his hips shifted against her rear once again.

“I’m not scared of you,” she whispered, staring into his eyes, fighting to keep her own open. “I’ve never been scared of you, Rowdy.”

“Yeah, you are,” he whispered, his eyes darkening. “I can see it in your eyes, in your face.” A somber smile touched his lips. “But that’s okay, baby, you won’t be scared for long.”

She opened her lips to speak, then stared at him in astonishment as he rolled from the bed and flashed her a wicked smile. A teasing smile.

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Leigh

Kelly rolled to her back, propping herself on her elbows and staring at him as he moved to the bottom of the bed. He was so obviously aroused it made her mouth water. His cock pressed against the sweatpants with implicit demand, a thick length of steel-hard flesh that she ached for.

“I don’t like being teased like that,” she pouted. “Come back here and kiss me properly.”

“You don’t deserve it yet.” His voice was a dark croon, his expression arrogant, certain. Smug.

“I don’t deserve it?” Disbelief warred with amusement. “I’ve been of age for at least six years now, Rowdy. Ready, willing and able. And...” she stretched her legs out slowly, looking at him from beneath lowered lids, “I think I’ve waited too long.”

His eyes narrowed, a seductive droop of the eyelids, the exceptional green eyes glittering from between heavy black lashes.

“Oh, I agree.” His voice lowered, his hands gripping the railed footboard of the bed, his fingers curling around it, clenching. “We’ve waited too long, Kelly. Now, let’s see how bad you want it.” He winked slowly. “Better shower, baby, I think you’re due at the marina this afternoon. I’ll take you in on the Harley.”

And just as easily as that he turned and sauntered to the bedroom door. He didn’t look back, didn’t pause. He opened the door and left the bedroom, his broad, bare shoulders straight and strong. Too damned sexy for his own good.

Dammit.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER FIVE

The Nauti Boys. They were together again. Rowdy pulled the Harley to a stop at the end of the hunting road, pulling in with the other two cycles parked there, and stared back at the men watching him.

Dawg, Natches and Rowdy Mackay. They were the bad boys of the county. The three of them had been the terror of Somerset Kentucky when they were young. Fathers locked their daughters up at night in fear of the three of them. They hadn't exactly gained a good reputation where their women were concerned.

“Damn, Rowdy, I’m glad you finally made it home.” Dawg pushed his dark sunglasses to the top of his head, securing them in his raven-black hair. The trademark shoulder-length hair gave him a wild, untamed look. It was longer than Rowdy’s own black hair, which was still almost military short. But Dawg had always been wilder than him and Natches,

in many ways.

Natches was leaning against the backrest of his bike, one boot propped on the gas tank, his sunglasses resting low on his nose, his pale green eyes focused and intent as he watched Rowdy.

They knew why they were there. Rowdy turned back to Dawg.

“You didn’t tell me when you picked me up.” He stared back at his cousin, his lips flat, anger tightening his skull.

Dawg shook his shaggy head, lowering it briefly as he sighed heavily.

“Some things you just don’t know how to tell a man.” He lifted his head, staring back as he gave it a brief jerk and grimaced. “I figured you’d get a hint soon enough. It’s not like she’s the same girl she was even last year. Let alone the one we all pretty much raised.”

Rowdy bit back the angry response he could have shot back, but hell, this was Dawg. When Rowdy hadn’t been around to watch out for Kelly’s skinned knees and the bullies who liked to pick on her, then Dawg had been there.

“We’ve pulled all the info we could find, Rowdy.” Natches straightened on the seat of his motorcycle, throwing his leg over the gas tank and crossing his arms over his chest. “We’ve been working on this since it happened, taking turns watching the house when we could, and trying to figure out who the bastard is.”

“And?” If anyone could figure it out, it was Dawg and Natches.

“Nada.” Natches grimaced. “What we have are four other rapes in surrounding counties over the last two years. All anal rapes, beatings, cuts, much more severe than Kelly’s. She got lucky. Her neighbor’s boyfriend heard the single scream she was able to get out. He was a tough guy, broke in and tried to apprehend him, but once he caught sight of Kelly he let the guy go to help her.”

“And none of you thought to let me know?” He stared back at the two men.

He had talked to both of them over the past year and never realized that the distance he had felt had been something they were hiding rather than his own imagination and the physical distance between them.

“What could you have done, man?” Dawg tilted his head to the side and stared back at him questioningly. “We didn’t want the trouble of hiding an AWOL Marine for the rest of our natural lives, and didn’t figure

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Kelly needed that on top of everything else. We took care of her until you could get home.”

“He’s still calling her.”

Natches nodded. “Ray has been keeping us up to date. Kelly doesn’t know about the majority of the phone calls—he and her mother have been protecting her from them.”

He hadn’t been able to protect her, though.

“Are you two free?” He looked at them and knew they would be, whatever it took.

“We’re free. We made sure of it.” Natches nodded firmly. “How do you want to play it?”

“I need one of you backing me at all times we’re away from the house.” He turned to Dawg. “I’ll have her on the Nauti Buoy this evening. I’ll have to talk to her, let her know what we’re looking at here.”

“I’ll be there.” Dawg gave a brief, slow nod. “We’re all living on the boats this summer, Natches and I will make sure we’re near, see if we can see any movement, anyone watching. We haven’t so far, but with crazies like this, you never know what they’ll do when their victim changes pattern.”

Rowdy stared back at them. They knew each other, sometimes too well.

“I’ve been thinking,” Dawg said, his voice graveled, suspicious. “Whoever he is, he had to have known her. Kelly’s not a creature of habit. She’s impulsive, unpredictable, and never where you expect her to be. He knew she would be home. He knew she liked to crack her window at night. You can’t tell it’s cracked from the street. He had to have known.”

“He studies his women,” Natches said. “Gets to know them somehow. We’ve been talking about this.” He nodded to the others. “Playing it out. I think he’s local.”

“Why?”

“The rapes are in a four-county radius around Somerset. Until Kelly, Somerset hadn’t been hit. She fits the profile of the other girls though. The others he doesn’t bother other than to call every now and then and ask if they’re being ‘good girls’, but he’s stalking Kelly. Calling your dad’s house at all hours of the day and night. My gut says he’s local.” Natches’ gut was rarely ever wrong.

“The guy lost it when he was interrupted. The others...” Dawg cleared his throat, fury flashing in his eyes. “He made them beg. First to live, and then for him. Kelly wouldn’t beg...”

“And he was interrupted— Shit!” Rowdy ran his hands over his head.

“But she’s still a ‘good girl’,” Natches pointed out. “When she stops being a good girl, what will he do?”

Rowdy felt his stomach pitch at the thought of what Ray had told him during their drunken night out. How the bastard called, asking if Kelly was still his “good girl”. It was one of the reasons he’d become so furious when he learned Rowdy had come home, not just because it was home, but because Kelly was there. Because Ray had known his son had come home to claim Kelly.

“The redneck code, cowboys,” Natches drawled. “You don’t fuck the good girls unless you mean it. He doesn’t rape them normally, he takes them anally. He’s not serious ‘bout them. And he’s not going to ‘dirty’ a ‘good girl’.”

It was sickening, and the truly horrifying part was it all made sense. There were unwritten rules sometimes, a code, a way of dealing with women. Good girls versus “bad” girls and the rules of engagement. This rapist was twisting those rules. Perverting them in ways guaranteed to give a sane man nightmares. He was targeting good girls, or his perception of a good girl.

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And Kelly gave the impression of the perfect good girl. But she was his naughty girl. He had seen it in her eyes eight years ago; he saw it there now. She wasn't a fool, and she might very well be a virgin but Rowdy knew that his naughty girl was in there, waiting for him. And he was going to claim her, love her, protect her.

No matter what it took.

“Rowdy, you start fooling with her and the bastard is going to come after her stronger,” Natches pointed out. “We can control it if we use it, control him and take him.”

“But only if he thinks Kelly isn't a ‘good girl’,” Dawg injected. “Good girls can tame the bad boys. Unless he thinks Rowdy is up to his past games with Kelly, it might not push him over the edge in time.”

Rowdy stared back at his friends. He heard the question in Dawg's voice, the suspicion. He leaned forward, bracing his arms on the gas tank as he watched them. He ignored the tightening, low in his stomach, the vague disquiet he felt at the thought of sharing Kelly. Of allowing his cousins to touch her, to hold her. He had waited for six years, ever since she turned eighteen, for the chance to show her just how much pleasure he could give her when he took her to his bed. He refused to remember the arousal she inspired two years before that. You didn't lust after babies, and sixteen-year-old, wide-eyed virgins were just that. Babies. But the minute she turned eighteen, he had known his days of freedom were numbered.

“I haven't changed.” He stared back at them with an edge of humor, of determination as he ignored the odd, unfamiliar tightening in his chest. “Have you?”

Snorts of wry amusement met his question.

“Yeah right, and pigs started flying over the lake when it happened.” Natches laughed. “We've been waiting on you, Rowdy, you know that.”

You think that little girl would have stayed unclaimed if any of us had changed over the years?"

They were unique, maybe. Sexual fulfillment and pleasure wasn't a game. It was something they took seriously, something they worked at. They all cared for Kelly, in different degrees. She was Rowdy's life. But the others, hell, they loved her too, and they always would.

Loving Kelly himself didn't change that. He'd kill any other man who dared touch her, but he hoped, prayed he wasn't wrong about Kelly and the fact that her needs would mirror his own.

The need was an enigma, even to the three men. Maybe they were too close, left on their own too much as teenagers, who the hell knew. They didn't question it, they didn't fight it. If Kelly didn't want it, then it was a no-go, but he had a feeling about Kelly. She was a little sex kitten waiting to purr, and they were ready to stroke her.

So why was he suddenly tensing at the thought of Dawg and Natches inspiring that pleasure, that need within her?

He nodded slowly. She was his; there was no contest there. He would fight any man for her, even a friend. But here, there was no need to fight. Dawg and Natches didn't own her heart, Rowdy did. And the pleasure he knew the three of them could bring her, outweighed the subtle warning shifting through his chest.

"Will she agree?" Dawg asked the hardest question to answer.

"Before the attack, I would have said yes." Rowdy sighed roughly. "Now, who knows?" He shook his head before wiping his hand over his face in a gesture of frustration. "We'll see. It will have to be her decision."

They nodded in reply.

"We get her over the attack first, take care of the attacker, then see where we go from there," Rowdy said. "She's not ignorant of the rumors,

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she suspects what's coming. But..." He swallowed tightly. "She's going to be scared now. And for that alone, I'll kill the bastard."

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Mackay's Marina was one of the smaller marinas, specializing in rentals and mechanical servicing. Some berths were leased out, and the attached restaurant and convenience store added to the overall "one stop" friendly atmosphere of the landing.

Mackay's Marina had begun with Rowdy's grandfather, Joseph Mackay, and then under Ray Mackay's guidance had turned into a thriving, year-long enterprise. One he wanted to turn over to Rowdy as soon as his son was willing.

The bait shop and sporting goods section of the main buildings were separated from the store and restaurant by the main office. Kelly's mother had put in the convenience store and additional gas pumps after their marriage on the condition that part of the enterprise go to Kelly once they retired. It was an agreement Ray and Rowdy had accepted easily.

Kelly was ringing up the variety of goods that old man Tanner and his son Ricky had picked up, when she saw Rowdy and Dawg walk into the main room. Natches had just left a few minutes ago after spending nearly an hour flirting and straightening the shelves at the side of the room.

She would have been a fool not to notice that the careful restraint in his demeanor toward her had changed. He watched her now with a subtle interest, a promise unique to the Mackay boys. She knew their moves, and knew the instant he walked in the room that he was no longer simply watching over her as he and Dawg had done in the past year. The additional element of desire was no longer hidden from her.

Lora
Leigh

There was no pressure, no touching, nothing that could send her pulse jumping with fear. But the invitation to be bad glittered in his eyes. It was an invitation she had believed she'd been waiting for. Until now. Now, it sent her nerves on overload, and had her questioning the fantasies that haunted her for years. Had the attack really affected her to this point, she wondered? To the point that what she believed she wanted now seemed cold, almost dirty?

“Kelly girl, you need to put these fishing rods on sale.” Ken Tanner’s scowl was fierce, his brown eyes eagle-bright. Wisps of gray hair stood on end over his head, and his lined face was normally fierce, though he had a heart of gold.

“I’ll tell Ray, Ken. But you know how he is. That will be \$14.62.”

She took the money from him, ignoring his son. Ricky was a shifty-eyed little prick who took pleasure in poking at others’ weaknesses. Thankfully, he reined it in while his father was around.

As she counted out his change, she caught sight of Rowdy moving behind the counter while Dawg started straightening some of the higher shelves across the room. Dawg had spent his summers working the marina before he left high school. For him, Rowdy and Natches, it was almost automatic to work when they were hanging around.

“Hey, babe.” She stiffened as Rowdy moved behind her, placing a hand on her shoulder as he leaned down to kiss the top of her head.

“Tired yet?”

She felt the flush that suffused her face as Ricky’s gaze became frankly assessing and old man Tanner grinned in delight.

“Rowdy Mackay. Boy, it’s about time you came home. You just visiting or staying?” Ken’s raspy voice boomed through the store.

“Hello, Ken. Ricky.” He moved to the counter, shaking the gnarled hand reaching out to him. “I’m home to stay this time.”

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“Well, it’s about time.” He nodded firmly, his knowing gaze shifting to Kelly for a long second, a hint of compassion entering his eyes. “You going to take care of our girl here?”

“Ken.” Her face flamed hotter at the question as she chastised him.

“Like all of us ain’t watched you twitching around him since you were too young to know what a twitch was.” He snorted, frowning back at her.

“Don’t you be playing dumb, girl. Just ‘cause I’m old don’t make me blind.”

She ignored Rowdy’s chuckle as she quickly bagged the items Ken had bought and handed them across the counter.

“I hope you catch lots of fish, Ken,” she gritted out between her clenched teeth, pasting a facsimile of a smile on her face.

She was as fond as she could be of the old man, but he wasn’t one to mince words.

His snicker was amused, kindly. “It’s all in the bait, girl. It’s all in the bait.” He nodded to Rowdy with one of the few smiles Kelly had ever seen out of him. “Let’s go, Ricky.” He nudged at his son, heading toward the lake-side door. “See you later, Rowdy.”

“Later, Ken.” As he spoke, Kelly felt his hand settle in the small of her back, his fingers rubbing in tiny circles over the loose cotton shirt she wore.

“Stop that,” she hissed, turning on him as Ken and Ricky left the building, the glass door whishing shut behind them.

She pushed his hand away, propped her hands on her hips and glared up at his smiling face as he crossed his arms over his chest and smiled wickedly back at her.

“You’re just going to make me pout if you start refusing my pitiful advances, Kelly,” he sighed. “And here I stayed awake all night last night with a numb arm just so you could sleep comfortable.”

Dawg's snicker was clearly heard.

"Dumb and dumber," she muttered, though she couldn't keep the smile from her face as he reached out to run the backs of his fingers over the side of her neck. Shivers raced through her at the small caress. And it wasn't fear. She could feel the pleasure suffusing her body, dampening the flesh between her thighs.

It was disconcerting. She had spent months with the fear that she would never be able to enjoy Rowdy's touch again. That the desires he had filled her with, the needs and fantasies would be swamped with the fear. The knowledge that they were coming back, perhaps stronger than ever was at once nerve-racking and comforting.

"It's almost closing time. I thought we'd help you close up. Then we take all that Chinese food I have out in the cycle's saddlebag and have dinner before we head out on the lake." He pushed her hair back from her shoulder as he spoke, his fingers lingering on the shell of her ear for long seconds after he finished.

From the corner of her eye she saw Dawg locking the lake-side doors and hanging up the "closed" sign.

"Ray will skin you alive." She shook her head, though she couldn't still the smile on her lips. "Summer hours are longer now, Rowdy. I still have an hour."

"I asked Dad first." He moved back, his expression intent, sexy. "Better yet, Dawg can finish up for you. Come on, Kelly, sneak away with me."

Sneak away with him? How many times had she dreamed of hearing him say those words? She would have snuck out with him, anytime, any place.

"Go on, Kelly." Dawg lent his approval to the idea. "I'll close up shop here and help Ray and your mom outside before I leave."

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As Rowdy's first cousin, and the oldest by several months, Dawg had usually led the pranks the Nauti Boys had gotten into. The three men had been hell on wheels through their high school years.

She breathed in deeply, her hands sliding from her hips to her jeans pockets as she glanced up at Rowdy again.

"You know you want to," he whispered with a wink. "Come on, I even spent the day airing out the boat and getting her ready."

The Nauti Buoy was his pride and joy, not to mention his weekend home. He and his friends spent their summers on the water, normally in the houseboats they had acquired over the years. Their title, the Nauti Boys, had come as much from the names of their boats as it had their sexual practices.

"Okay." She gripped her courage with both hands and gave him a short nod. "I haven't had Chinese in a while."

She hadn't eaten out much period, preferring to stay in the house when she was home rather than forcing herself to pretend a security she didn't feel. It terrified her, not knowing who her attacker was. If he was a friend or a stranger, someone she trusted or would have trusted.

"Good," he said, his voice warm, approving as she moved past him, tugging at the hem of her big shirt before one of his big hands caught one of hers.

Warmth surrounded her fingers, fed into her bloodstream and sent a surge of heat spiking through her system. Adrenaline spiked the wave of warmth, fed it into her tightening nipples, her swollen clit.

"We'll catch you on the lake later, Dawg."

"I'll give you a call before I head out." Dawg nodded as they moved past him, his eyes narrowed, the brilliant blue glittering behind the spiked lashes surrounding them. They held the same teasing warmth and sensual promise that Natches' had earlier.

“Come on.”

She followed Rowdy as he moved through the main marina office, waving to her mother as he opened the door and escorted her through it. She wondered if she looked as confused as she felt.

Stilling her emotions and her equilibrium after waking up with him that morning had been hard enough. She had been nervous, her fingers shaking, her stomach clenching each time she thought of waking up beside him, feeling him surrounding her, his erection pressing into her rear. That had been the most disconcerting part. She should have been frightened. The psychologist had told her she would likely be frightened the first time she tried intimate relations after the near-rape. That the intimacy of allowing a man to touch her, to hold her, might be difficult to get through.

It hadn't been. Not that Rowdy had touched her much. He had made her more aroused than frightened. And in ways, that was more frightening than the fear of his touch. Everyone had told her for months that being touched would be difficult for her, but being touched by Rowdy had been a dream come true.

“You think too much sometimes,” Rowdy announced as he collected the bags of Chinese food from the steel saddlebags mounted to the side of the motorcycle.

“I can walk and chew gum at the same time too.” She rolled her eyes at him, feeling his hand at the small of her back again.

In the past twenty-four hours he had touched her more than he had in the last ten years. Of course he hadn't been home for the better part of those ten years, but it wasn't as though the opportunity hadn't been there.

“Why didn't you go on to college?” he asked as they moved onto the docks. “I expected you to head off right after high school.”

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She shrugged at the question. “I took business classes at the tech school. You might get the marina when Ray and Mom retire, but the store and fuel supply are mine,” she reminded him. “They’ll only grow as the traffic on the lake increases and I wanted to be prepared for it.”

“You say that as though you think I might want to get rid of you.” They turned along the plank, heading for the Nauti Buoy, the fifty-foot sea-green and white houseboat .

“Not get rid of me maybe.” She stepped onto the wide porch, moving back as he slid open the glass sliding doors before heading into the dim, air-conditioned comfort of the living room/kitchen.

The shades were all drawn, the lights out. As he closed the door behind them, he pulled the heavy drapes closed over it, sealing them inside the intimate, cool comfort of his home away from home.

“Then what?” he asked as he moved to the small kitchen. “Do you think I wouldn’t want you around, Kelly?”

The wheel column sat in the corner in front of the large shaded window beside the glass doors. A six-foot burgundy couch sat to her side, two matching chairs on the other side of the room, behind the wheel. The kitchen was equipped with a mini refrigerator, chest-type freezer and narrow four-burner stove with an overhead microwave and oak cabinets. The double sink was narrow, but efficient. Across from the work area a circular table with four cushioned captain’s chairs sat beneath a stained glass chandelier. Further along was a small bathroom and shower, berth bed and a walkout to the back diving area.

She loved the Nauti Buoy. They had spent the summers on it when she was younger. Upstairs was another larger, opulent bedroom, as well as a master bathroom and deck. Before Ray had given it to Rowdy, there had been two bedrooms downstairs. Now, the second one was a

drying/changing area for the back deck with a small washer/dryer combo.

“I wasn’t sure,” she finally answered, staring back at him, her fingers knotting in the hem of her shirt.

“Your mother helped build the marina.” He turned to her after setting the food on the table. “I wouldn’t take it from you, no matter what happened.”

He hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his jeans, watching her with those eyes. Eyes that stripped her defenses, that sent butterflies crashing to and fro in the pit of her stomach.

She licked her lips, staring back at him. The last thing on her mind now was that of the business. Nerves clashed to and fro as her senses became more heightened; the air in the confines of the craft became heavier, dense with the seductive, subtle scent that was unique to Rowdy.

“I know you wouldn’t, Rowdy.” She cleared her throat, forcing herself to move to the cabinet and the kitchenware there.

As she pulled plates and silverware from where they were held and set the table, Rowdy warmed the food in the microwave, setting it on the table before pulling a bottle of cheap wine from the fridge.

At some point, he had turned on a CD, lowering the volume until the soft, intimate music flowed through the cabin.

“Let’s eat.” The dark throb in his voice was so sexual that the suggestion took on a whole new meaning.

“Eat.” She breathed in slowly. “Okay. We eat.”

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER SIX

As they ate, he told her about the Marines. She knew he was glossing over the harder details, the blood and death he'd seen overseas, the friends he had lost. She knew when he was talking about those friends who were no longer alive to laugh with him. His eyes would darken, his expression becoming reflective.

He told her about the desert, made her laugh at some of the pranks he and his buddies had played on their CO or other soldiers. She saw the beauty of the sun rising over a desert landscape, the calm tranquility of the moon rising with his deep voice and reverent descriptions.

But he had missed home. She heard that in every word. How beautiful the moon glistening off the sand could be, but it didn't compare to the early morning fog that rose from the lake or the moon slicing a path of golden light across the wet surface.

How he would miss the guys he'd fought with, but he dreamed of slipping off into the mountains and making the homemade moonshine he, Natches and Dawg often made.

The silence of the desert, the symphony of the forest. He saw the beauty of the land he'd been in, but he knew the treasures to be found in the land he'd grown up in.

"What about women?" She finally got around to the question that plagued her most as he stacked the dishes in the tiny dishwasher and turned back to where she watched him from the table.

She propped her elbow on the table, cupping her chin in her hands as she watched him curiously.

“I wasn’t a saint, baby.” His lips quirked with that sexy little half-smile that was trademark Rowdy. “But there was nothing serious. Hasn’t been anyone in a while, actually. What about you?”

He was leaning against the counter, his muscular body relaxed. Well, mostly relaxed. He was hard. She could glimpse the bulge in the front of his jeans from the lower portion of her vision and was dying for a full look.

“No one for me,” she finally answered with a self-mocking grimace. “I couldn’t get over you. You left and broke my young heart.”

“Better your young heart than my neck.” He grunted. “I was twenty- two years old, Kelly. I should have been shot for even looking at you then.” His eyelids lowered. “But it was damned hard not to look. You filled out a pair of shorts almost as good as you fill them out now.”

She felt the flush that rose over her face, her gaze flickering away from him for long moments as she breathed in deeply.

“You know, those loose clothes are going to have to go,” he finally sighed. “One of my favorite parts of coming home was watching you run around in those snug little shorts and tank tops. Made my dick harder than hell, but it was a sight I sure as hell miss, Kelly.”

Her gaze slammed into his. The green was darker now, his expression heavy with hunger.

“I...” She swallowed tightly. “I’m more comfortable...”

“Bullshit.” The whispered retort was delivered with a knowing smile. “You’re scared. I’m home now, Kelly. Trust me.”

He had promised her, so long ago, as long as he was around, no one would hurt her. It was the bully, she remembered. She was terrified of staying in the park after school while her mother worked, after the

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bullies had started picking on her. Unless Rowdy was there. He had taken care of her. And sometimes one of the others. If Rowdy couldn't be there, Dawg or Natches had been.

“Remember when I promised I'd always take care of you?” he whispered. “You were the littlest bit of thing I had ever laid my young eyes on. Those tears on your face when those bullies stole that frippery in your hair made me madder than hell.”

“You saved my hair bows.” She restrained her teasing smile. “And saved Mom a ton of extra money. I loved my hair bows.”

“You still love your hair bows.” He grinned. “I saw them scattered all over your bathroom last night when I got up for a drink. Damned things own your sink counter.”

She lifted her brows. “They're pretty though.”

He pushed from the counter, moving with a predatory ease, a shift of bone, muscle and sinew that had her breath catching in her throat as he walked to the table.

“No.” He reached out, the backs of his fingers smoothing over the side of her face. “You're pretty. Too damned pretty for those loose clothes. Take them off for me.”

Her eyes widened. “I didn't bring a change—”

“You have a bra on and panties, I presume?” His fingers wrapped around her wrist, drawing her to her feet. “I bet they cover you better than that damned bathing suit did when you were seventeen.”

The air was suddenly too thick to breathe, her sight dazed, filled with the color of Rowdy's eyes and the desire she could see glowing in them. Her thighs tightened as she felt the tingle of response racing through her womb, rippling through her vagina.

Lora
Leigh

“I’ll head the boat for the cove,” he whispered. “We could do some swimming, watch the moon rise over the lake. Would you like that, Kelly?”

“A bra and panties isn’t exactly a bathing suit.” She drew in a deep breath, moving away from him as she tugged at the large shirt.

“It’s not exactly naked, either,” he said as he moved to the wheel column. “Think about it. So do we go to the cove anyway?” He glanced back at her, lifting a black brow suggestively.

Kelly breathed in deeply.

“The cove sounds like fun.” She finally nodded firmly.

“And the clothes?” His gaze dropped over her body before coming back to her eyes.

She lifted her brow mockingly. “You haven’t done anything to deserve it yet, Rowdy,” she purred sweetly. “I guess I’ll just have to think about it.”

She was going to have to think about it?

As he maneuvered the Nauti Buoy toward the hidden cove he and his friends had partied in when they were younger, Rowdy found a smile tugging at his lips.

He might not deserve to see those loose clothes coming over her perky little body, but he was going to. The long, thin, denim shirt fell to her thighs and draped over her slender shoulders. Even her jeans were loose, a protective shell to cover herself with.

His jaw clenched at the thought. Kelly had never had a problem wearing clothes that emphasized her slender body and pert breasts, until now. The attack had changed that, she was nervous now, where before she had been confident of herself as a desirable, pretty young woman.

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She didn't tease him like she had for far too many years. She was more contained, quieter. And he realized he missed the spitfire she had been. By now, they should have been arguing loud enough to draw attention, while she drove him crazy with a combination of lust and exasperation.

Instead, she was standing at the glass sliding doors, staring into the distance reflectively as her fingers gripped the drapes at the side.

"I think you're wrong, Kelly." He leaned into the back of the barstool he was sitting in, one hand gripping the wheel as the boat plowed through the water toward the cove.

"About what?" She turned back to him with a frown, her gray eyes twinkling with good humor.

"I think I deserve to see you stripped down to something decent." He scowled. "Stop hiding baby."

She rolled her eyes before turning back to the scenery outside the boat.

"You don't know everything, Rowdy," she retorted, but there was no conviction in her voice.

"I know you." He began unbuttoning his own shirt as he glanced at her, his cock throbbing in delight as her eyes shadowed with interest.

Within seconds he'd stripped the shirt, tossing it back on the chair behind him as he flashed her a wicked grin.

She turned to him then, crossing her arms over her breasts as she lifted her brow.

"You could at least lose the jeans," he pointed out. "That shirt is big enough to cover two of you. No one would know."

Four years ago she had worn that tiny little bikini all damned day, flipping around him like a wood nymph intent on driving mortal men insane. Now, he couldn't even get her out of her pants.

Lora
Leigh

“You’re pushing,” she warned, her voice holding a subtle snap.

“You haven’t seen me push yet, baby,” he growled in return. “Do you think I didn’t take the time to find out just far you’ve been hiding since that bastard attacked you? You stopped dressing like the girl I knew and started dressing like your damned grandmother instead. You’re scared.”

“Well duh!” she mocked him. “Go figure. Maybe I should just prance around naked for you, Rowdy.” She wasn’t really angry, yet. Her eyes were sparkling though, her cheeks flushing with irritation.

“That would work for me.” He grinned wolfishly. “Let’s try it and see if it will work for you. Take yours off and I’ll take mine off.”

“You would take yours off anyway.” Her laughter was soft, knowing.

“For you baby, anytime.” He winked.

“A far cry from your answer in the past years.” The shade of mockery in her voice wasn’t lost on him. “Why now? You come back and suddenly can’t wait to get into bed with me? It’s enough to make a girl suspicious.”

“No doubt,” he agreed, grinning back at her. “There’s no secret there, sweetheart. I wasn’t about to take a kid to my bed. Being a virgin will be hard enough for you, I at least wanted you to be mature enough to know what the hell you were getting into. But I had no intentions of not coming back for you.”

Surprise reflected in her eyes.

“And if I decided I wanted someone else?” Her eyes narrowed, her lips thinning at the confidence he knew she was reading in his tone.

“Then Dawg or Natches would have taken care of it until I made it back on leave.” He shrugged easily. “I put claim on you a long time ago, Kelly. You just didn’t realize it.”

“Somewhere between the little sex games that your buddies shared in?” Ohhh, now was that just a little shade of jealousy there? He watched

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her closely from the corner of his eyes as he kept the teasing grin in place.

“Sex games are for adults.” He scratched at his chin as he glanced back at her. “You couldn’t handle them.”

And that could very well be the truth. Not that he couldn’t do without them, but damn, the Kelly he had known four years ago had been wild, impetuous and filled with hunger. He had always liked the sex games, played them carefully and in deadly earnest.

“Who says I couldn’t handle them?” She frowned back at him as she straightened and placed her hands on her hips. “You never gave me the chance to try.”

He snorted. “Don’t let your mouth write checks your body can’t cash, baby. Don’t dare me.”

He gave her a dark, warning look, one she immediately recognized. He wasn’t playing here. Not yet. And before he started, he wanted her aware of the rules.

“I’m not stupid.” She pushed her hands into her jeans pockets, staring back at him with an edge of anger, of arousal. “I paid attention to your reputation a long time ago.”

She wasn’t shying away from him. That was good. He didn’t want her shying away from him; he wanted her curious, interested. He wanted her horny.

“Did you now?” He ran his hand over his chest as he guided the houseboat into a turn that would take it off the main section of the lake and into a more narrow waterway leading to the cove. “And you still teased me every chance you had. You’ve stopped teasing me. Maybe you decided you can’t handle it.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re being a prick.”

“I’m being honest, Kelly.” He gave his head a quick, negative jerk. “You listened to the rumors, you say. Evidently you didn’t listen close enough.”

“What does that mean?”

“Exactly what I said,” he answered, narrowing his eyes as he glanced back at her. “I’m fine with having the princess. I’ll take you to my bed, treat you like crystal and love you with everything I have to give you, for as long as you can put up with me. But don’t tempt the beast, sugar, because when he gets hungry, you might get more than you’ve bargained for.”

He watched her expression go blank.

“You love me?” She blinked back at him, so damned innocent it made his guts clench.

“Kelly, I’ve always loved you,” he told her, meaning it. Knowing he meant it. “In one way or the other, you’ve always been a part of me. You’re old enough to decide if you want to settle in with one man, forever, or not. I figure I can give you this summer to decide for sure if I’m that man. If not, then I’ll let you go. It won’t be easy. I’ll be a son of a bitch with an attitude for years to come, but I’ll let you go.”

“But, Rowdy, I’ve always loved you.” She watched him in confusion now, hope and fear in equal parts shadowing her eyes.

He tapped his fingers against the wheel, turning it until it swung into another waterway leading to the private cove. Natches’ family owned the small property that bordered the bay. It was on the back side of undeveloped land, and completely private.

“Yeah, I know you have,” he finally answered as he pulled along the tree-shaded bank and cut the engine.

He didn’t say anything more as he moved beyond the sliding doors, throwing out the heavy front anchor weight before moving to the back

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and doing the same. As he returned to the living area, he paused by the table.

“I came back for you,” he said, leaning against the small bar, forcing himself to stand away from her. “That’s why Dad was so pissed. He knew I came back for you. And the rumors are fact, baby. So don’t push me where the games are concerned.”

“I don’t need you or your dad making decisions for me,” she snapped, her gray eyes flaring in defiance. “If we’re going to try for a relationship, then we’ll meet in the middle. Somehow. But not if you think you can plan my life for me.”

His lips twitched. She was a bundle of fire, that was for damned sure.

“Take off the pants,” he whispered. “Let’s go one step at a time, Kelly. See what your limits are together.”

“Our limits,” she retorted. “Not just mine.”

His lips curled into a frankly sexual, wicked smile.

Kelly licked her lips nervously. The action had the head of his erection pounding with need. Damn, he wanted that little tongue there laving the thick crest, licking around it as though it were a favorite treat. She bit her lower lip and glanced away before breathing in deeply. Her hands moved, pulling out of the jeans pockets before moving beneath the shirt to unsnap the pants. She kicked off her sandals then pushed the jeans over her hips and down her legs.

Within seconds she was laying them over the chair with his shirt before turning back to him.

“You used to tease me like a brazen little hussy,” he whispered, staring at her legs, dying to feel them around his hips. “It was one of the things I looked forward to most when I thought of coming home.” He watched her move toward him, her eyes becoming cloudy with passion as he kept his voice low, carefully teasing.

Lora
Leigh

“You didn’t act as though you enjoyed it,” she murmured as she drew up to him. He jerked as she placed her small hand on his bare chest and ran it slowly down to his tight abdomen. “You stayed away from me.”

He lifted his hand, moving it to her arm, feeling the softness of her skin as he ran his fingers to her elbow and back again.

“If you knew the things I wanted to do you over the years, you would have run screaming.” He stared down at her uplifted face, his gaze on her lips. The soft, candy-pink perfection of those full curves had him aching.

“You’re still too damned young for the things I want to do to you. With you.”

“What did you want to do to me, Rowdy?” Her hand slid from his abdomen to his chest again as she stared at him, her eyes reflecting the same hungry need she had shown for years, but it also showed a shadow of fear, of hesitation.

“Everything.” He wasn’t going to lie to her. Now wasn’t the time to hide any part of who or what he was, or the hungers he could unleash on her. If there was a time to be honest with her, it was now. Before the emotional connection that had bonded them for so many years deepened, before there was a chance she could be hurt.

Arousal flashed in her eyes as her breathing became heavier, jerkier.

“Give me an example.” He could hear the hunger in her voice.

He ran his fingers down her arm until he found her hand, lifted it, pulling her fingers to his lips as he watched her through narrowed eyes. Her gaze flickered to his lips as he licked over the pad of two fingers, her eyelids drooping, pleasure rather than fear filling her gaze.

“You know what I want,” he whispered. “Exactly what I suspect you’re most frightened of now.” He lifted his other hand, smoothing back her hair from her face, his thumb caressing her cheek. “I want to strip

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you down, love you from head to toe as often as possible, and sometimes...we might not be alone.”

Her breath caught in a hard hitch a second before she jerked away from him, moving across the room, her shoulders stiff and straight as he forced himself to relax, to wait.

“And if we weren’t alone?” Her voice was thin, breathy. He couldn’t tell if it was arousal or fear that inspired it.

“If we weren’t alone, you know the only men I’d ever allow around you,” he told her softly.

“And if it’s not what I want?” She turned back to him, her gray eyes dark, shadowed with indecision.

“Then I won’t press you for it.” He crossed his arms over his chest again as he leaned against the counter. “That doesn’t mean I won’t think about it, that I won’t fantasize the hell out of it. I won’t lie to you, Kelly. Ever. And I won’t have things between us that don’t need to be there.”

“And how do they feel about this?” Arousal lay thick in her voice, as did the fear. “Have the three of you already been making plans to seduce me?”

“There are times when men don’t have to make plans, Kelly.” He kept his voice smooth, even. “They know me, just as well as I know them. No plans will ever be made outside of your presence.”

She breathed in slowly, her nostrils flaring as she watched him closely.

“Which brings me to another point,” he continued. “Whether you want to do it or not, you’re going to at least have to fake it. Until I catch that bastard who dared to touch you, I’ll let him think it’s going on. I’ll torture him with the knowledge of it. Because I’ll be damned if I’ll let him threaten you any longer. So you might want to think about at least enjoying some of the pretense.”

Lora
Leigh

As he spoke, he watched her pale, then flush as fury contorted her features with lightning swiftness. A spark was all it took, and he had known he was taking that risk.

“You think you’re going to play with me?” she threw back at him. “That I’m going to let you play head games with that sick bastard until he comes after me again?”

Betrayal flashed in her eyes, in her voice.

“Think again, damn you.” She stalked over to the chair, yanking her pants from the seat and jerking them over her legs as she cast him a heated glare. “You’re a son of a bitch, Rowdy. I can’t believe you’d do this.” Emotion clogged her throat, the pain in her voice tearing at his chest.

“Hell yes, I’ll do it,” he snarled, stalking to her as she struggled to snap and zip her jeans. He gripped her arms, staring down at her, rage eating him alive at the thought of that perverted bastard holding her down, cutting her with that knife. “I’ll do whatever it takes, Kelly, do you understand me? He’s a threat to you. A danger. And that I will not tolerate. If we don’t catch him, he’s going to rape again, and the next woman might not live to regret it. Is that what you want?”

“You want to use me.” She slapped at his arms, breaking away from him as she screamed the accusation in his face, her gray eyes swimming with tears. “You want to pervert what I feel for you, what I’ve needed for years, and turn it into some kind of damned war game.”

“I want you until I can’t breathe, dammit,” he growled back at her. “I haven’t taken a comfortable breath since you developed breasts. But he’s going to come after you again. Sooner or later, you know it and I know it. What happens if he catches me off guard? If he gets to you again?”

“I’m careful...”

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“I snuck up on you yesterday morning,” he snapped. “Do you have any idea how easy it is to get past even Dad’s security system? Do you think you could have stopped him even if that window had been closed and locked?” He saw the truth in her eyes. “Forget that, Kelly. The other girls he raped couldn’t stop him. He raped one of them while her parents slept only rooms away from her. You can’t hide from him, and you can’t run.”

“Stop yelling at me!” She pushed him back furiously, her hands cracking against his stomach as she slapped against it to forcibly put distance between them.

“You aren’t listening to me,” he snarled.

“And I won’t listen to you,” she screamed, the tears falling from her eyes, her face pale, her eyes raging with fury and the sense of betrayal he could see tearing through her. “You call this love? Setting me up? Oh God, Rowdy, how could you do this to me?”

A sob tore through her body as she stared up at him, her fists clenched at her side, tears wetting her cheeks and breaking his heart.

“Do what, Kelly?” he finally asked wearily, shaking his head. “Want you safe? Well? I’m telling you who and what I am, and what I am endangers you with this bastard anyway if he’s even heard of me. Dawg, Natches and I have been sharing our women since we were old enough to understand what our dicks were made for. You know that as well as anyone else does. Loving me doesn’t mean you have to do shit about it. Loving you doesn’t mean it’s something I have to have. But we’re talking about more than that now. We’re talking about your life, and I’ll do whatever the hell it takes to keep that bastard from ever touching you again. Ever, Kelly.”

“And how do you know it wasn’t one of them?” she threw in his face. “It could have been either of them. He tried to rape me anally, Rowdy.

And the three of you are considered the ass-fucking kings, so tell me how you know it's not one of them."

"Because they know me," he snapped back. "And they've watched you twitch that little ass at me since you were a teenager. Trust me, baby, if it was one of them, they would have never made the mistake of believing that good girl persona you project to every other man close enough to watch you. You're a good girl to the world, but you, baby, are bad to the bone when it comes to me. I know it, and you know it. You just have to accept it."

"Get fucked!" she screamed back, enraged, her face flushed red, her eyes glittering now with a fury he'd rarely seen in her.

He smiled. A slow, teasing, wicked grin that only fueled her rage as his gaze dropped down her body then back up.

"But darlin', ain't that what we were talking about?"

Before she could do more than gasp he had her in his arms again, his lips covering hers, his tongue slipping past her lips to taste the wild anger and arousal pumping through her.

She didn't think. She didn't fear. He felt her hands grip his shoulders, her little nails pricking against his flesh as his hand moved beneath her shirt, to her thighs.

"Damn you," he growled, lifting his head to stare into her dazed, stormy eyes as his palm cupped the hot flesh between her thighs, the heat of his flesh searing her even through her jeans. "I bet you're wet, Kelly. So fucking wet it's seeping through your panties."

He pressed closer, feeling her hips buck at the pressure against her clit.

"Feel good?"

"I hate you," she snapped, her breathing rough as a low whimper left her throat.

NAUTI BUOY

“No, you don’t.” He rotated his hand, watching her eyes flare, feeling the heat intensify against his palm. “You love me, Kelly, just like you love this. And you want more. Admit it, baby.”

Her thighs parted further as his fingers curved, massaging the sensitive flesh through her clothes.

“I want you, not a game,” she cried out, arching to her tiptoes, helpless against him. He liked her helpless against his touch, loved feeling the heat of her against his hand.

“And if the game comes with it?” He watched her intently, his eyes narrowed. “I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe. And this is what it takes. I won’t let him catch us unprepared. I won’t let him touch you again.”

He released her slowly, hating letting her go as she stared back at him miserably.

“Think about that,” he whispered, keeping his voice gentle. “I hate it like hell, and no one wishes I could have seduced you more than I do. I would have loved seducing you, baby. But your safety is more important.”

“My safety?” she asked mockingly. “Or your desires?”

Anger flared inside him. “You know me better than that, Kelly.” He kept his jaw tensed, his tone of voice low. “Nothing matters as much as keeping you safe.”

“But only on your terms,” she pointed out, furious, causing him to pause. “On your terms and by your rules. Well, you know what, Rowdy, your rules suck. Maybe I need to decide if playing your game is worth the risk to my heart and to my safety.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

He watched as the Nauti Buoy pulled into her berth, fifty feet and gleaming beneath the summer moon, her lights giving the craft a soft, romantic look. How he had dreamed of having such a craft, a place he could use to hide, to take his good girls and fulfill the promises he made to them.

He thought he had chosen so wisely. His perfect girls, pure in heart and in nature, and they loved him. He was their love, but it had taken so long to find the one he wanted for all time. The perfect good girl. So sweet-natured and pure, never dirtying herself or her good name. Despite the brother.

His fists clenched at the thought of the brother. He was depraved, perverted and he was going to dirty her. Rowdy Mackay was going to shame Kelly, and he knew it. He had seen them today, in the store, his hands on her, his eyes raking over her as though he owned her.

Rowdy Mackay didn't own her. She belonged to the man who had loved her, who had respected her. And she was going to love him. Just like the others did. They hadn't loved anyone else either. He watched them sometimes, making certain they didn't allow anyone else to touch what belonged to him. Sometimes he called them, reminded them of who they were waiting for. They had promised to wait on him to find his one true love.

NAUTI BUOY

Kelly could be his true love. He thought it was possible. Until Rowdy came home.

The Nauti Boys. They were depraved. Perverts. But they had never fooled with the good girls. They left the perfect ones alone, always preferring the tramps, the little whores willing to spread their legs not just for one of them, but sometimes for all three at once. They shared their women all the time, watching and listening to their nasty screams as they begged for more.

His fists clenched, his gut rolling in sick suspicion. Rowdy had taken Kelly away on the houseboat. He had never done that by himself before. In the past, it had always been with her and her friends, never alone.

He shook at the fear that the bastard had dirtied her. He couldn't let that happen. Kelly was sweet and clean, she had never been dirtied by another man's seed, by another's possession of her.

She had screamed for him when he touched her though. He hadn't had time to hear her beg for him, or to hear her promise to remain true to him. No sooner had he attempted to possess her than that big dumb hick visiting his whore girlfriend had started yelling outside the door. He couldn't get caught. His sweet Kelly couldn't be seen with a man in her bed. It would ruin her reputation and she wouldn't be clean anymore. Her reputation meant everything.

Bastard Rowdy. Rowdy Mackay thought he was perfect, thought all the girls were his. He was going to hurt sweet Kelly, his sister. She was his sister, he had no business touching her. Sisters shouldn't be touched, his father had warned him of that.

His eyes narrowed as Kelly moved from the boat and jumped onto the narrow floating dock. She was angry. He could see it in her face, in the stiff set of her body beneath the bright lights of the dock.

Lora
Leigh

She said something as Rowdy locked the doors, causing the man to stiffen, to turn to her slowly. He didn't like the smile Rowdy gave her. It was carnal. Dirty.

He watched as she stalked ahead of the other man, her loose clothing demure, hiding the body that belonged to him alone. How perfect she was. His good girl. He had to finish his claim on her. He had to make certain she belonged to him. Not Rowdy. Never Rowdy and his perverted friends.

His eyes watered at the thought of them touching her, tears falling down his cheeks as pain raged inside his soul. What was he going to do? It hurt so bad to see her with him, to know what Rowdy would do to the precious girl. His sweet little good girl, he raged in agony, Rowdy Mackay would destroy her. He had to get her away from Rowdy.

He watched as Rowdy walked her to her car. He was too close to her, even though she was angry. Rowdy was standing too close. He was crowding her.

She unlocked the door and opened it, then Rowdy touched her. Don't touch her. He clenched his fists, sniffing miserably, fighting the tears that fell from his eyes. Rowdy shouldn't be touching her.

But he was. The depraved bastard was touching her hair, her cheek, smiling down at her. Rage shattered in his head, filling his vision with a red haze as he watched another move from the shadows of the dock. Dawg. The bastard couldn't even use his real name—he used the nickname of the animal he was.

Kelly started as the other man called out to them, flashed Rowdy a furious look then got into her car. The car door closed and within seconds she was pulling from the parking lot. She was going home. But she wouldn't be going alone. Rowdy would go as well. He lived in the house with her. His bedroom would be close to hers, he could hear her, smell her, maybe touch her as she slept.

NAUTI BUOY

Oh God, don't let him touch her, he prayed. Don't let him dirty the good girl. She was his good girl. And, she just might be his perfect love.

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Kelly forcibly restrained the anger pounding through her bloodstream as she unlocked the front door and stepped into the entryway of her mother and stepfather's home. She punched in the security code, keeping her back to Rowdy as he entered with her and then closed and locked the door behind them.

"It's about time you two found your way home." Ray stepped into the entryway, Marie following close behind.

Kelly breathed in deeply before turning to them, pasting a smile on her face as she met their concerned gazes.

"Rowdy has a habit of poking along on the way back to the docks." She kept her voice flat and even. "You know how he is."

They weren't convinced.

"She's a lousy liar, isn't she?" Rowdy drawled, his deep baritone still sending shivers up her spine despite her anger.

She glanced over at him. His thumbs were hooked in the pockets of his jeans, long legs stiff and straight as he smiled in open amusement back at their parents. She drew in a deep, hard breath.

"I'm going up to bed." She smiled stiffly. "Rowdy can be a butt by himself. I don't feel like dealing with it."

She moved for the stairs, her hand gripping the balustrade when the phone rang. Her teeth clenched as she moved, jerking the phone up before Rowdy or Ray could reach it, staring back at them furiously as she brought it to her ear.

"Kelly, don't." Rowdy's voice was an enraged growl.

Lora
Leigh

“Hello.” She could deal with it. It was time she knew what was being said, rather than hiding. What had made Rowdy so determined to use her to push this bastard?

“You liked it, Kelly. I didn’t dirty you. You’re still precious, pure. You’re my good girl.” The hiss sent her stomach heaving. She stared at Rowdy’s chest, feeling rage, fear and a sudden overwhelming urge to commit murder rising inside her. “Don’t let him touch you, my good girl. He’s your brother. You’re my love. I finally found you, my sweet little love...”

“Are you my love?” he whispered.

Pain twisted inside her as she felt his penis nudging at her rear, his body holding her down, the smell of alcohol and the latex of the gloves that covered his hands filling her nostrils. She was screaming, fighting, feeling the painful penetration beginning as she finally worked the gag from her lips and screamed.

“You’re my love, Kelly. Don’t let him touch you. Don’t let him dirty my good girl...”

“Get. Fucked,” she enunciated clearly, hearing his cry, a painful whimper of crazed rage, before she slammed the phone down on the cradle. She stared back at her mother, Ray, Rowdy.

“How often does he call?” She had avoided the phone, knowing the calls were coming, thinking they would stop. Eventually. Eventually he would have to go away.

Her mother gripped Ray’s hand with both of hers, her blue-gray eyes filled with fear. “Often.”

“How often?” She had been hiding, trying to forget, trying to get past the nightmares that came with facing what had happened, the fear and the helplessness.

“At least a few a day,” her mother finally answered.

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“Marie.” Rowdy’s tone was warning.

“Douglas, let her face it,” Marie snapped. “If she wanted to continue to hide she wouldn’t be asking about it. She’s a grown woman, let her make her own decisions.”

“Yes, Douglas.” Kelly let her lips curve into a furious parody of a smile, mocking, challenging. “Shut up!”

He arched his brow slowly.

“He calls at least three or four times, sometimes more.” Her mother’s eyes were compassionate, filled with pain. “The answering machine in our room picks them up, as does the caller ID. They’re always made from pay phones, and never traceable. We turn in the tapes to the sheriff once a week as well as a list of the numbers that show up on the caller ID, if one shows up. Sometimes the number doesn’t show up at all. The sheriff has his deputy trying to trace them but they haven’t had any luck yet.”

“Does he always say...” She swallowed tightly. “What he did?”

“Kelly, dammit, that’s enough,” Rowdy growled. “What does it matter what he says?”

She stared back at her mother. Maria nodded slowly, her gaze filling with tears as Kelly felt her expression twist with fear and pain.

“I’m going to bed.” She couldn’t stand there any longer, she couldn’t bear the knowledge on their faces, the memory of the shame and pain her own foolishness had brought her.

She raced up the stairs, fearing Rowdy would follow her, grateful he didn’t. She slammed the door to her bedroom, twisting the lock on the handle before she stomped to her window and jerked the heavy curtains closed.

“Beg me for it,” he panted at her ear, holding her down. “You’re my good girl, Kelly. You’re mine, it’s okay to let me in. Let me in...”

Lora Leigh

She shook her head, gasping for air as she pushed her fingers through her hair, fighting the sobs that wanted to build in her throat.

Why couldn't he leave her alone? He had left the other girls alone for the most part, calling only once or twice to taunt them. He didn't call them daily. He didn't torment them. He didn't make them remember. Kelly had specifically asked the sheriff's deputy in charge of the investigation if the other women were being harassed. Why was he harassing her?

But she had, as Rowdy had argued, essentially been the one who got away. She had escaped the full rape, suffering only some cuts made to weaken her, and a terror that still brought her awake with a cry on her lips.

She didn't wear the clothes she used to because the marks were still there. Shorts and tank tops might reveal the nearly imperceptible white scars that still marred her arms, her shoulders and legs. Nakedness would reveal the ones on her buttocks. Deeper slices had been made there as he held her down, cutting her panties from her.

Her mother swore they weren't noticeable. But to Kelly, they were.

She still remembered the feel of that knife biting into her. Razor-sharp, the skin parting as cold pain streaked through her nervous system and the feel of hot blood as it began to pour from the wounds. The doctor had assured her that within a few years they would be gone entirely. She wondered if the memories would fade as well.

She paced through the dark room to the wide recliner that sat on the far wall, beneath the standing lamp she used to read by. Collapsing into it, she propped her elbows on her knees and dropped her head in her hands. The calls were coming more frequently than they had been the last time she asked. He was getting more dangerous, she knew that. Sensed it. She didn't need Rowdy's arguments earlier to understand that

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he was focused on her because he hadn't finished with her the night he tried to rape her. He was convincing himself he loved her. That she loved him. That she was meant to somehow be his.

She felt her stomach heave at the thought of it even as anger began to burn inside her. The fear was almost overwhelming at times, the memory of the pain, and the certainty that she was going to die, eating her alive. Until that night there had been no uncertainty about what she wanted. She knew Rowdy, knew his sex games, knew the sexual, carnal creature he had grown into. She had heard stories of their lush eroticism for years. And she saw how women watched them. The envy, the furtive hunger and shameful lust that raced through their eyes whenever the three men were near.

It wasn't as though she didn't dream about it. She jerked to her feet, pacing the dark room. Fantasized about it. Over the years she had awakened more nights than she could count, sweating, reaching out for a touch, a release that never came. But in those dreams, it was always Rowdy alone. They had not mirrored her waking fantasies or the carnal arousal she felt at the thought of the sex games she knew Rowdy participated in with his cousins.

"He's making me crazy," she muttered as she stalked from one end of her bedroom to the other.

As though the fact he was making her crazy was anything new. He had been doing that far longer than four years. From the day she first met him, from the moment the fifteen-year-old Rowdy had picked her up from where the bully had pushed her to the ground, she had loved him.

His eyes had been sober, intense, his voice gentle as he checked out her skinned knees. Then he had patted her shoulder and left her in Dawg's and Natches' care while he went after the boys who had stolen the hair bows out of her long hair.

Lora
Leigh

Her mother had scrimped in those days just to buy Kelly the pretty, girly little treasures she loved so much. The little pocketbooks, the pretty shoes, even if they were secondhand, and the hair bows.

It hadn't been long before he returned, her hair bows in hand. He had taken the little brush she had pulled from her backpack and brushed her hair and set the bows in place. They had been crooked, but she hadn't cared because Rowdy had put them there.

From that day on, at least one of the boys, usually all of them, were at the park in the evenings playing basketball when Kelly came to play. While her mother taught after-school tutoring, Kelly had been watched over. Two years later, Ray and Maria had married but Rowdy had already set the tone of how she was to be treated. No one hurt Kelly. It was that simple. And if anyone dared, they paid, one way or the other.

The past eight years had been miserable with him gone. With only occasional visits, the rare leaves he had taken were never enough to fill the gaps his absence left. And she had always dreamed of him. Held onto the thought of him. And as she matured, had fallen in love with him.

And she was tired of dreaming.

Shaking her head, she moved to her dresser. She pulled free one of the long sleeveless gowns she slept in and headed for the shower. A cold shower maybe, she thought as she adjusted the water. If she didn't get the memory of his kiss, his teasing out of her head, she would go crazy.

But even the cool water did nothing to still the idea he had planted in her head earlier. She was furious that he would play games to draw the stalker out, but she was smart enough to realize she wasn't safe. He could strike at anytime, and one day, he could get lucky.

She dried her hair, staring at the thin white scars on her shoulders and upper arms. There were four on one, three on the other. They

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showed clearly in the bright light of the bathroom, the dark blue gown emphasizing the marks.

At times she swore she could feel the ones on her buttocks.

She shook her head as she turned from the mirror, moving to the bedroom, her hand reaching out to flip off the light. She paused at the switch, her eyes narrowing at the sight that met her eyes.

Rowdy had obviously showered as well. Dressed in gray sweatpants, he was propped against her pillows, waiting on her, a scowl creasing his handsome face.

“That expression freezes on your face and you’ll be terrifying little kids on the streets,” she informed him as she flipped off the light and walked into the bedroom.

“I’m not leaving you alone at night, Kelly...”

“Windows were locked and so was the door,” she informed him as she stood by the side of the bed, her arms crossed over her breasts.

“And I got in the door anyway.”

She inhaled slowly, her gaze sliding to the shadowed outline of the door as Rowdy reached over and clicked on the dim lamp on the small table beside him.

The lock was in the standing position, still locked.

“How did you do that?” She turned back to him, pretending to ignore the fact that he was mouthwateringly sexy as he lay on the flowered comforter of her bed.

“It’s a piece of cake,” he grunted. “The window locks aren’t a lot harder to release. Until I can get the contractor out here to add to the security, you’re stuck with me.”

His expression was determined, stubborn. It was easy to tell when Rowdy had made up his mind and was refusing to change it. His

expression went completely bland and his sea-green eyes turned as cool as the arctic seas.

“Fine.” She shrugged. “You sleep here and I’ll sleep in your bed. No biggie.” She moved for the door.

“Open that door, Kelly, and your mom and my dad are going to get dragged into this little disagreement we’re having. Is that really what you want?”

Damn.

She stopped halfway to the door before turning back to him.

“Whose side would they take?” She opened her eyes wide, with mocking innocence. “Now I wonder what will they think about the little proposal you put to me earlier?”

He tilted his head, his eyes glittering with lust, with amused hunger.

“Dad would probably kick my ass out of the house,” he growled good-naturedly. “Is that what you really want?”

She turned away from him, restraining the urge to kick his butt herself. He was right. Ray would likely skin his hide if he ever learned his son’s proposal.

It wasn’t that she hadn’t expected it. She had. She had looked forward to it. How was that for some sick shit? She had actually looked forward to the day Rowdy would return and make good on the promise his kiss had made four years ago.

And she had known if he did, the possibility of just such a proposal would come. She had been ready for it. Prepared for it. What she hadn’t expected was the cold-blooded intention he had of using it to catch her rapist. As though the act no longer had anything to do with the two of them. As though the desire, the need and the hunger were a means to an end and nothing more. It was without feeling, without emotion. And God help her, whenever she was around Rowdy, she felt nothing but emotion.

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Swirls of it. Lava-hot, lightning forks of sensation that rippled over her nerve endings, rendering even the air itself a caress against her sensitive flesh.

And emotions? Oh she didn't even want to go there. Except she was already there. Arousal, uncertainty, fear of the unknown and a fear of losing the dream in the face of reality.

He was asking her to choose. She had wanted to be seduced.

She turned back to him, drawing in a slow, deep breath, her head lifting as she stared at the confident, cool countenance he presented to her.

“Get out of my bedroom.” She crossed her arms over her breasts, pressing her lips together as she glared at him. “I’m not one of the Nauti Boys playthings. And I’m not in the mood for games. Not yours or anyone else’s.”

She watched the surprise gleam in his eyes for just a second. For the first time in all the years she had known him, she had never surprised him, until now.

With a ripple of muscle, he moved from the bed, his gaze never leaving hers as he rose, coming to his feet and walking around the bed.

He was aroused. The thick length of his erection tented his sweatpants, drew her eyes and made her mouth water. She had fantasized about that erection. About all the things a woman could do with such a prime piece of flesh.

She let her eyes linger on the proof of that arousal before lifting them to his eyes again. He was close. So close she could smell the clean, male scent of him. Dial soap and heated male arousal.

She stood still as he stalked around her, the movements deliberate, predatory. Suddenly, he wasn't the laid-back, patiently amused Rowdy

she had always known. She could feel the purpose, the male intent that poured from him.

Her breath caught as he paused behind her, his hand reaching up to allow his fingers to smooth her hair back over her shoulder, to bare the shell of her ear.

“You’re mine.” She jumped at his whispered response. “And, baby, I do like to play.” His hands ran down her arms, creating a friction of heat as she felt his lips at her shoulders. “I guess that makes you my playmate, if not my plaything.”

Her eyes widened a second before she jerked out of his hold, turning back to him furiously.

“I don’t think so.” She gave him a tight, angry smile. Stupid male confidence, she fumed.

He tilted his head, the beginnings of a smile twitching at the corners of his lips.

“I could convince you.” No doubt.

She snorted as though it weren’t possible. Unfortunately, he probably could convince her, but at what cost to her soul?

“Go get in your own bed, Rowdy. Don’t make me cause a scene. Ray wouldn’t like it.” She walked to hers, flipping back the blankets and moving into the comfort of the mattress, ignoring him as though he didn’t matter. “Good night.”

He chuckled, the sound washing through the room, the lazy humor of the sexual animal she knew he was. She looked back at him, fighting to control her breathing, the excitement and adrenaline surging through her.

“You’ve changed,” he murmured as he paced to the other side of the bed, staring down at her, aroused, determined.

NAUTI BUOY

“I haven’t changed at all, Rowdy.” She pulled the blankets to her waist as she sat propped against the pillows. “Perhaps you just never really knew me.” She raised her brows in emphasis. “That’s always a possibility.”

“You enjoyed waking up with me,” he accused. “You don’t want to throw me out.”

That one was a no-brainer. No, she didn’t want to throw him out. She wanted to curl against him and sleep as fearlessly as she had the night before and awaken as warm and protected as she had that morning.

She lifted her chin, refusing to answer him, fighting to hold his knowing stare as he watched her from beneath the veil of his thick, black lashes.

“Go play with someone else.” She might have to kill him if he tried. “I’m not interested in the games.”

“And you think this is a game?” He scowled down at her, his hands bracing on his powerful hips as his eyes began to simmer with irritation.

“I think it is for you,” she answered somberly. “And I’m not a game. Don’t play games with me, Rowdy. Not now, not ever.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rowdy leaned forward, muscular arms propping him up on the mattress as he stared into her eyes. Kelly fought the need to glance away from him, to deny the hold he had on her. There was no turning away from him. He mesmerized her, made her hungry, made her need.

“I’m not scared of you, Rowdy,” she tried to smirk back at him. “Don’t try to intimidate me.”

“If you don’t like games, then don’t play them.” His voice was dangerously, warningly soft. “You want something from me, then tell me what you want.”

Her teeth clenched in anger.

“Fine,” she snapped. “I want you out of my bedroom and out of my face. Go away.” She made a shooping motion with her hand then stared at him in shock as his hand whipped out, catching her wrist.

Her heart jumped to her throat as he brought her fingers to his mouth, rubbed them against the velvet roughness of his lips before opening them and licking over the pads with a subtle flick of his tongue. She was helpless. Struck dumb by the sheer sensuality of watching him caress nothing but her fingertips. Feeling the warmth of his lips, the flickering heat of his tongue, the sensual nip of his teeth.

Each caress sent flares of heat exploding with sensual devastation throughout her body. Her nipples were so hard, the nerves there so sensitized that they were sending rippling flares of response straight to

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her womb, convulsing it with an erotic punch of pleasure. The sensation sent heated moisture spilling from her vagina.

“Rowdy...” She was shocked at the whimper in her voice, at her inability to pull away from him.

He came closer. Kneeling on the bed, still holding her hand, he pulled her to him until she was on her knees before him.

He took her other wrist, placing her palms against his chest before his hands smoothed up her arms, over her shoulders, down her back to her hips. She trembled, shuddering at the light caress; it could have been firmer, could have been more destructive. It was subtle instead. Soft. Giving her the chance to break away, knowing she couldn't. That she wouldn't.

“You're mine,” he whispered again as his head lowered.

She stared back at him, fighting to breathe, fighting against the desires raging inside her. She was helpless against his touch, against the hunger that gleamed in his eyes.

Just as she became helpless against his kiss.

His lips covered hers, slowly at first. So slowly, too slowly. They stroked over hers, his tongue flickering out to lave them a second before his teeth caught the lower curve, nipping at it as he watched her.

Her breathing hitched as she felt his hands bunch in the material of the gown at her hips. It drew slowly up her thighs, working over her flesh, baring her to his hands.

“Easy,” he whispered against her lips. “Just feel, Kelly. Feel for me. Burn for me...”

She felt cool air caress her thighs, then his hands against her naked flesh, calloused, heated as his lips slanted over hers and he stole her mind with his kiss.

Deep, drugging kisses. Pleasure tore through her system, consumed her to the point that the knowledge that she was being lowered, laid beneath him barely registered in her mind. All she knew was the pleasure. The feel of his hard body above her, his hands smoothing over her bare thighs, her hips, then working on the tiny buttons at the bodice while his kisses ravished her lips.

She was drowning in him. The taste of him. His touch. The muted male sounds of hunger and pleasure as she began to touch him. She needed to touch him. To immerse herself in every sensual sensation she could consume. Her nervous system was rioting with the chaotic impulses rushing through them. The air around them became heated, steamy with the desperation that infused each kiss, each touch.

“God, you taste sweet.” His lips tore from hers, his breathing heavy, hard as they moved to her neck.

She tilted her neck, panting for air as she felt his teeth rake down the sensitive column, then felt the brush of cool air over her naked breasts.

As his head lifted, she opened her eyes, staring back at him in dazed fascination as his gaze dropped to her breasts. He had pulled apart the unbuttoned edges of her gown, displaying the swollen, hard-tipped mounds of her breasts.

The expression on his face was pure, carnal hunger. His eyes heavy-lidded, his lips moist and swollen from their kisses, his cheekbones flushed a brick-red.

As though suspended between dream and reality, she watched as his head lowered, her eyes widening, a strangled groan leaving her lips as his tongue covered one spiked, aroused nipple.

Reaction shot through her, jerking at her body as her hands tightened on his neck, her back arching. This was heaven. It was ecstasy. The most pleasure she had ever known in her life.

NAUTI BUOY

His tongue lashed at the hard point as he sucked the nerve-laden flesh into his mouth, drawing on her deeply, creating a pleasure-pain sensation that had a startled cry leaving her lips.

Lips he immediately covered, stilling the aroused cries as his fingers replaced his mouth. Tweaking at the tender tips, causing her to writhe beneath him as she fought to get closer, to still the ache burning between her thighs.

“Shh. Easy.” His groan was whispered against her lips, his voice dark, desperate. “Damn, Kelly. I can’t take you here. Dad will kill me.”

“I’ll kill you if you don’t.” His chest pressed against her breasts, rasped her nipples as she fought to breathe. “Don’t stop, Rowdy, please.” His hand smoothed down to her thigh, his fingers close, so close to where she needed them. She gazed back at him pleadingly, feeling her vagina ripple with need, the muscles clenching in desperation.

“If I take you, you’re going to scream,” he whispered, his eyes darkening, a ravenous lust filling his expression. “I want to hear every cry that leaves your lips, Kelly. Every scream as you come around me. I can’t do that here. We can’t do that here. You know that.”

She shook her head, a weak whimper passing her lips.

“I’ve waited too long, Rowdy.”

“Shh.” His kiss was gentle and much too short as he eased her gown over her thighs and then covered her breasts once again. “Tomorrow. We’ll go out on the boat,” he whispered, pushing her hair back before moving slowly to her side and pulling her into his arms.

She laid her head against his chest, fighting to regulate her breathing, to tear herself back from the endless spiral of heat he had thrown her into.

“That wasn’t fair,” she whispered as he lifted the sheet over them. “You’re supposed to be sleeping in your own bed.”

Lora
Leigh

She was too weak to make him move now, too desperate for his touch, any touch, to force him from her bed.

“Go to sleep.” His arms contracted around her. “I’d be fighting shadows if I slept away from you, Kelly. Let me hold you. Know you’re okay.”

She pressed her lips to his chest. “It wasn’t your fault, Rowdy,” she told him softly, wondering at the edge of remorse she heard in his voice.

He was silent, but his hands still stroked her back, soothing now, where seconds before they had been arousing.

“Just let me hold you,” he repeated. “Sleep beside me, Kelly. We’ll argue out the rest of it later.”

“You want me to sleep?” She sighed, shaking her head. “Rowdy, I’m never going to sleep with your hard-on poking at my belly all night.”

“Sure you can,” he chuckled at her ear. “You need your rest, baby. Because tomorrow night, I really wouldn’t bet on you getting any sleep at all.”

She was silent then, lying against him, feeling his arms surrounding her, protecting her. God, what was she doing? She had lived and breathed for the day Rowdy would return and see her as more than just a pesky little girl. That he would see her as a woman, as his woman. And here he was, ready to claim her, and she was fighting it, fighting him. Or was she fighting herself?

“This isn’t a game, Kelly.” His voice was soft, surrounding her, causing her eyelids to flutter in pleasure as it stroked over her senses.

“I’m deadly serious about this. About us. I wasn’t joking when I said you were mine. I came home to claim you, if that’s what you still want.”

“Maybe it doesn’t work that way, Rowdy.” Or did it? “I want you until I can’t think, can’t breathe. But you’re different now.”

NAUTI BUOY

“I’m no different than I’ve ever been and you know it.” His voice hardened. “You don’t like the fact that I’m willing to do whatever it takes to protect you. You want everything tied up in roses and sweet promises. I can give you that, to a point. But I won’t ignore the danger. And you have to accept that. This will be taken care of.”

He wasn’t angry; he wasn’t trying to convince her. He was telling her.

“You’re talking about using me. Me and whatever we share between us sexually, flaunting it in front of him to provoke him.” That terrified her more than she wanted to admit.

“It’s the quickest way to finish this.”

“Maybe the quickest way isn’t always the best.” She didn’t know if she wanted to take that step, if she wanted to force a madman’s hand.

“Or maybe you think you can hide whatever this relationship brings.” His voice hardened. “Do you believe that’s possible, Kelly? Whether you make the choice to immerse yourself in everything I can give you, or not, doesn’t make a difference. Everyone is going to believe you are. He’ll believe you are. My plan will just flush him out quicker, that’s all. But we’ll play it however you choose.”

She didn’t like the easy, matter-of-fact way he said that. She could feel a “but” in there somewhere, she just had to find it.

“You could have at least tried to hide that part of your sex life from the world,” she finally sighed with an edge of irritation.

“Why?” He sounded genuinely curious now. “Kelly, I’m who I am. I don’t hide that, from anyone. I don’t flaunt it. I don’t advertise it. Others have. What happens between you and me I expect will stay between you and me. You don’t advertise yourself, and you won’t advertise our relationship. Why should we do without something we might enjoy because of what others suspect, or think?”

She hated it when he pulled logic into his arguments with her. He had always done that.

“Because I’m scared,” she whispered, rolling away from him to sit on the side of the bed.

She lowered her head, staring at the carpet at her feet, trying to reconcile things within herself that she never thought she would have to face. She thought Rowdy would seduce her into what he wanted from her, she hadn’t expected to have to make the choice. She hadn’t expected to have to risk not just her own life, but his as well in being with him.

“Of me?”

“Of myself. Of what could happen.” She moved to her feet, pacing away from the bed as she rubbed at the chill that rushed over her arms. “You’re talking about pushing someone who isn’t sane. And in the same breath...” She shook her head.

“I’m asking you to make a decision,” he finished for her. “Not about your safety but about something much more important to you. Your sexuality.”

“I’m still a virgin.” Her laughter was self-mocking. “I expected something a little more romantic, Rowdy.”

“And you deserved something a hell of a lot more romantic, Kelly.” He sighed. “But catching this stalker is more important than romance. And I’m not going to play games with you. From the beginning, we won’t be alone. If it doesn’t happen for you with Dawg and Natches, then we have to at least give the impression of it. We can’t afford to let this guy catch us unawares, I can’t afford to let him hurt you again, because God as my witness, my sanity won’t survive it, Kelly.”

“God!” She pushed her fingers through her hair, turning from him, trying to ignore the fact that she wasn’t insulted, wasn’t offended or

NAUTI BUOY

furious. “You’re not talking about a one-time deal, are you?” She kept her back to him, kept her expression hidden.

“No. I’m not.”

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The rumors had started when they were in their teens. Three young men, young gods with a charisma and sexuality who had been the downfall of a local divorcee. It had begun then, at an age that none of the three men would reveal. Too young, Rowdy knew. But damn, it had been hot that summer, and not just from the sun. Loren Barnes had been a quiet, school-marmish lady on the outside, but inside she had been hotter than fireworks in July.

She had taken three uncertain virgin boys and, in a few short months, taught them to be men well before their time. All together. All at once. One soft female body, her approval and cries of pleasure penetrating their lust-hazed minds as they took her lessons and drove her to the brink of passion with them.

She taught them how to romance, how to tease, how to cajole, how to subtly drive a woman crazy and make her so wet the slick essence of her would dampen her thighs. She had taught them how much more pleasure they could bring together than alone. And to the Mackay boys, that was what it was all about.

Women were treasures, precious gifts of never-ending excitement, sweetly scented flesh and mysterious motives. They were a challenge and a comfort, a balm to the soul and an adventure like nothing else man had ever created. They were infinitely strong, and yet infinitely vulnerable. Rowdy, Dawg and Natches had realized years before that

Lora
Leigh

alone they couldn't give the pleasure they could together, but also, they couldn't protect as well.

Ironically, it was Kelly who taught them that lesson. As a kid, keeping up with her had been practically impossible for just one of them. It took the three of them to keep her safe, to keep her happy as she grew up. Watching for the bullies who liked to pick on her because she was poor, because she was pretty as a picture and sweetly gentle. And they wanted to keep her that way.

She was also impetuous, defiant and smart as a whip. There had been nothing sexual involved. She amused them, made them laugh, and challenged them to keep up with her with an innocent thirst for life and adventure that appealed to the teenagers. After her mother married Ray, she was then "family", as well.

As she grew older, as they grew older, things had slowly shifted for all of them. Four years ago it had come to a head. She had just turned twenty, hotter than fireworks and as tempting as sin itself. The three of them had been a little too drunk, a little too wild that night. And she had been there.

"Make up your mind, Rowdy. You don't put a claim on her, one of us is going to." Natches' eyes had followed her as she laughed and danced beneath the brilliance of a full summer moon during the party.

"She's still too young." He had denied the need, as well as the challenge.

"Keeping the local boys off her ass is getting harder," Dawg had muttered. "I'm tired of bruising my knuckles on their thick skulls. Make up your mind. If you don't intend to keep her, one of us will."

He grimaced, finished his beer then crumpled the can.

"She's too fucking young and the two of you know it," he snapped. "She's not ready for it."

NAUTI BUOY

“She’s old enough to make the choice,” Natches had drawled. “You’re going back to the Marines and that’s fine. But if she’s not willing to wait on you, then we aren’t either. Claim her man, or one of us will.”

She had been like a fire in midnight. He had to make her want to wait on him. He had to ensure her need for him. And he had done that. But in doing it, he had cemented his need for her.

As he held her in the darkness of the night, the soft warmth of her pressed into his chest, he knew her earlier protest was the key to her soul. The romance. She needed the romance, she deserved it, but God knew he had no idea how to make it romantic. He could give her pleasure. Enough pleasure to leave her screaming in orgasm, begging for more. But the heart of the woman needed more. A lesson Loren had taught them, but one they had forgotten over the years.

The women they had drawn to them hadn’t been ones to need the romance, or even want it.

For the first time in his life Rowdy felt helpless. Eliminating the threat to her was imperative. And he wasn’t going to lie to her. Not Kelly. She deserved more than that.

“You’re not asleep.” Her whisper was as soft as a breath.

“Neither are you.” He sighed, knowing her mind had been running as fast as his.

They hadn’t said much since that final question. She had drawn in a deep, hard breath, informed him she was going to sleep then curled into his arms and turned out the lights. But she hadn’t gone to sleep any more than he had.

“Why do you do it?” she finally asked. He didn’t have to ask what she was talking about. It was a question he had hoped she wouldn’t ask. Yet he had known she would.

He slid his hand from her hip to her stomach, feeling the muscles flutter beneath his palm.

“A man’s pleasure comes from his woman’s,” he whispered. “Because we learned how much better it can be for a woman when no part of her body is neglected. Because we learned as young men how much easier it is to protect what’s ours when we work together. Hell Kelly, I could give you a thousand reasons and none of them would really make sense. Because it’s who we are, what we are.”

“Will it end?” He knew where she was going, what she would eventually ask.

“Only if you want it to. My needs aren’t more important than yours. It won’t be every time. It won’t be an either-or.”

She was silent for long moments. He closed his eyes, grimacing in painful awareness of the can of worms he had opened here.

“And when they find the woman they want for their own? What then?”

“It’s not an either-or,” he repeated. “I’ll do nothing you can’t live with, Kelly. Ever.”

“But you’ll want to.” Her voice lowered further. “If Dawg or Natches found a woman they wanted for their own, then you’d want to be a part of it, wouldn’t you, Rowdy?”

“No more than you would miss losing a part of what you’ll become used to if it’s something you’ll enjoy as much as I think you will.” There was no way to reassure her, and God knew he wanted to.

He felt her flinch against him.

“You would touch another woman?”

“I would never do anything that would jeopardize us.” That wasn’t acceptable. “Ever, Kelly. Not at any time.”

NAUTI BUOY

As he stared into the darkness, he thought of her touch, her kiss.
Could he touch another woman? At any time?

“So it would be my choice?”

“It would be your choice.”

“But you would still want to.” It wasn’t a question.

“I don’t know.” He couldn’t lie to her. He wouldn’t lie to her, even though he was terrified of losing her.

He caressed her abdomen as he held her, as silence filled the room once again.

“This might not work.” Her voice trembled with an awareness of what she might be looking at. “I don’t know if I can do that. I don’t know if I could handle your need to do it.”

He sighed heavily into her hair, drawing her closer, knowing he could be risking both their hearts with the hungers that tormented him. It was the reason he had left four years before, the reason he couldn’t begin this relationship with anything less than the truth.

“I can live without it,” he told her softly. “I don’t know if I could live without you, Kelly. Not now. Not after the years I’ve spent needing you. I’ll give you everything I am, as much as you want. That’s all I can do.”

She turned to him then, her soft gray eyes dark in the dim light of the room as he stared into the shadowed expanse of her face.

“The first time...”

He closed his eyes. “However you want it.”

Bonding came in so many ways. He would have had Dawg and Natches there, but he wouldn’t push her. He couldn’t push her. Not now.

“You want them there.”

His eyes flew open at the soft statement.

“I want them there,” he affirmed, knowing her safety demanded nothing less. He ignored the possessiveness raging inside him.

“Kelly, I

want everything for you, and I know that's hard to understand. The first time, it's special for a woman. It begins a bonding with her lover, one that never really dies. It's why I've never taken a virgin, never fooled with a woman who didn't know the score, until you."

He felt the shiver that raced over her, the little tremor of fear, or response, he wasn't certain.

"You want me to have that, with them?" The uncertainty in her voice, the edge of hurt broke his heart.

"Kelly, listen to me." He framed the side of her face with his hand, his thumb smoothing over her cheek. "I'm not going to do a damned thing that's going to hurt you or make you uncomfortable. Baby, it won't be good for me, or for Dawg and Natches, if it isn't something you want with everything inside you. This is your choice. The perception of it isn't."

"But you want it," she said fiercely.

"Don't make excuses." He could feel it in her then, the need to have the choice taken from her, to be seduced. "I'm not making them and I won't let you. Think about it, Kelly. Decide what you want, what you need. I'm not a kid, and you've known me too long to be able to fool yourself about me. You've known, you wanted to sugarcoat it, pretend it wasn't real, but you knew. Now decide what you want, because I won't make that decision for you. Not now, not ever. I love you, baby, but I can't love you enough for both of us."

He felt her then, her fingers moving against his chest, leaving a path of fire in their wake as they smoothed over his chest.

"Can you do anything without your cousins?" she asked. "Or do you need their help all the time, Rowdy?"

Damn. Her fingers were at his abdomen now, her nails raking over his flesh, tracing the skin above the waistband of his sweatpants.

Impetuous. Defiant. An adventure. That was Kelly.

NAUTI BUOY

His hand trapped hers, holding it still against him, his eyes narrowing on her in the darkness.

“Anywhere but here,” he growled. “Now go to sleep, minx. I’ll be damned if I’ll have our parents hearing us in here screwing our brains out. I’m right fond of keeping my private parts intact if it’s all the same to you.”

She chuckled, flipped around, then horror of all horrors, because his control was edging toward non-existent, that curvy little ass tucked into his hips, cushioning the raging fullness of his cock. Son of a bitch.

“Good night, Rowdy.” Her husky little purr nearly had him coming in his pants. “Maybe tomorrow we’ll see what you can actually do without your cousins around to approve of it.”

A grin tilted his lips. Oh, he’d show her all right, in ways she could never imagine.

CHAPTER NINE

Kelly stared at the bed as she came from the shower the next morning. It was perfectly made, the flowered comforter smoothed out, the pillows neatly stacked at the headboard. And lying at the bottom of the mattress was clothing she hadn't worn since the attack.

The low-rise jeans were patched and faded, and she knew exactly how low they were. The waistband barely reached her hipbones, with the snap in the front dipping lower nearly an inch.

The white vest-style summer shirt rose above her navel, and would reveal the belly ring that lay glittering on top of the shirt. The brilliant green emerald twinkled and gleamed beneath a shaft of sunlight coming in from the window. She had chosen that particular gem because of its resemblance to Rowdy's eyes.

Kelly drew in a deep breath before turning her head to stare at Rowdy where he sat in the recliner. Leaning forward, his arms resting on his knees, he watched her silently, emotion swirling in his gaze. Compassion, understanding, determination.

She stepped closer to the bed, turning back to stare at the clothes. She had been too scared to wear them before, terrified that how she dressed had somehow caused the attack.

She was still scared, but as she stood there, she realized that the terror that had often filled her before Rowdy's return wasn't there now.

NAUTI BUOY

Just as he had protected her from those bullies years before, she knew he would protect her now.

She cleared her throat before speaking.

“You’re certain you can catch him?” She picked up the belly ring, staring down at it intently.

“I’m certain, Kelly.” His voice was dark, deep, confident.

“Do you know who it is?” She knew Rowdy, and his cousins. And she knew Dawg and Natches had been investigating the attack since it happened.

“Not yet. But we will. He’s not sane enough to hide for long.”

Could she be a woman again, rather than a child hiding? Kelly admitted, if only silently, that the woman had been protesting the baggy clothes and the lack of adventure for a year now. She was ready to return, just as the psychologist had warned her she would be.

She nodded slowly. “I need to go to town today. To the spa.” The intimate waxing had been put off too long.

Tension began to sizzle in the room. She knew he would know what it meant. Rowdy was an expert at a woman’s body and all the various procedures they used to tempt a man.

“I’d like to drive you in.” His voice was hoarse. “We could pick up dinner later and go out on the lake.”

She inhaled roughly before nodding. She could feel her insides quivering with the knowledge that once he got her out on the lake, she would be in his bed.

“That sounds good,” she said as she turned back to him slowly.

She dropped the towel that covered her, watched his eyes flame, his face flush and his body come to immediate attention as she stood before him.

“It’s hard to put in.” She held the belly ring out to him. “Would you help me?”

“Good God!” His gaze moved to hers slowly. “Dad’s home, Kelly. If I fuck you here, he’ll kill me.”

“I didn’t ask you to fuck me, Rowdy.” She kept her voice low, intimate as she moved to him. “I asked you to put the ring in.” She extended her arm, her fingers holding the glittering gem.

She loved teasing Rowdy, always had. The look in his eyes made her breathless, showed his hunger. It was the reason she had always waited on him, always known she belonged to him. For years, every time he looked at her, he ate her with his eyes, consumed her with the hunger in them. Just as he did now.

Without speaking, he moved forward, spreading his legs before his hand gripped her hips, pulling her forward. His hands were hot on her flesh, rasping against her, sending sizzling impulses of pleasure raking over her nerve endings.

“Give me the ring.” His expression was heavy with sensual intent as he took the ring from her fingers.

Kelly stood still, silent as he inserted the curved metal into the tiny hole before snapping the ball end in place. But he didn’t stop touching her there. He positioned the emerald teardrop in place over the entrance to her navel before his fingertips skimmed over her lower belly.

Her womb convulsed beneath his fingers as pleasure tore through her. Lower, she felt the curves of her pussy dampen further than they already were as her vagina pulsed in heavy need.

“Look how pretty,” he whispered, his eyes centering between her thighs as her fingers gripped his shoulders and her knees trembled. “You’re wet for me, Kelly.”

NAUTI BUOY

“I’m always wet for you. I’ve been wet for you for years, Rowdy,” she whimpered.

She realized then the mistake she had made in teasing him. She was too hungry, needed him too much to tempt what she knew she couldn’t have beneath Ray’s roof.

She stared down at Rowdy in a haze of need as he shifted, his head coming closer, his lips pressing into her lower belly as she gasped at the contact. Long-fingered hands smoothed down her hips to her thighs, nudging them apart gently before raising his head. He stared at the flushed folds of her mound. His thumb caressed over the tattoo just above her pussy. The eagle in flight, one wing dipping toward her damp flesh.

“I want to taste you, Kelly,” he groaned, his voice roughening further. “I want to lay you down, spread those pretty legs and lick all that soft syrup from you.”

Weakness flooded her, taking her breath, her senses, and turning them into one hard ache for just that.

“You’re so wet.” The fingers of one hand trailed around her thigh, then slid slowly, so slowly, but with destructive results, through the thick wetness that lay between the soft folds of flesh.

“Rowdy,” she breathed, her fingers sliding to his hair as his head dipped to her belly again. “Please touch me. Please.”

She had waited so long, dreamed so desperately of his touch that now that it was happening, she feared it was just another dream.

“I’m going to do more than touch you, baby,” he whispered as his lips moved closer to the pounding ache of her clit. “I’m going to touch you, taste you, I’m going to make you scream for me, Kelly. Beg for more.”

Okay. She could handle that.

“Now.”

She felt his chuckle, the sound rasping, filled with hunger as his fingers circled her clit. Her hips arched forward as a low cry left her lips. Need flamed inside her with an intensity that drove anything else from her mind.

“Shhh, baby,” he groaned, his fingers parting her. “Remember Ray.”
Ray who?

His breath whispered over the damp, throbbing bud, sending her senses reeling as a knock sounded at the door. Kelly jerked in Rowdy’s grip as she felt him tense beneath her hold.

“Rowdy, I’m heading out. I need to talk to you before I leave,” Ray called through the thick panel. “Get out here, boy, so I can get to work.”

She heard his footsteps retreating as Rowdy’s fingers slowly slid from her flesh.

“Damn,” he breathed out, moving her back as he lifted his head to stare back at her. “You’re dangerous, darlin’.”

“Don’t stop.” Kelly shook her head as he rose from the chair, his hands smoothing up her back, yet holding her from him.

“I’ll take you to the spa,” he whispered. “And later, I’ll show you how much I love having your sweet pussy bare to me. Get dressed, baby, so we can escape for a while.”

His lips whispered over hers, ignoring her silent plea for more as her lips parted.

“Get dressed,” he told her again, moving back. “Stop driving me crazy, baby. Let’s get out of here.”

Okay, two could play this game, Kelly was certain. With narrowed eyes she watched as Rowdy stalked from the bedroom, his body tight with tension and the bulge in his pants so apparent he had pulled the tail of his white cotton shirt free of his pants to cover it. She was sure there was no way Ray wouldn’t be aware of his son’s problem.

NAUTI BUOY

She snickered at the thought of the tough Rowdy squirming beneath his father's gaze. Ray was a good guy, but she knew how he was. He hadn't wanted this relationship to develop between her and Rowdy, neither had her mother, though she wasn't certain why. She had loved Rowdy forever, and despite Ray and her mother's marriage, she had never understood the reasons for their disapproval.

Twenty minutes later, dressed and feeling more feminine and less afraid than she had in months, Kelly picked up her phone and called the spa. Marla Reiner, her favorite technician, was available and eager to see Kelly returning to her regular visits. With a little maneuvering, Marla managed to schedule her right in and disconnected the call with a cheery goodbye.

Drawing in a deep breath, Kelly placed her hand on her stomach to still the butterflies racing through her system before she moved to her bedroom door and headed downstairs.

In the back of her mind was the knowledge that nothing would ever be the same from this day on. Once Rowdy had her, she knew what would happen. Questions still plagued her, as did an instinctive discomfort regarding the idea that Rowdy could ever want to touch another woman, no matter the relationship that developed between her and his cousins.

God, it was so strange having that thought in her mind. It had always stayed distant, an awareness of what could happen if she ever got into Rowdy's bed. There wouldn't be just one man, but three pleasuring her. Now that it could be reality, she found herself both curious and hesitant. Aroused and frightened. But Kelly knew she wasn't willing to draw back. Maybe she was different, maybe she wasn't.

For years rumors had abounded of the Mackay cousins. Women whispered their names with naughty pleasure at the thought of them.

**Lora
Leigh**

Her friends had jokingly informed her that she was insane for not moving into Dawg's or Natches' bed while Rowdy was in the service.

She could have. But deep inside she knew that who her heart belonged to made a difference. Alone, Dawg and Natches held no appeal for her. But with Rowdy...

She stepped into the kitchen, watching as he turned to face her, his deep green eyes approving, and hungry.

She belonged to Rowdy.

ad

God, she was gorgeous. Rowdy couldn't keep his eyes off her as he drove the truck into Somerset, listening to her soft voice catching him up on the local gossip.

Johnny Flowers traded wives with his worst enemy, Buck Layne. Crista Jansen was back home and had moved into her parents' home place outside of town. No one knew why she had returned to town after years away, but everyone was gossiping about it. Rowdy bet Dawg was interested in that one. He had been hot as hell for Crista before she ran off to college eight years before.

One of Rowdy's old girlfriends now owned the café he and Dawg and Natches had frequented before Rowdy left, and for the most part, for all the things that had changed, everything was pretty much the same. It was one of the things Rowdy loved about home. It was familiar, endearing.

Lake Cumberland was a place of mystery and beauty, and the small towns that surrounded it were filled with friends and family and memories that had gotten him through the last eight years in the service.

And memories of Kelly.

NAUTI BUOY

He glanced at her again, the light reflecting off the emerald at her pretty belly drawing his gaze again. It made his dick hard. Damn, he was dying for her, his cock was throbbing like a toothache in his jeans and his mouth watering for the taste of her.

He entered the city limits, navigating the summer traffic as he drove to the popular spa the women in town seemed to flock to.

“Here you go.” He pulled into an empty space in front of the entrance and turned to her. “I programmed my number into your cell phone, call me before you leave. I’m meeting Dawg and Natches at the café up the street, so I won’t be far.”

Those kissable lips curved into a slow, promising smile as she leaned close.

“I bet I could walk down the street all by myself, Rowdy,” she whispered teasingly, sending a jolt of fear to slice through his soul.

“No!” He hadn’t meant his voice to be so harsh, but the slight flinch and the spark of fear and anger that filled her eyes assured him he was much harsher than he intended to be.

Rowdy drew in a quick, hard breath before pushing his fingers through his hair, frustration eating him alive.

“I’m sorry, baby,” he growled, his voice still rougher than he wanted. “Don’t scare me like that. Give me a while, okay?” He gave her a quick, comforting smile. “Let me protect you, Kelly.”

She sat against the door now, her gray eyes quiet, her expression closed until she glanced away and lowered her head.

“I understand, Rowdy,” she finally sighed. “But I’m tired of hiding.” She turned back to him, a frown edging at her brows. “I’m tired of letting him win.”

And she was alternately breaking his heart and terrifying him. He knew Kelly. She was impetuous, stubborn, and once she made up her mind, she rarely changed it.

“Kelly, promise me you’ll call me before you leave.” He reached out to her, his fingers running down her cheek, feeling the small quiver of response that ran through her. “Don’t fight me on this, please. He’s a madman...”

“I’m not crazy.” She brushed his hand away as she glared back at him. “I’ll call you, Rowdy. But I don’t think he’s going to try anything in broad daylight. It would be too risky.”

“Point taken.” He nodded. “But we can’t be certain, either. Until I know what we’re dealing with, we’re going to be careful.”

“So says the man who wants to poke at the crazy person by letting him think I’m taking on the Mackay cousins all at once,” she reminded him. “I think walking down the street is a hell of a lot safer.”

“Exactly why you shouldn’t be walking down the street alone,” he pointed out softly. “He knows I have you now, Kelly. Which means Dawg and Natches aren’t far behind, in his eyes. From here on out, we can’t underestimate him. We take nothing for granted.”

Rowdy forcibly tamped down the violence rising inside him. As he watched her vulnerable face, seeing the need to live in her eyes, the growing desperation that lurked just beyond the shadowed gray depths, he wanted to kill. He knew if he ever managed to get hold of the bastard who dared to touch her, then he would kill him. There would be nothing left for justice to convict.

“Fine. I’ll call you before I leave,” she snapped with a spark of anger he couldn’t blame her for. “But don’t take forever to pick me up if you don’t mind. I have a few other things I’d like to do while I’m in town.”

NAUTI BUOY

She reached out to grip the door handle. Just as fast Rowdy caught her arm, causing her to turn back to him. His hand moved, his fingers threading through her hair as he drew her head back and captured her lips quickly with his.

Summer heat, lightning and the sweet taste of a woman's passion met his hunger, tightening his gut with lust. He couldn't wait to get her beneath him. At that moment, nothing mattered except getting through the rest of the day until he could get her to the houseboat and the large bed awaiting them there.

He forced himself to release her seconds later, staring into her dazed features with a satisfaction so intense it caused his balls to tighten.

"That wasn't fair." She smiled despite the chastisement, her cheeks flushed with warmth and her breathing ragged.

"Sure it was," he whispered, pulling back from her, despite the need to wrap her in his arms and run away with her. He wanted to hide her. To make certain no one could ever touch her again. "I need to touch you, babe. That's always fair considering how long I've waited to do it."

She snorted at that before pushing her fingers through her hair and flashing him a disgruntled look. "No one made you wait."

She was out of the truck before he could stop her, tossing him a cheery smile before crossing the sidewalk and entering the spa.

Rowdy breathed out roughly. She was going to be the death of him, there was just no other way about it. With her shining innocence, tempting eyes and sweetly rounded body, he knew she was capable of making him curse as often as he sighed in need.

He gave his head a quick jerk before reversing from the parking spot and driving further down the street to the café he had told Dawg and Natches to meet him in.

Reginald's Café was newly remodeled, the inside cool and welcoming as he entered. Dawg and Natches were waiting at one of the back tables, steaming cups of coffee sitting in front of them.

"Bout time you got here, cuz," Dawg grunted as he slid into the chair across from him. "I thought we were gonna have to come down there and rescue Kelly ourselves from your clutches."

Natches chuckled as Rowdy leaned back in his chair and watched his cousin curiously. Dawg had changed over the years, more than any of them, Rowdy sometimes thought. He was darker, despite the joviality, quieter than he used to be.

Rowdy didn't know what had happened during the years he spent in the Marines, but it had affected his cousin. Natches was just as lazy as always, his smile quiet, his eyes watchful. Of course, none of them were as relaxed, as carefree as they used to be.

There was a darkness in them that had always lurked just beneath the surface. A difference that separated them from other men, made them appear wilder, more dangerous. And in ways they were more dangerous. They had proved that overseas.

"What's up?" Rowdy could tell there was more going on than a general bad mood.

Dawg leaned forward, his eyes narrowed.

"You had company outside last night." Dawg's voice was low. "On that little knob above the house that looks into Kelly's room. I was checking it out this morning before heading here. He must have been there all night. The grass was indented where he sat, with claw marks at the side where the bastard dug his fingers into the ground. He's getting pissed."

And they had no idea who he was. Fuck.

NAUTI BUOY

“Where do we go from here, Rowdy?” Natches watched him with a spark of excitement in his eyes that Rowdy knew was more due to the thought of a good fight as much as it was the chance of touching Kelly.

“I’m taking her back to the boat this evening,” he answered. “We’ll head out to the cove. We should be staying the night. We’ll see how brave he wants to get. We’ll have dinner on the boat. Let the bastard think we’re all having a fine time. After dark the two of you can slip on shore and I’ll pull further out into the water. We’ll see what happens.”

Dawg and Natches nodded somberly. They were waiting, watchful, their bodies now on high alert. Not that anyone else would have noticed the change.

They paused as the waitress moved toward them, her steps slow, her head down, waves of burnished chestnut curls pulled into a low ponytail, her classically pretty features stiff and tense.

Rowdy cocked his head at the woman. Crista Jensen kept her head carefully lowered as she refilled the coffee cups before turning to leave.

“You didn’t ask me if I wanted anything to eat, Crista.” Dawg surprised them all with his mocking drawl. “Didn’t Jenny warn you to look after us good?”

“Shut up, Dawg,” Natches muttered, his voice low but easy to hear.

Rowdy watched as Crista pulled the ordering pad from the back pocket of her jeans, a pencil from behind her ear and watched Dawg
with

a spark of anger. Dawg stared back at her expectantly.

“What would you like to order, Dawg?” Her words were gritted, her voice raspy.

“Eh. Nothing right now, but be sure to check back in a few minutes.” Dawg’s smile was all teeth, a predatory snarl if Rowdy had ever seen one.

“I’ll be sure to do that.” Crista’s smile was no less antagonistic as she returned the order pad to the back pocket of her jeans, picked up the coffeepot and stalked away.

The minute her back turned, Dawg’s eyes narrowed and a flash of anger seared the depths as he stood to his feet, dug into his pocket and slapped a few dollars to the table.

“I’ll see you at the marina,” he snapped before stalking from the café. Rowdy watched, perplexed, before turning to Natches.

“What the hell was that?”

“Dawg in heat,” Natches snickered. “She won’t give him the time of day.”

Rowdy glanced to the woman in question and restrained his smile as he noticed her gaze, centered squarely on Dawg as he stormed from the café. Sad, weary, her expression marked with indecision. Yeah, she was giving him the time of day, perhaps more than the big lug deserved.

Now this was an interesting development.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER TEN

Knowing what Rowdy had planned, and actually seeing it being put into effect were two different things. Kelly found that watching the men converge on a project was almost scary.

The Nauti Boys weren't known for playing nice, in any way. But seeing the hard, cold men studying the banks as they maneuvered into the wide, deserted cove, reminded her that they had been warriors for years, Marines who had survived a long, bloody war. The men gathered in the living room, Dawg stood at the sliding glass doors that led to the deck, while Natches watched the back, and Rowdy kept a check on the bank along the side of the river.

Their eyes were narrowed, bodies tense and prepared, and all Kelly could do was worry. And try to stem the butterflies rising in her stomach.

"You're too quiet, baby." Rowdy's voice was soft, filled with hidden depths as he glanced back at where she sat on the couch, staring back at him.

"There doesn't seem to be much to say," she responded quietly, seeing the shadows that filled his eyes.

She wished he wasn't so handsome, wished he wasn't so male. And she wished his cousins didn't draw her almost as much as Rowdy himself did. It was one of the issues she had struggled with since the attack. Her rapist had called her a good girl, but she knew she wasn't, not really, and that scared her. No woman had ever held even one of the

Mackay cousins' hearts—what made her think she could? What made her think she could hold all three?

“I told you, Kelly, when it happens, it will be just you and me.”

Yes, he had. On the way to the marina, his voice quiet and throbbing with lust, but she had heard the tinge of regret as well. As though he were torn in his needs, in his wants.

She was aware of Dawg listening, his back to them, his body tense.

“The Nauti Boys would dare to play separately?” She arched her brow at the comment. “That’s just about unheard of, Rowdy.”

Dawg snorted, Rowdy shook his head, his green eyes chastising.

“Your tongue has grown sharper over the years, darlin’,” he growled. “I’m a hungry man right now. It’s not nice to tempt hungry men.”

She settled into the corner of the couch, lifting her legs to the cushions and stretching them to the side. Rowdy’s gaze followed the movement with a spark of interest.

“My tongue has always been sharp, you just haven’t been around enough to notice.” She shrugged. “Dawg and Natches should have warned you of that. Wasn’t that part of their job description?”

Knowing they had been watching her and running off potential lovers hadn’t suited her well. It was a damned good thing she hadn’t known before Rowdy came home.

“The job was hard enough as it was, brat.” Dawg turned his head, flashing her a mock frown over his shoulder. “There was no sense in making it more complicated.”

Rowdy chuckled as Kelly glanced back at Dawg archly. He winked with a slow, sensual lowering of one thickly lashed eyelid. And she knew that move shouldn’t have affected her, unfortunately, it always did. Dawg was a natural-born flirt.

NAUTI BUOY

“You make it sound like I was hard to watch.” The pretend pout was aimed at Rowdy. “And here I thought I was being a...” The words trailed off as she caught what she was about to say.

She thought she had been a good girl.

She jerked from the couch, ignoring Rowdy’s soft protest as she stalked through the cabin of the houseboat to the back deck.

For a moment, she wasn’t certain she could keep her dinner in her stomach as fear lurched through her. A cold sweat covered her skin and she felt naked, exposed in the brief bathing suit she had managed to let Rowdy convince her to wear.

Ignoring Natches, she moved to the rail, staring down at the water churning at the hull, and swallowed tightly. She had been a good girl. She had waited for Rowdy, instinctively knowing she belonged to him. She may have moments of insecurity in holding his heart, but she had always known she loved him. Always known that he would be her first. And she had waited on that. Not because she was a good girl, but because she knew no other man could ever still the wildness that had been rising inside her during her late teens.

She gripped the rail, forcing back her fears as she remembered sound of her own screams echoed through her head.

“He’s won.”

The sound of Natches’ voice had her breathing in roughly as she shook her head.

“I bet you feel like you should have worn clothes. That you’re naked, on display,” he continued.

“Don’t, Natches.” She fought back the fears rolling through her. “Please.”

“Is your skin crawling, Kelly?”

Lora
Leigh

It was. The feel of him behind her, knowing he could see her bare skin, that he wanted to touch her, was suddenly terrifying.

This was Natches. He was almost an extension of Rowdy, a protector, a friend.

“I don’t want this,” she whispered. “I don’t want to be scared because I’m about to say the wrong thing. I don’t want to forget every dream I ever had, or lose the man I’ve loved forever because I can’t control the nightmares.”

She was only barely aware of her tears.

“You’ll never lose Rowdy, Kelly,” he spoke behind her, far enough way that she wasn’t jumping out of her own skin, but close enough that she could clearly hear him. “He’s waited on you for eight years now. You’re not going to get rid of him easily.”

Her breathing hitched.

“If it doesn’t happen tonight, Kelly, then he’ll wait until you’re ready.” His voice was soothing, gentle.

Kelly turned to him, staring into his compassionate expression, ignoring the flame of fury that burned behind the sympathy in his eyes.

“And you and Dawg?”

His lips tugged into a crooked smile as his pale green eyes seemed to darken with a hungry cast.

“You belong to Rowdy, Kelly, and vice versa. If that’s what you want, then Rowdy will let us know. Until then, nothing has changed with us. We’re no different than we’ve always been to you, and our feelings for you haven’t changed.”

His gaze flickered over her quickly, and Kelly remembered that he had looked at her the same way for years. With a tinge of teasing lust that he never allowed free. Dawg had always done the same thing,

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knowing the day would come that Rowdy would claim her, and possibly they would as well.

She glanced at the doorway as Rowdy suddenly filled it, his green eyes bright as they went over her body. He paused at her thighs, centering his gaze on the black material of the bikini bottoms she wore before lifting to the fabric that stretched over her breasts.

“I never mistook you for a good girl,” he murmured, his voice deep, rough. “You were my girl, Kelly. Always.”

His girl. Her breath caught in her throat as she stared back at him. Not his good girl, his bad girl or his naughty girl. Just his.

“I bet you fantasized about it.” Rowdy’s voice sent curls of heat whipping through her womb before they struck at her clit, her nipples.

She had fantasized of it. Of Rowdy holding her, whispering in her ear, watching... She bit back her moan at the thought of those fantasies.

“Come back in, Kelly.” His voice was a rough growl now, his expression heavy with lust as his eyes darkened to an emerald depth.

She stared at the hand he extended to her before her gaze flickered to Natches. He was watchful, tense, but rather than driving hunger, his eyes held warmth and desire.

“I’m scared, Rowdy,” she whispered.

“We’re just going to go in and pilot the boat to the cove, babe. We’re going to relax, nothing heavy, no decisions to be made, I promise.”

He kept his hand held out to her, broad, strong. Kelly reached out, placing her fingers against his palm, feeling the heat and strength there as his covered them. Then he was pulling her to him, flush against his body, his hand carrying hers until her arm curved behind her back and she was arched into him. The length of his cock pressed into her belly, a thick wedge of heat and hardness that left her knees trembling.

“Just let me touch you, Kelly. Just me. That’s all.” His head lowered until his lips caressed the shell of her ear, sending shivers racing down her spine.

He was seducing her. She lifted her free hand to his biceps, holding on tight as his lips traveled to her neck, smoothing over her sensitive flesh, sending sparks of intent need slicing through every nerve ending.

He lifted his head, a sensual smile curving his lips as he drew her back into the cabin, retaining his hold on her hand as he returned to the wheel.

Dawg aside, returning to his post at the balcony doors as Kelly glimpsed the narrow opening into the sheltered cove ahead.

They were staying the night, she knew that. The first step in drawing out a madman. Kelly allowed Rowdy to pull her in front of him, between him and the wheel. Her breath caught as his hand settled on her bare stomach, just over the butterflies beating violently within.

He stood behind her, flush against her, his erection resting in the small of her back, covered only by the thin material of his cutoffs.

“Do you think he knows where we’re going?” She could barely force the words from her lips.

“He studies his victims,” Rowdy sighed. “He’ll know about me, about Dawg and Natches. If he doesn’t follow, he’ll at least be aware of where you are.”

“How close has he been watching me?” She knew Ray and her mother had been protecting her, giving her time to heal, to refocus her life. Now she was beginning to suspect she had made a mistake in allowing it.

Rowdy’s plans were targeted at someone who would be watching, waiting. Which meant her rapist had been watching her more closely than she had ever imagined.

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“We’ll take care of it, Kelly.” She felt his chin rest lightly on her head as he held her close.

“How close,” she repeated.

He sighed behind her. “We suspect he’s been hiding on the knob across from your room. He was definitely there last night.”

“Oh God!” The horrified whisper was dragged from her chest as she felt the strength momentarily leave her legs.

“Kelly, we’ll catch him.” His hold tightened on her. “I promise you, baby, we’ll take care of this. We’ll take care of you. I swear it.”

“I should have listened,” she whispered. “Everyone warned me about the window. I should have listened.”

“It wouldn’t have stopped him, Kelly. It didn’t help the other women he raped. Women alone, who did everything right. He still got to them. This isn’t your fault.”

She knew that, in her head. Her fears and her shame told her otherwise.

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No. No. No. He crouched on the cliff overlooking the cove, sheltered by the pines and brush that surrounded him, rocking back and forth on his heels as he fought the pain inside his chest.

They were all there. All three of them were there with her. Tears coursed down his face as he watched Dawg and Natches Mackay lower the anchor weights on each side of the boat before returning to the cabin.

The curtains were pulled. Thick, heavy curtains that wouldn’t show so much as a shadow once night fell. There would be no way of knowing how far Kelly was allowing those bastards to debase her.

Lora
Leigh

He sniffed, holding back his sobs, and let the rage building inside him burn. He had thought she was such a good girl. A sweet, pure angel who deserved his gentleness and his love.

She was a whore. Just like the other whores who had allowed the Mackay cousins to touch them in the past. There was nothing innocent about her. Nothing good. Nothing pure.

But she was his one true love.

And she was breaking his heart. He had refused to dirty her, had given her his heart, and this was his repayment.

He had treasured her. Had shown her his caring, his respect and consideration.

No more.

A small sob escaped him as he realized what had to be done. She had stolen his heart. The only way to rid himself of the torment, was to rid himself of Kelly. She would have to die, but first... First he would show her how bad girls were really treated.

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She was nervous, frightened. Rowdy wasn't unaware of how warily Kelly watched Dawg and Natches. Equal parts curiosity and fear raged in her eyes, assuring him that his need to take her alone this first time wasn't misplaced. It was perplexing to him that the need should rage inside him. For as long as he could remember he had never had a problem sharing a woman with Dawg and Natches.

But the more he thought of Kelly's innocence, and the fact that she had saved not just her body, but her heart for him as well, caused something to clench in his chest. An emotion he couldn't name, a hunger, a desire he couldn't define.

NAUTI BUOY

But Kelly had always endeared such emotions inside him. She could turn his heart when no one else could, and bring out protective instincts he didn't think he possessed.

As they sat watching one of the latest action-adventure DVDs, he felt her move against his side, drawing closer to him, her mostly bare body tucking closer to his.

Neither Natches nor Dawg were watching her. They had joked through the evening, drank a few beers and seemed as enthralled with the movie as any man should be. But the tension was rising. Kelly's tension, not theirs.

He tightened his arm around her, drawing her closer to his chest and feeling the heat rising from her. Her hand flattened on his muscular abdomen, her fingers curling into the flesh as he stared down at her bent head.

He was hard, hurting, his cock throbbing beneath his cutoffs with raging demand.

Eight years he had waited on her. He had stifled the need to touch her, to taste her, until four years before and then he had restrained himself to no more than the slightest caress. He had tried to run from his hunger for her, had tried to forget it. And he had threatened Dawg and Natches with death if they allowed another man to touch her.

But another man had touched her. He had taken a part of her, filled her with fear, with insecurity.

His breath caught with a shocked hiss as he felt her hand caress the tight muscles of his abdomen. Inquisitive fingers ran along the band of his shorts, sending imperative signals to his overly tight cock.

"You're going to get in trouble," he whispered against her hair as the head of his dick began to throb in demand. If he didn't ease the

constriction against his cock, then permanent zipper tracks were a definite threat.

“I’m naughty, remember?” She turned her head, her lips pressing against his breastbone as his hand lifted, his fingers tangling in her hair.

“Don’t tease, Kelly,” he growled. “I’m riding a very fine edge right now.”

She licked him. Son of a bitch, he nearly jumped out of his skin as he felt the slow, savoring lick of her hot little tongue.

“Really? Strange, I could say the same thing about myself. I’ve waited a long time on you, Rowdy.”

He wasn’t unaware of Dawg and Natches listening closely, or the careful readiness of their bodies. They were as aroused as he was, as hungry.

She lifted her head, her slender, lithe body moving, rising as he watched, entranced. She stood in front of him before gracefully straddling his thighs and lowering herself into his lap.

“Son of a bitch!” His head fell back on the couch, his hands catching her hips as he jerked her flush with the tortured length of his cock.

Her pussy was hot, the heat of it burning through her scanty bathing suit bottom as well as the threadbare material of his denim cutoffs.

“We’re not alone, baby.” He tilted his head as her lips moved to his neck. Each touch reminded him of her inexperience, of her daring.

She knew Dawg and Natches could hear every move, every passionate sigh.

“I dreamed of you,” she whispered at his ear a second later, her soft breath sending pleasure racing over his flesh. “While you were gone, I dreamed of touching you, kissing you, of all the things I knew you enjoyed. That I knew I would enjoy.” The hesitant admission had his body tightening further.

NAUTI BUOY

He felt the tremor that quivered through her, the hint of fear and of arousal. The soft weight of her body against his was driving him crazy. The need to throw her to her back on the couch and devour her was making him sweat. The feel of her straddling his lap, her hands moving over his chest, her lips at his neck was too much.

She had initiated the contact, had known that Dawg and Natches were in the room. He should leave it at that, he thought. He should seduce her, as he knew she wanted to be seduced. But seduction and the acts he wanted to see her involved in did not go hand in hand. Rowdy knew Kelly's innocence, knew the demons that rode her, and he swore to himself he wouldn't add to them.

If this were her choice, then she would face it. And she would face it from the beginning.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Kelly felt her head spinning as pleasure washed through her with the force of a sensual tidal wave. She could feel Rowdy's hands roaming over her back, her buttocks, bringing a sense of heat and overwhelming pleasure rather than pain and fear.

One hand moved up her spine, threaded in her hair, and before she could guess his intention he was pulling her head back as he turned, lifting her, pushing her to her to the couch.

Before she could do more than gasp, he stole her breath with his kiss. Her lips parted beneath his, her tongue meeting his in a duel of exquisite ecstasy. She couldn't help curling her fingers into his broad shoulders, feeling the muscles flex beneath her touch, bunch with power as he buried her smaller body beneath his much larger one.

There was no fear here. There wasn't even the thought of fear. There was only Rowdy's touch, his lips covering hers, one hand tangled in her hair, the other moving inexorably to the rounded curve of one breast.

She fought to breathe, certain there had been enough oxygen in the air before his kiss. And she would have broken away to breathe, but it was so good, so hot, so filled with liquid, carnal delight that she couldn't draw away from him. But she could touch him. God, how she had dreamed of touching him over the years, feeling him against her, possessing her.

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“Rowdy...” Her cry was instinctive as he pulled his lips from her, her eyes opening to stare into his expression in dazed fascination as he pressed his jeans-clad erection tight between her thighs.

“Be sure.” His voice was guttural. “Look around you, Kelly. Be certain of what you’re doing. There’s no turning back. Ever.”

Dark erotic power filled his expression. His brilliant green eyes were moss-dark, his face flushed, his lips heavy with greedy hunger.

“Kiss me, Rowdy.” She didn’t want to think about what could or would be. She wanted to feel the dreams she had known for so long. Rowdy taking her, his cousins pleasuring her.

“No,” he growled, his voice rough, his hands clamping on her wrists as her hands moved for the snap of his cutoffs. “Look around, Kelly. Look at them. Let them know they’re welcome or they leave. That simple. Your choice.”

A spark of anger, of foolish pride rose inside her at the demand.

“However you want it...”

“No, dammit.” He was off her before she could do more than gasp, striding across the room before turning back to her.

“Rowdy, man, let this go,” Dawg muttered warningly as Kelly sat up on the couch.

“You make the choice,” he growled, his eyes tormented with need, with demand. “I won’t do it for you.”

Kelly rose jerkily from the couch, her body on fire, her face flaming with anger and embarrassment, and an instinctive demand that she deny them all.

“All or nothing?” she snapped in reply.

“You know better than that, Kelly.” He sliced his hand through the air with frustrated fury. “Don’t play games.”

“So I have to say the words instead?” she yelled back at him, challenging him, facing him with the same determination and anger he was using himself.

“Words work.” He crossed his arms over his chest as Dawg and Natches slouched in their chairs and watched him, each wearing dark, disapproving frowns.

“Oh, I just bet they would.” She flipped her hair from her face before propping her hands on her hips. “Should I just ask you all to screw me, Rowdy? Why don’t I just bare it now and let you take turns with me. Hell yeah, make it damned easy on you, wouldn’t it, asshole,” she snarled in reply. “That way, you don’t have to feel like shit later because you let another man take what was yours?”

His lips drew back from his teeth in an angry grimace.

“Do you think for one fucking minute they would dare take your virginity?” he questioned her with dark intent. “If I didn’t care, baby, you wouldn’t be a virgin now.”

“Says who?” she argued belligerently. “Do you really believe that all it takes is a touch from a Nauti Boy to turn any woman’s crank?” She waved her hand mockingly. “Your ego is becoming more swollen than your dick, Rowdy.”

Wrong word. All three men seemed to tighten, straighten at the explicit word that left her lips.

“Yeah, just look at the three of you,” she snapped. “Like little boys waiting for a treat. Well, fuck that. Find someplace else to treat, because I’ll be damned if I’m still in the mood.”

She stomped across the room, determined to reach the curving staircase that led to the upper bedroom and peace. She passed Rowdy with a disdainful little hiss, so irked and frustrated with his male, redneck attitude that she could have kicked him.

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“Oh, no you don’t.”

She hadn’t expected him to reach for her. But even if she had, she wouldn’t have expected him to lift her so quickly into his arms before his lips slammed down on hers.

It wasn’t a romantic kiss. It wasn’t soft and delving, or deep and passionate. It was hungry demand, carnal intent. It stole resistance and replaced it with pure fiery need, and nothing less.

Before she could protest, before she even processed the information, she found her rear braced on the counter, her thighs spread, and Rowdy devouring her.

She was lost in him, helpless in his arms as usual and loving it. Her fingers speared into his hair as his lips moved over hers, his tongue a restless marauder that conquered hers with inordinate ease.

And his hands weren’t still either. Within seconds, the bikini top she wore was tossed aside, the hard tips of her breasts pressing into the fine layer of hair that covered his broad chest.

She shifted against him, her fingernails digging into his scalp as the tender, spike-hard tips burned in pleasure.

Kelly moaned at the loss as his lips pulled from hers, moving to her neck as her head fell back, the whiplash of sensations jerking her against him as his broad palms framed the tender mounds when he pulled back.

“So pretty.” His lips were swollen, his eyes heavy-lidded and intense as they focused on the swollen curves. “You have the prettiest nipples, Kelly. As pretty pink as cotton candy. Do they taste as sweet?”

Her gaze fell to her breasts. The light pink nipples were straining toward him, diamond-hard and desperate for his touch. No other man had touched her there. No one but Rowdy. She ached for him, needed him, belonged to him.

“I won’t stop here,” he whispered, his gaze lifting to hers. “Once I sate myself on these pretty nipples, I’m going to go lower, Kelly. I’m going to strip those damned bottoms off and spread your pretty legs. Then I’m going to lap at every sweet drop of syrup running between your thighs. Are you ready for that?”

“God, Rowdy, I’ve dreamed of it.” She had tossed in her lonely bed as the hunger for it kept her awake night after night.

A primal growl left his throat as his head lowered, his tongue swiping over one tender nipple before he enveloped it in his hot mouth.

His lips closed over the peak, sucking it into his mouth as his tongue curled around it. Kelly jerked violently, the pleasure so strong, so fiery that she could do nothing but cry out in response. Rowdy’s hard hands held her in place as his lips devoured her, sending her senses reeling, her pulse rocketing as sensuality wrapped around her.

She heard a male groan, but whose it was she wasn’t certain.

“They’ll just watch,” he whispered as his head lifted. “Watch me eat every perfect inch of your body this time. That’s all. No pressure, Kelly.”

She arched toward him. She didn’t want to hear about it, she didn’t want to analyze it. She wanted to feel. She wanted each sensation to rip through her, wanted the pleasure to never end.

And he took the offering. His lips closed on the opposite peak, drawing it into his mouth and setting it aflame as he surrounded the other with his thumb and forefinger. Then, his fingers tightened.

“Rowdy...” The surprised exclamation echoed around her as the fiery lance of sensation tore through her. Not quite pain. Almost, but a fiery kind of hurt that made the pleasure hotter, sweeter.

“God, Kelly...” The rough moan was whispered between her breasts as his head moved. He was fighting for breath, his fingers working her nipple, causing her to shudder with each tug at the eager tip. She could

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feel the hunger blazing out of control now, the need ripping through her, hard, bright, and hotter than a living flame. And she needed more. So much more.

Kelly could feel Dawg and Natches watching as she burned in Rowdy's arms. His lips and hands were never still, caressing over her, filling her senses with the dark taste of passion and the stinging need growing within her.

She was desperate for him. Her legs wrapped around his hips as she pressed her mound tighter against the rock-hard length of his cock. Her swollen clit was screaming for relief even as her tormented nipples begged for more.

"Come here, baby." Rowdy's voice was a rough growl as he lifted her from the counter, his hands curving beneath her bottom to hold her in place against the straining length of his erection. "I'm not taking you on this counter."

She didn't care where he took her, as long as he did.

"I need you." A whimpering cry whispered from her lips as her arms circled his shoulders, her lips moving to the corded strength of his neck.

"Don't make me wait again, Rowdy. I can't wait any longer."

"No longer, baby. This is it." She felt him moving up the curving steps that led to the upper deck and the large bedroom. She had no idea if Dawg and Natches were following. She didn't care if they were, or if they weren't. Nothing mattered except Rowdy's touch. Except touching Rowdy. As he lowered her to the wide bed that dominated the center of the room, Kelly twisted, pressing against his broad shoulders until
he

lowered himself beside her, stretching out beneath her gaze.

Finesse be damned. She wasn't experienced, he knew it and she knew it. But she was desperate to touch him, to taste him. Without thought she scrambled to his side, one hand gripping his shoulder, the

other smoothing down his hard chest as her head lowered to the flat male nipples that drew her attention.

If his mouth on hers could make her weak, could she do the same to him?

“Shit! Kelly. Baby...” Maybe she could.

His hands buried in her hair, his body jerking against her as she nipped at the little discs before laving them with her tongue.

Hard, growling moans came from his chest as her hand lowered to the band of his cutoffs, her fingers tearing at the snap before he brushed her fingers away to release the material himself.

Kelly contented herself with tasting him. Both nipples, licking and nipping at them with rising pleasure before she began to move lower.

“God. Kelly.” Rowdy tightened further as her tongue licked around his navel before heading to the length of hard flesh still covered by his cutoffs.

“I need to touch you, Rowdy,” she whispered. “Let me touch you.” She parted the fabric then watched as he gripped the material of the waistband in his hands and shed it with easy grace.

And there he was. Hard, thick, his cock rising along his abdomen, pulsing with life as a small bead of semen collected at the tip. Kelly licked her lips, imagining the taste of it. Would it taste like his kiss? Or like his flesh?

She bent, reaching out with her tongue to swipe over the bulging head as she tasted him. A bit salty, bold, wild, like Rowdy. And she wanted more.

A rumbled groan came from his throat as her fingers trailed down the ridged length of his erection, curiously exploring each shift of the bulging veins until she reached the hair-roughened sac below.

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“Easy, baby.” One hand clenched in her hair as the other cupped her cheek now. “Come down slow and easy. Take me in that pretty mouth of yours.”

The hand moved from her cheek as her lips parted. It gripped the base of the hard stalk, lifting it until the head pressed against the damp curves. Kelly whimpered at the heat and hardness before her lips opened, stretching to surround him, to take him into her mouth as her tongue flickered over the expanse of skin that she was able to reach.

“God yes!” His hips bucked against her mouth, driving his cock in deeper as she tried to lick at each new expanse of flesh.

It stretched her lips, filled her mouth with the taste of sexual intent, a wicked, intoxicating male taste that inflamed her senses. She felt his fingers bunching in her hair as she began to slowly suck at the engorged crest.

“Oh yes, baby,” he crooned. “Your mouth is like liquid silk.” The rough sound of his voice was rough, erotic.

“That’s it, baby,” he encouraged her as she followed the lead of his hands in her hair, her lips moving up, then down, filling her mouth with as much of his erection as possible as she suckled at the rising flesh, her tongue flickering over it.

He took one hand and caught hers, wrapping her fingers over the hard stalk, high enough to keep it from going too deep into her mouth before he returned his fingers to her hair. He sifted through the strands before tangling within them and moving more firmly against her, his cock thrusting with slow, easy strokes inside her mouth.

“Damn. You’re stealing my sanity, baby,” he growled as she felt the bloated crest throb in her mouth. “There you go. Suck it nice and hard. Oh hell...” Her lips tightened on him as she lifted her eyes to see the carnal expression on his dark face.

She had never realized how hungry she was for him, until now. Until his cock filled her mouth, the wild taste of aroused male consuming her, driving her past shame to a realm where nothing mattered but touch, taste, desire.

As her mouth moved on him, her hand began to stroke the strong shaft, moving up and down, pumping the hard column as he fucked her mouth with increasingly strong strokes.

At the same time, she felt a touch behind her. Male hands sliding her bikini bottoms from her, smoothing over the rounded curves of her ass. Was it Dawg or Natches? She didn't know, she didn't care.

She watched Rowdy's gaze flare though as he stared over her head for a long second. When his eyes returned to hers, they were wild with lust.

Then she felt it. A slow, reverent kiss on one buttock, then the next. A tongue, wicked and alluring, flickering along the top of the narrow crevice that separated the rounded cheeks.

"God, Kelly, baby..." Rowdy groaned her name as her suckling caresses deepened. "We need to stop this before I come."

Stop it? She couldn't, not yet. If she stopped, she was going to have to think rather than feel. If she stopped...

Her head jerked up as a keening moan left her lips, her eyes widening in shocked pleasure. An insidiously wicked caress nearly had her collapsing against Rowdy. Only his hands held her upright, his gaze holding her sanity as she felt the probing tongue gently rimming the ultrasensitive entrance to her anus.

She should be screaming in fear, instead, she was panting with pleasure.

"Oh God, Rowdy..." Her voice was weak, questioning. Should it feel so good? Should she be so desperate for more?

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“Shh, baby,” he whispered gently. “Let it feel good. Just for a minute. Just for another minute.”

She cried out as she felt that knowing tongue press against the entrance again. Her head whipped from side to side as she fought to breathe, fought to make sense of the blinding pleasure. When it breached the small hole with a slight pinching sensation, only to pull back, then probe inside again, she shuddered at the intensity of the carnal caress, suddenly terrified. Not of the touch or the man, but of herself.

“It’s okay, Kelly... Easy, baby.” The touch was suddenly gone as Rowdy pulled her to him, his lips covering hers as he bore her to her back.

He kissed her with ruthless demand, leaning over her and working his lips over hers with experienced lust. He ate her kiss, consumed her, and taught her to consume in return.

Rowdy lifted his head from the kiss, his senses drunk with the taste of the woman beneath him, his body aching to possess her.

The soft, dim glow spread over Kelly, clearly revealing bare silken flesh between her thighs, devoid of any sign of feminine hair. He had expected it, had known what awaited him, but the sight of it was a punch of lust to his gut anyway.

He blinked down at the pink, flushed curves as they gleamed with a layer of soft silky syrup, licking his lips in hunger before his eyes caught sight of the tattoo and his heart clenched.

The eagle emblazoned on his shoulder suddenly ached at the sight of the exact replica that lay just above that tempting pussy. Wings unfurled, one nearly touching the edge of the sweet mound of her cunt, pointing toward the swollen bud of her clit.

“Damn.” His fingers smoothed over the bronzed image as her tongue peeked out to dampen her lips.

“Do you like it?” Her breathy little voice had every muscle in his body flexing in need to fuck. To fuck hard and deep, to hear her screaming his name, begging to come.

“Baby, you’re pushing a man already hanging on the edge,” he growled as he watched his fingers move, smoothing over the swollen flesh until his fingers could delve into the rich, dewy slit below.

“Oh God. Rowdy...” Her cry pierced through him as he parted her, his gaze drinking in the flushed flesh covered in slick honey as her hips arched to him, her thighs spreading further.

He pressed the pad of his palm over her clit as his fingers found the tender entrance to her pussy and circled it slowly, his mouth watering to taste her. Lifting his fingers he turned his gaze to her again, narrowing his eyes as he moved his fingers to her pouty lips and painted them with her own juices.

Shock widened her eyes as she gasped. His other hand moved to her head, lacing his fingers through her hair as he spread the sweetness over her lush lips.

“Lick it off,” he growled. “Come on, baby, see how sweet and hot you’re going to taste when I get my tongue inside that hot little pussy.”

“Rowdy...” He could hear the protest of her innocence, the dark hungers filling her, urged on by his own needs as she hesitated in the face of the unfamiliar intensity of their combined lust.

“Lick your lips,” he ordered her again, his voice rough, the need to see her completely immersed in the needs building between them, overwhelming.

Her tongue peeked out as the flush deepened on her face. A grimace twisted his lips as she licked at her own sweetness, tasting what he

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craved so desperately for himself. Then, her tongue curled around his finger, drawing a hoarse moan from his chest as she sucked it into her mouth.

The feel of her drawing the remaining taste from his fingers broke his control. He pulled from her, moving between her thighs, spreading them further as he lifted her to his descending mouth and buried his lips in the liquid heat flowing from her.

She was more intoxicating than moonshine, sweeter, hotter than life itself, and all his.

Kelly heard her own cries flowing through the night around her and could do nothing to still them, to smother them. Rowdy's mouth was burning through inhibitions, through shyness, and igniting a fire inside her pussy that threatened to consume her. He held her legs wide, his mouth eating her decadently, his whispering murmurs of pleasure and hunger fueling the flames burning through her.

His tongue was voracious. It licked, spread fire through the burning flesh and caressed her with a knowledge and experience that had her gasping. Small, flickering strokes against her clit caused her to arch to him, her hips jerking as sensation snaked like raking talons of need through her nervous system. The pleasure, oh God, the pleasure was too much to bear. Each circular stroke around the hard, pulsing knot of her clit stole her breath. Her womb convulsed with the need for orgasm as the pleasure tore through it before spreading throughout her system.

His fingers weren't still either. One circled the sensitive opening to her vagina, spreading the juices that wept from her aching center before his tongue stroked lower, moving to lap at her, to draw the taste of her into his mouth as she screamed out from the precipice he kept her teetering on.

She was so close. Too close to be held back in such a way. She could feel the sensation burning throughout her body, igniting a firestorm that raced through her bloodstream.

Finally. She writhed beneath him, her head tossing as all the fantasies she had known in the past five years were finally coming to life. Rowdy was touching her, tasting her, loving her.

“Fuck, I could get drunk on your taste.” His voice was a hoarse growl a second before his tongue plunged inside the gripping entrance to her cunt, fucking into her with licking strokes that had a strangled scream leaving her throat.

The tension building inside her was frightening. Control was a thing of the past, but Rowdy was causing the gathering tightness in her belly to deepen, to convulse with each inward thrust of his wicked tongue. Her hands tightened in his hair as she shuddered and the wet heat flowing from her vagina increased.

She was panting for air, sensation racing across her flesh, sensitizing her, leaving her gasping amid the inferno he was creating. His hands weren't still any more than his tongue was. They smoothed over her thighs, his thumb flicked at her clit, sending sharp sensations of agonizing need tearing through her a moment before it retreated. His hands curled along the cheeks of her ass, and as his tongue plunged inside her again, he parted the soft curves, tugging at the entrance to her ass and sending sharp flares of heat whipping through her system.

“Rowdy...” She writhed beneath him, her head tossing on the blankets as she felt perspiration gathering along her body, trickling down her breasts, her tummy, even as her juices flowed from her pussy. “I can't...I can't stand it...”

She couldn't understand this pleasure. It wasn't like anything she had ever known. Even her own self-induced orgasms had never made her

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feel this way. As though she were going to fly apart, that if the pleasure didn't stop then she would explode into fragments. She twisted beneath him, whimpering as she felt the pad of his finger smoothing through the hot juices that flowed along the cleft of her rear, rubbing them against her anus.

“Make it stop!” She tried to scream, to demand an ease to the pressure building in her womb, her thighs, deep inside her cunt.

He didn't answer. If anything, his mouth became more voracious, his fingers exploring further, pressing deeper against the untouched entrance he was massaging.

“Rowdy...I swear...I can't stand...” She lost her breath as she felt his finger breach her ass, felt it slide slowly inside her as his lips covered her clit, his thumb slipping into the entrance of her pussy and destroying her.

“Oh God!” She fought the lightning surge of almost painful sensation that shot through her.

“The hell you can't. You will come for me, Kelly. Now,” he snarled, his finger retreating, gathering more of the silky liquid flowing from her before sliding in deeper, stronger, his thumb pumping into her pussy before his lips covered her clit again. He suckled at the tender bud, his tongue flickering over it as his finger bit into her ass, his thumb fucking her cunt until she felt herself erupt.

Her scream filled the night as she dissolved, saw lights exploding behind her clenched eyes and heard Rowdy's roar of pleasure a second before he was rising between her thighs and throwing her higher.

“Hang on, baby.” He gripped her hands, moving them to his shoulders as she felt a thick pressure against the sensitized entrance to her pussy.

She stared up at him, dazed, awash in cascading waves of ecstasy.

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“Sweet baby,” he groaned, his green eyes darkening as his hands clasped her face. “Hold on to me, sweet thing. I can’t wait. Not even another minute.”

Her eyes widened, fluttered, fought to stay open as she felt the pressure between her thighs increase a second before a sudden stretching, a blooming fire and exquisite pleasure/pain tore through her. And it didn’t stop. It went on and on, as though in slow motion, stretching her until she was certain she could hold no more before she found she could.

She jerked in his grip, her nails pressing into his shoulders as she whimpered then screamed as Rowdy settled to the hilt inside her. She could feel every thick inch parting the tender tissue of her pussy, straining it to its limits as fingers of electricity sizzled through the delicate tissue and the tension began to increase once again within her.

“God, you’re tight.” His expression was strained as she stared up at him, fighting to make sense of the sensations ripping through her. “And soft as silk.” His forehead pressed against hers. “Please God, tell me you’re on birth control, Kelly.”

She nodded jerkily. She had begun the birth control shots years before in anticipation of this night.

He grimaced, lifting his head a few inches as he stared down at her, his thumb dragging roughly over her lips as she fought to breathe.

“Lift your legs.” His voice was like gravel. “Brace your knees against my hips.”

He lowered one hand, lifting her thigh as she did as he bid.

“Oh God, Rowdy.” He slid in deeper than ever, filling her in ways she couldn’t explain. “Oh God, I don’t know what to do...” She wanted to cry, wanted to ease the furious throb of hunger pulsing in her womb, in her cunt.

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“Shush, baby.” His voice was strained, his body tight with the effort it was taking as he helped her, positioning her knees against his hips as a ragged moan tore from his chest. “Son of a bitch, you’re so fucking tight. I could come just feeling you grip and milk me like that.”

The muscles inside her pussy were indeed milking him, rippling around him, driving her crazy with the furious heat building inside them. She stared up at him, feeling the tears on her cheeks, the emotions clogging her throat. She couldn’t imagine ever needing anything more than she needed Rowdy.

“Easy now, sweetheart,” he warned as she felt his thighs bunching. “If I don’t move I’m going to come before you ever get yours. And you have to have yours.” A wicked smile crossed his swollen lips as he began to move.

His cock slid slowly from the clutching grip of her cunt as she heard her own desperate groan of pleasure, the thrust back had her crying out in sharp agonizing need, and then there was no stopping him.

He arched back, gripping her legs and pressing them closer to her body as he stared down to where they came together, her gaze following automatically, watching as the slick, glistening shaft of his cock powered in and out of the flattened curves of her cunt. It was mesmerizing, consuming. She could feel raking fingers of pleasure, pain, sharp sensation and fiery explosions of hunger ripping through her body as she watched him fuck her. Watched his cock thrust in and out, shafting her with furious strokes as the world receded around her.

She came again, screaming through her orgasm, and still he didn’t stop.

“Again,” he snarled, turning her to her side, her legs bent, pressed to her breasts as he leaned over her, one hand parting the cheeks of her ass as his fingers found the tingling entrance there.

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Her back arched, her head falling back as his finger slid inside, pumping in tandem with the thick erection driving inside her cunt, stretching her, burning through her mind as pleasure and pain mixed with the addition of another finger to stretch her tender anus. And still his cock drove into her, stroking furiously over sensitized nerve endings until she was shuddering, convulsing around him, her juices spewing from her pussy as she heard him give a ragged shout and felt his body tighten.

She was still dissolving around him as she felt his release, the hot, furious blasts of semen filling her, burning her, sending her into another quaking paradox of sensation that had her convulsing beneath him as he held his cock deep inside her, shuddering with the pleasure ripping them both apart.

Kelly had lost sanity long before Rowdy's release. She quivered in the aftermath of orgasm, weak, wasted by the emotion, the pleasure that had erupted through her. She felt him collapse behind her, still buried inside her pussy, his breathing harsh, his arms tight as he pulled her to his damp chest.

"Breathe, baby," he crooned in her ear as one hand massaged her chest, reminding her she was holding her breath as it released in a rush, sending stars exploding before her eyes. "There you go, sweet thing," he murmured, his lips at her shoulder as his cock jerked inside her. "Rest for a bit. Just a little bit. Then we'll try it again and see if we can't get it right."

Get it right? Dear God, if that wasn't right then he would kill her if he ever managed perfection.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER TWELVE

It was still dark when Kelly awoke, her body pleasantly sore as Rowdy slept deeply beside her, sprawled naked on his stomach.

Heat curled low in her stomach as she stared at his shadowed form, a shiver of remembered pleasure echoing through her womb.

Moving quietly, she slid from the bed, searching until she found Rowdy's T-shirt, discarded on the nearby chair earlier that day, and pulled it over her naked body. She couldn't hear anything below, but she doubted Dawg and Natches were both sleeping.

Making her way down the narrow, curved staircase, the faint glow of the television provided a dim light as Kelly headed for the small refrigerator.

She pulled a bottle of water free, uncapping it as she straightened and lifted it to her lips before she caught sight of Dawg.

He was sitting in the shadowed corner between the table and counter, his eyes gleaming in the darkness as she paused, watching him.

"Rowdy's gonna bitch over you stealing another of his shirts," he drawled quietly as she felt her face flush.

The heat had nothing do with the fact that she was caught stealing more of Rowdy's clothes, it was the sudden question of whether or not his wicked mouth had been the one caressing her earlier.

"He should be used to it by now." She cleared her throat uncomfortably, feeling a tingle of heat curl around her clitoris.

“He’s a stubborn boy, though.” He shrugged negligently. “You already know that.”

Kelly leaned against the counter and watched him curiously. There was a lot she still didn’t know about Rowdy and his relationship with his cousins. All anyone seemed to care about was the fact that sexually, they enjoyed sharing their toys.

She ducked her head, knowing she shouldn’t have put off learning more about the three men together rather than just focusing on Rowdy. But it was Rowdy who held her heart, not the other two. Though she knew, eventually, they would become a part of the relationship she and Rowdy shared.

“You look like a frightened little doe standing there.” His voice was like dark silk. “We’ve known each other too long for that wariness in your eyes, little girl.”

Yes, they had. Dawg and Natches were as much a part of her life as Rowdy had been, in many ways. He had tried to protect her when Rowdy wasn’t around, had looked out for her and generally put up with her. They all had.

“I’m not frightened of you, Dawg,” she sighed. “I’m not frightened of any of you.”

Maybe she was frightened of herself.

“People make too much out of our little pleasures,” he grunted. “As though some insidious evil causes it rather than choice.” He chuckled at his own words. “There’s nothing evil in it, Kelly. And Rowdy would never press you for what you don’t want. So you don’t have to watch us as though we’re going to jump you at any minute.”

“And the three of you think I didn’t know what the hell I was getting myself into when I waited on Rowdy.” She pressed her lips together as

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her own frustration ate inside her. “It’s not a matter of not wanting it, Dawg, or even if I do want it.”

“You want to be seduced into it. You want the choice taken out of your hands?” He leaned back in his chair, watching her intently.

“I don’t want to analyze it to death, that’s for damned sure,” she snapped. “It’s a wonder the three of you found a woman to share if you talked her to death first.”

“The other women didn’t matter, Kelly.” He shocked her with his answer. “They were fun and games, you’re Rowdy’s future. There can be no misunderstandings, no seduction, no hesitations or hiding from the truth if you accept it. If you accept it, then you accept all of it.”

Even the fact that eventually, the man she loved would touch another woman, pleasure her, fuck her. She couldn’t accept his cousins’ touch without that knowledge.

“I love him,” she whispered.

“This won’t be easy on any of us.” He lifted his shoulders heavily. “Natches and I both love you too, Kelly, not like Rowdy does but we love you. We’ve been burning along with him to touch you. But the day will come when one or both of us will find the woman we want for our own. The sharing isn’t an every time thing, but it would sure as hell be missed if we stopped.”

It would be a hunger that would torment them. The sudden thought had her chest clenching. For some reason, the three men were irrevocably bound. And it was a bond that only death would sever.

“Has anyone ever asked you to stop, Dawg?” she asked. “Have you ever considered it?”

Something dangerous flashed in his expression before it was gone just as quickly. “I’d stop if someone I loved asked it of me. If I knew the woman I loved couldn’t handle it.” He shrugged his broad shoulders.

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“I don’t know if I could bear to see him touch another woman, Dawg.” A self-mocking smile twisted her lips. “How’s that for hypocrisy?”

“Not hypocrisy, sweetheart, honesty,” he told her quietly. “That’s what makes a relationship like this work, being honest about it. Being true to yourself and to Rowdy. We couldn’t ask for anything more than that.”

“I won’t do this just for Rowdy,” she breathed out roughly. “I won’t let him touch another woman just because I know it’s what he wants. It has to make sense to me. I have to be able to live with it.”

“That’s true enough.” He nodded in understanding. “Any relationship is give and take. You give a little, Rowdy gives a little, and vice versa.” He rose from his chair, moving the short distance to where she stood, towering over her.

Kelly swallowed deeply as she felt him surrounding her, his heat, the sensual hunger building inside him.

“Dawg...” There was no way to retreat.

She shivered as he reached out, his calloused fingers running down her arm and filling her with conflicting emotions. Could she do it? Fantasizing about it was one thing, and Lord knew she had fantasized about it often. But actually taking that step was another matter.

“I want you,” he whispered. “I even love you, Kelly. Not like Rowdy does, but I love you, and I won’t see you hurt. Not for anything.”

“Stop.” She protested, shaking her head as denial began to rage within her. A panicked sense of discomfort began to build. It might be what Rowdy wanted, but this wasn’t Rowdy. It wasn’t his body heating her, his need surrounding her.

“It’s dark and shadowed. A lot of truths can be hid in the shadows.” Dawg’s voice was darker than the night. “As can lies.”

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Her breath caught in her throat as his head lowered, his lips too close to her own.

“I could seduce you,” he whispered. “I can give you that, Kelly. I don’t have to wake up with you in the morning. I don’t have to face knowing I used your body against you. Is that what you want?”

“Moron.” She pushed against his chest, her hands smacking into his hard-packed muscles as a shadowy chuckle whispered around her. “Get away from me. You’re about as amusing as the flu, Dawg.”

“Did I make my point?” His teeth flashed in a smile.

She sniffed disdainfully. “The point wasn’t needed. Don’t make the mistake of thinking I don’t understand his reasons. But I’m also still a woman, Dawg, not a plaything. He can get serious about this, or he can forget it.”

“Can he get anymore serious, Kelly? He let one of his cousins lick your ass. That’s pretty damned serious to me.”

Her face flamed as she narrowed her eyes.

“Was it you?”

He crossed his arms over his chest, watching her with a hint of a smile. “One licked, the other watched in anticipation. I ain’t tellin’ which was which.”

And that didn’t surprise her, why? What did surprise her was the feeling of denial that raged through her at the memory. This wasn’t fantasy, it was reality, and she wasn’t comfortable with it, no matter how much she wished she was.

“You know, Dawg, one of these days you boys are going to bite off more than you can chew in a woman. What are you going to do then?”

“Looks to me like Rowdy has already managed that one,” he chuckled as his gaze shot past her. “And here he is to see how much further he can sink into monogamous bliss.”

Kelly turned quickly, barely restraining a moan at the sight of Rowdy, naked, hard, his eyes gleaming with interest as he stood at the bottom of the steps. One thing she could say about him, naked or dressed, confidence oozed from every pore of his body. Confidence and pure driving lust.

He tilted his head at he watched her, his gaze moving to his cousin, then back to her slowly. There was a challenge there, a knowing glint in his eye that assured her that he was well aware that she was wet and aroused herself.

“There you go stealing my clothes again.” He shook his head in mock chastisement. “I was hoping you would learn better, baby.”

“I think she needs to be spanked,” Dawg murmured behind her, sending her pulse rocketing at the suggestion.

She arched her brow as she held Rowdy’s gaze. He was grinning back at her, a crooked, self-assured grin filled with carnal intent.

He made no excuses for who he was, or what he was. Playful, wicked, determined to have his own way. But through the self-assurance and determination she saw something more as well. She saw his love for her. He did love her, just as she loved him, and despite her fears and often her insecurities, she knew Rowdy wasn’t a man to love lightly.

As she watched him, she was aware of Natches moving from the rear of the cabin, watching the scene curiously. The testosterone wept through the room, heavy with wicked hunger and sinful intent. Three predatory males, no matter how they tried to hide the primal instincts that ran just beneath the surface of their lazy humor, Kelly saw it.

They converged on her, tall, broad, aroused. Rowdy was the only one completely naked, but the other two were following suit quickly. Natches stripped his shirt, while behind her she heard Dawg’s movements, the rustle of his clothes.

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Nerves ripped through her, sending shudders of instinctive response to curl through her lower stomach before burning a path of erotic destruction along her erogenous zones. Her nipples peaked. Her lips ached and her sex wept.

“Take the shirt off, baby,” Rowdy whispered as his hands gripped the hem, slowly drawing it upward.

Behind her, Dawg stepped closer, the shock of his bare hands running up her thighs had her tensing at the pleasure. She was so wet she could feel her juices dampening her thighs now, running freely from her weeping pussy as they prepared her for the coming possessions.

“Look how pretty you are...” Rowdy whispered reverently as she lifted her arms, allowing him to strip his shirt from her body. “Your nipples are so hard, flushed. I love tasting them, Kelly. Feeling them in my mouth, the tight little points throbbing on my tongue.”

They were throbbing now at the thought of it.

The shirt was tossed aside, but it wasn't Rowdy's hands that cupped the firm globes, it was Dawg's. They slid around her side until both hands were filled with her flesh, the index finger and thumb of each hand gripping a hard point, playing with them, rolling them deliciously.

Her head fell back against his chest as the fingers moved aside. Rowdy shifted, making room for Natches as both men lowered their heads to the upthrust peaks.

Kelly went to her tiptoes as sensation exploded through her. A ragged cry slipped past her lips as a flood of weakening lust ripped through her. Kelly lost the ability to speak, to see, to do anything but feel as two sets of hard male lips covered the sensitive peaks. Fire engulfed her as damp, lava-hot tongues begin to whip over the tight flesh, and hard male mouths began to suckle erotically.

“Easy, sweetheart,” Dawg whispered at her ear as she began to writhe within the hold the three men had created. The feel of their mouths sucking at her sent arrows of near painful pleasure ripping to her womb, her clit. The aching throb was destroying her. “It’s okay, Kelly.” His hands moved from her breasts, only to be replaced by Rowdy’s and Natches’.

One arm clasped her to him as he slid his hand down her stomach, moving slowly for the tortured flesh of her pussy.

“Rowdy...” His name was a whimpering plea as she felt Dawg’s palm cup the sensitized folds of her cunt, one finger tucking subtly against the syrup-laden entrance to her vagina.

Rowdy groaned as he continued to suckle her, his teeth raking her nipple, his tongue flickering over it as Natches caught the tip he held captured between his teeth and pinched at it with destructive results.

Her cry echoed around her as she twisted against Dawg, silently pleading to feel his finger slipping inside her.

The sensations tearing through her body were violent, destructive. Alternate caresses, suckling mouths, hands over her, hot male groans washing over her. And she was in the center of it, weak, helpless against the eroticism of each touch.

She pressed against Dawg’s palm, shattered cries passing her lips at the pressure against her clit. It would be so easy to climax, if she could just press against him a bit more, just the barest friction would allow her to ease the hunger beating at her.

“Not yet, baby,” he whispered at her ear, nipping her lobe. “Let your body burn for us, get so hungry that nothing matters except the touch, the need.”

She was already burning. Her fingers clenched in Rowdy’s and Natches’ hair as she felt Dawg’s fingers moving, felt him spreading her

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juices, allowing them to coat the tight entrance beyond as his finger massaged the closed portal.

She felt her anal entrance clench at the caresses, felt it open, milk at the tip of his finger as another hand, she didn't know whose, began to play with the swollen bud of her clitoris.

She was trapped between them, in the middle of the kitchen area, suspended within a pleasure, a heat so intense she could barely make sense of it. Pleading, incoherent cries fell from her lips as she arched back, arched forward, so desperate that she no longer knew which touch would send her streaking toward orgasm, she just knew she needed it.

Yet, it was different than it had been with Rowdy alone. She struggled to push aside the vague unease she felt. The lack of emotional warmth, of sharing that had come from being in that bed upstairs, just her and Rowdy.

“There you go, sweetheart,” Dawg whispered again as she felt the tip of his finger slide inside her anus. “Damn, you're tight, and hot. Your ass is sucking at my finger like a little mouth, needing more. Do you need more, sweetheart?”

At the same time, hard fingers captured her clit and pumped it wickedly. Oh God, she could come so easy, if she could just get closer.

She relaxed her buttocks as flames licked at the little bud. Simultaneously, the little entrance sucked the hard finger deeper as the pressure eased at her clit, causing her to scream in pleasure and frustration.

Her ass felt filled, and yet she needed more. Her clit was pounding with need, her pussy clenching with it until suddenly, sirens began to rip through her head...

“Fuck...” Reality slammed through as she was jerked to the floor, three cursing, furious men covering her as blasts shattered the erotic frenzy with cold fury.

“Get her to the side.” She was being pulled, jerked to the side, between the heavy cabinets as the sound of pounding feet and raging curses were heralded by return fire.

Shadows flashed around her in the dark as she scrambled to the corner of the cabinets, her hand brushing over fabric as she felt the shirt she had worn earlier beneath her hands.

Pulling it from the floor, she crouched in the vee made by the cabinets and pulled it over her head as Rowdy pressed her tight against his side.

She didn’t ask questions, she wasn’t hysterical. She followed his lead as he, Natches and Dawg began to work her closer to the back of the houseboat.

“Bastard shot the hull, Rowdy,” Dawg hissed as the gunfire eased.

The computerized alarm was still going nuts, the siren shattering her nerves as the sound of the security personnel on the other end demanded an answer.

She noticed no one was answering. Within seconds they were informed that Lake Patrol had been alerted and was now moving for the area.

“The pumps are working.” Natches slid in place with them. “We’ll be okay until the patrol gets here.”

They were dressed. She felt the scratch of Rowdy’s jeans on her thigh, Natches at her rear. Dawg had dragged his shorts back on, but where Rowdy had come up with clothes she wasn’t certain.

“I think he’s on the cliff overlooking us,” Natches snapped. “The trajectory of the shots would be about right for that.”

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“He’ll have to cross the point to get back to the road,” Dawg growled. “I’ll be back. I’m going after him.”

“No...” The word was a hollow, raspy sound, jerking from Kelly’s throat as she caught at his pants.

Dawg brushed her hand aside, moving through the darkness as the pulsing siren continued to echo through the boat.

“Stay here.” Rowdy pressed her against the counters before moving for the alarm box and quickly cutting the sound off.

Kelly listened silently as he spoke to the security personnel, his voice hard, dark, furious.

“Don’t move from here until Rowdy comes back,” Natches whispered in her ear. **“I need to check upstairs.”**

She nodded in reply, her throat tight, fear and fury clogging her voice until she wasn’t certain she could speak. This was because of her. Someone had shot into the boat, tried to sink it, to kill them, because of her. She had placed Rowdy and his cousins in danger, had caused a madman to focus on them.

She wrapped her arms around her waist, staying in place, huddled against the counter as Rowdy flipped on a light in the living area.

She looked up as he came around the counter, his expression hard, his eyes gleaming with rage.

“Come on, baby.” His voice was gentle as he reached down for her. **“Lake Patrol will be here to escort us to the dock in a minute. We need to get you dressed.”**

She pulled herself wearily to her feet, gazing around at the destruction. The windows were shattered, glass and debris littering the floor, the paneling splintered from the bullets.

“Come on.” He lifted her into his arms as she stared around numbly at the destruction.

Despair tightened in her chest as she buried her face against Rowdy's neck. She could feel her stomach cramping with guilt, with fear. One of them could have died. She could have lost Rowdy, or Dawg or Natches could have been hurt, killed.

"Here." He sat her in the middle of the bedroom floor before moving to the small closet and pulling free a pair of her jeans. "Put these on."

She accepted them silently, bending to pull them over her feet and then to her hips before she took the sneakers from his hand. She sat on the bed, slipped them on then struggled to tie the laces.

"Easy, baby." As Rowdy knelt before her, she realized the small whimpers she could hear were her own.

He brushed her fingers out of the way before tying the laces quickly then staring up at her. Something twisted inside Kelly at the gentle emotion she saw in his eyes. Beyond the anger, the determination to kill that she could see raging inside him, she saw his gentleness.

"This wasn't your fault, Kelly." He reached up, cupping her cheek in his hand.

Kelly fought the tears that clogged her throat, as well as the fears that clogged her mind. Rather than answering, she pulled from his touch slowly, shuddering at the thought that his need for her could end in his death.

"Don't even try it." The snarl that twisted his face had her staring back at him in shock. "Don't think I'm going to let you run from me now, Kelly," he snapped roughly. "The time for running was over the minute you let me fuck that hot little body of yours."

She shook her head desperately, pushing against his chest as she fought to jerk to her feet. She couldn't speak. If she dared to attempt to, she knew the screams of rage and fear wouldn't be far behind.

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“Stop it, Kelly...” He grabbed her wrists, forcing her in place as she heard the first hoarse cry leave her lips. “It’s okay to be scared, baby. I swear to you, we’re all okay, we anticipated this, we know how to fight him...”

“No,” she protested fiercely, feeling the tears seeping past her eyes despite her desperation to hold them in check. “He’s crazy. You can’t do this. You can’t...” She wasn’t going to let him do it.

She tried to tear herself away from him, to get away from his touch, his warmth. She couldn’t live like this. She couldn’t live if anything happened to him, or the others.

“I will do it.” He gripped her upper arms, giving her a brief, hard shake as she stared back at him miserably. “Hear me well, Kelly. I will do it. And when I get my hands on him I’ll kill him. Do you understand me? He will never ever touch you or another woman again. Ever.”

Death shadowed his eyes as she stared back at him, incredulous. He would kill, and he would do so with no guilt, no second thoughts, she could see it in his eyes.

“I can’t do this...” Her voice was shaky, her insides trembling with enough force to make her stomach pitch.

“He’s going to come after you again, baby.” He framed her face with his hands, holding her still as his eyes bored into hers. “You know he will. He didn’t finish with you, Kelly. You got away. He won’t be able to let it, or you, go. Do you understand me?”

“Stop.” Her nails bit into his wrists as she saw the complete determination to finish what he had started. God, how could she have not seen where it could lead? How could she have let it go this far?

“I won’t stop, Kelly,” he bit out. “Listen to me well, dammit. I will not stop until he’s dead. I will not let that bastard terrorize you.”

She opened her lips to argue, to beg, only to be cut off as Dawg moved quickly into the room.

“He got away.” He was breathing rough, heavy. “Lake Patrol is moving in and Ray and Maria are right behind them. Natches is on the deck waiting for them.”

Rowdy turned back to her. “You aren’t leaving with them, Kelly. Don’t even consider it.”

Her breath caught, feeling the shudders in her belly beginning to work through her body. She had no other choice. She had to leave. And soon, she would have to leave Ray’s home as well. She couldn’t continue to endanger the people she loved.

“Don’t make me gag you.” She stared back at him in shock as his voice rumbled dangerously.

“What?”

“You’re going to try to run. I can see it in your eyes. You do and I’ll throw you over my shoulder and cart you out of here like a sack of fucking potatoes. Don’t push me.”

His lips curled back from his teeth in a powerful snarl as his eyes blazed with green fire back at her. Shock whipped through her at the deadly warning she saw in his gaze, as well as the confidence that he would carry out his warning.

“Don’t...” She tried to protest, to fight against the sheer force she could feel wrapping around her.

“I mean it, Kelly,” he growled, rising slowly to his feet as he pulled her after him. “Don’t fight me on this. Not right now.”

She felt dazed, overtaken, her mind overwhelmed by the danger and the certainty that if she attempted to run from him, then he would chase her down. He wouldn’t let her go. Not now, not yet. Not before he shed blood.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sheriff Ezekiel Mayes had surveyed the destruction of the Nauti Buoy after she limped into dock. His deputies were going through the interior as Kelly, Rowdy, Dawg and Natches sat inside the small employees' room of the marina.

Ray and Maria stood at the side of the room as Sheriff Mayes took their statements. Kelly could see the knowledge in the sheriff's eyes as he questioned her, his gaze flickering to the Mackay cousins, a hint of disapproval lighting the golden-brown depths of his eyes.

"You didn't see anything at all?" His gaze went over the four of them once again. "Hard to believe three tough ex-Marines would let a stalker get the jump on them, especially considering those same Marines were well aware of the danger of the situation."

Kelly pressed her lips together as she clenched her hands in her lap. She had to grit her teeth to keep from defending the men. To keep from revealing the fact that she knew Rowdy had planned this. She knew he had, and it infuriated her.

"Come on, Zeke, you know better than that," Rowdy bit out. "Kelly needed some time out. I thought the cove would be safe..."

"I'm not a fool, Rowdy," the sheriff growled. "I'm not buying that shit and neither is your daddy." He nodded to where Ray was staring back at his son with a heavy scowl.

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“I’m old enough that my daddy’s opinion either way doesn’t sway me, Zeke,” Rowdy snapped back. “Now why don’t you let me take Kelly home to rest...”

“Kelly, letting these three mix you up in some crazy scheme to catch this stalker is a bad idea.” The sheriff hunched down in front of the chair, staring back at her intently as she fought to keep her breathing even. “Let me handle this. We’ll catch him.”

“You haven’t yet,” she whispered, shaking her head as anger and fear collided inside her.

Damn them all. She felt like a bone in the middle of a pack of wild dogs.

Compassion filled the sheriff’s eyes. “I’m not a vigilante, sweetheart. When he’s caught, I need the law on my side, not his. Kelly, if these boys suspect someone, I need to know.”

“If I suspected anyone, you’d know it, Zeke.” Rowdy’s voice was hard, cold. “Now leave her the hell alone.”

“God, stop snapping around me.” Kelly jerked to her feet, causing the sheriff to straighten and stare down at her with a heavy scowl. “All of you. I’ve had enough for tonight. I didn’t see anyone. I didn’t hear anything. We were on the lake to get the hell away from the bastard’s phone calls. That was all.”

She pushed her fingers through her hair, aware of the strained silence filling the room. She glanced over at her mother, and saw knowledge there. They knew why she was at the lake with the three cousins. She and Ray knew, and though Kelly felt no embarrassment, no shame at the knowledge, what she did feel was a sudden certainty that this wasn’t a relationship she could endure.

Not because of the knowledge. Not because of morality. Because she didn’t love them. She loved Rowdy, and the discontent, the subtle anger

NAUTI BUOY

building inside her for days now over his expectations were clawing at her heart. The attack had only reinforced it. She was tired of being controlled. Period. First by a damned stalker and then by her need to please Rowdy.

“I’m ready to go home.” She shook her head before lifting her chin and staring around the room. “Now. I need to sleep and I need to think.”

“You can go home.” Sheriff Mayes nodded. “But I may need to ask you some more questions tomorrow.”

“Fine. Whatever.”

“Just a minute and I’ll drive you...” Rowdy began.

“I’ll ride with Mom and Ray,” she told him, ignoring the surprise that swept across his face. “I need to think, Rowdy. We can talk later.”

“Kelly.” He caught her arm as she moved to step past him. “We’ll be right behind you.”

We.

She moved her gaze over his cousins. She had been in their arms, felt their hunger and their lust, and despite the pleasure, she could feel her anger building. They were like little boys desperate to keep their newest toy close to them.

She inhaled deeply. “Whatever you want to do, Rowdy.”

She pulled her arm from his grip before moving to Ray and her mother.

“Sure?” Ray asked her quietly.

“I just want to go home,” she muttered. “Now.”

Rowdy, Natches and Dawg moved from the store with them. She was aware of how they placed themselves around her, protectively, shielding her. She felt smothered instead as she moved into the backseat of her stepfather’s Laredo.

Within minutes they were heading to the house, a fucking convoy of vehicles. Dawg and Natches were in front of the Laredo with Rowdy bringing up the rear.

“Kelly...” Her mother began softly.

“Not now, Mom.” She huddled into the backseat, wishing she could make sense of the emotions clouding her heart, her mind. Trying to make sense of her anger.

Rowdy was taking her over. Forceful. Dominant. He was so certain he knew what she needed, but Kelly had seen what she needed, and it wasn't what he was offering.

It was the reason she couldn't make the choice. Why she fought Rowdy every time he pushed for her to make a conscious decision about her needs. It was why she had wanted to be seduced, because she knew it wasn't a choice she could make.

Maybe she just wasn't naughty enough for the man she loved, or his cousins.

ad

He was a fool. Rowdy followed the Laredo, his thoughts as confused as the emotions he had glimpsed raging in Kelly's eyes. He ached, and it wasn't because of the attack. That just pissed him off. No, he ached because the attack had been a diversion he had begun praying for just before it happened. A way to pull Kelly from Dawg's arms, make certain the fingers filling her tight ass were gone, the touch to her clit no one's but his own.

Jealousy had begun to mar the pleasure even before the sounds of gunshots and the whiz of bullets tearing through the cabin had sent them all crashing to the floor.

NAUTI BUOY

What the hell was he supposed to do now? Dawg and Natches had protected her for the past four years from the bastards desperate to get into her pants. His two cousins hadn't touched her because of the understanding of the relationship that would evolve later. Even though Rowdy knew they had hungered for her almost as desperately as he had.

Had he not been so intent on running those last four years, of being certain what he wanted, the attack wouldn't have happened. He would have been there to protect her, to keep that bastard from touching her. But what would have happened to the relationship he had always envisioned?

He realized now that the shift in his desires had begun before he returned home. Hell, before he took that last tour in the Marines. He hadn't wanted to face it, and now it was slamming into his face with the force of a sledgehammer.

He was risking everything he had come home for and he hadn't even realized it. His own arrogance, his own certainty that he hadn't, that he couldn't change. That the sexual pleasures that had always been such a part of his life would remain the same.

Kelly was changing the rules. She was changing him.

Rowdy rubbed at his neck wearily, blowing out a frustrated breath as he turned into the driveway of his father's home, his eyes scanning the well-lit exterior. Dawg and Natches had pulled to the sides of the driveway, keeping Ray's Laredo between their vehicles with Rowdy bringing up the rear.

Turning off the ignition, Rowdy opened the door and stepped from his pickup as Ray, Maria and Kelly slowly stepped from the Laredo.

With a flick of his fingers he sent Natches ahead of them to check out the house before Kelly entered. His eyes continued to scan the exterior, the hairs on the back of his neck tingling as he moved closer to Kelly.

**Lora
Leigh**

She leaned into him as his arm went around her. Damn, she was exhausted, terrified. What the hell was he going to do about her? As the warmth of her swept through his body, the possessiveness growing inside him seemed to expand, strengthen.

Leading her toward the house, he kept his senses on alert as Natches slipped in ahead of them, with Dawg following close behind.

“Rowdy, we need to talk,” Kelly whispered as they stepped up to the porch.

“We will, baby.” He bent his head, kissing the top of her head before leading her into the hallway, his eyes finding Dawg as he made his way along the top of the stairs. Natches had moved into the kitchen, each man checking the rooms thoroughly as Rowdy led Kelly, and their parents, into the darkened living room.

“Leave the lights off for now, Dad,” he advised his father as he moved Kelly to the wide chair at the side of the room. “There were signs of a watcher on the hill overlooking the house on this side the other night. The lights will pick up shadows with the thin curtains in here.”

“Shit,” his father muttered, but the lights stayed out. “I need a drink.” As Ray took care of drinks for himself, Maria and Kelly, Rowdy went through the house again, checking windows, assuring himself it was safe for the few hours of night left. Dawg was currently set up in Kelly’s room, armed with a night vision telescope as he watched the hill across the clearing, while Natches had slipped outside to take watch.

Returning downstairs, he escorted Kelly to his own bedroom. She was quiet, withdrawn, and he’d be damned if he knew what to say to her.

“Grab one of my shirts and go on to bed, darling.” He couldn’t touch her, if he did, he was guaranteed to completely humiliate himself. How could one man be as big a fool as he was? he wondered. And now, how did he fix it?

NAUTI BUOY

She was moving for his closet even as he spoke, and pulling free one of his more comfortable T-shirts. He had to give her credit for knowing what she wanted.

As he stood silently watching her, she stripped down to bare skin, then drew the shirt over her head and smoothed it down past her thighs. His clothes hung on her, but they carried her scent for weeks after she wore them. The soft, subtle hint of woman that only he could smell.

“You go ahead and do whatever you have to do,” she told him, her voice cool as she flipped the blankets back on his bed and crawled in. “I’m too tired to deal with it tonight.”

He moved to the bed, knowing better than to move into it with her, to hold her against him. His control was shot, the need for her, to mark her, to erase his cousins’ touch with his own was driving him crazy.

“Go to sleep, baby.” He came close enough to bend, to let his lips caress the still kiss-swollen curves of hers as she stared up at him. “I’ll take care of you, Kelly.”

“Yes, you will,” she sighed heavily, her gray eyes shadowed. “And tomorrow, I’ll take care of you.”

He didn’t think she meant sexually.

“Kelly...”

“Not tonight, Rowdy.” She shook her head firmly. “Tomorrow. I’m just too tired to talk tonight.”

He could see the adrenaline crashing through her, wiping her out. She was still in shock, fighting the reality of the attack. She would dream later, he knew. And the nightmares could be ugly. He promised himself he’d be back by then, that he would hold her through them, ease her.

“Tomorrow.” He smoothed her hair back from her face as she settled into the bed. “I’m going downstairs for a while, baby. I’ll leave the door open and I won’t be long...”

“I’ll be okay, Rowdy,” she assured him, a thread of mockery filling her voice. “Go. Just let me sleep.”

Rowdy paced the house. Nervous tension was a bitch, and suffering from it wasn’t something he normally did. But damn if he wasn’t just about to cut his own throat just to ease the thoughts tormenting him.

What the hell had he done?

When he first came downstairs on the Nauti Buoy, the sight of Kelly standing next to Dawg had sent his cock to full erection and the blood racing through his veins. Just as it had earlier when his cousin had moved behind her, his lips moving over her buttocks, spreading them, caressing her.

It had been hot as hell, feeling her pleasure as her hot little mouth surrounded the sensitive crest of his cock. Holding back had been iffy. His balls had drawn up in torturous need, desperate to explode as the pleasure of it had seared his nerve endings.

He had ignored that unfamiliar tension that began to hover at the back of his mind. Fought with it. Then later, as his lips suckled at her tight nipple his eyes had watched as Natches pleased the other, and he heard the words Dawg whispered to her. How snug she was, how hot, and the lust that filled his cousin’s voice had slapped at Rowdy.

Jealousy. Possessiveness. He wasn’t used to those emotions, but now they raged inside him until his fists were clenched and violence simmered just beneath the surface. He prayed for the chance to get his hands on the little son of a bitch stalking Kelly. To take out the fury and aggression rising inside him on someone who deserved it. Neither Dawg nor Natches deserved it, but it was building, growing inside him until Rowdy wasn’t certain he could contain it.

NAUTI BUOY

Stalking back to the living room, he moved to the small bar Ray kept at the side of the room and poured a measure of whisky into one of the tumblers sitting ready. The liquid burned going down, but did nothing to calm the beast raging inside him.

“Liquor doesn’t help, boy.”

He turned, his hand tightening on the butt of the pistol he carried before recognizing his father.

Ray stood just inside the doorway, dressed in a pair of dark cotton pajama bottoms and a faded T-shirt. His expression was sober, lined with worry and his eyes gleamed with knowledge.

“We’ll catch him.” Rowdy shrugged. “He’s losing focus...”

“I wasn’t talking about her stalker.” He moved further into the room. “I was talking about what happened on that boat before he attacked.”

Rowdy brought the glass to his lips and threw back the rest of the whisky before grimacing tightly. Damn, he didn’t need this conversation with his father.

“Let it go, Dad.”

“Doesn’t set well, does it, Son?” Ray moved closer to the bar, lifting one of the clean tumblers and pouring his own drink. “It starts eating at your gut first thing, tearing at you, making you wonder where your mind was.”

Rowdy narrowed his eyes on his father, hearing the knowledge in his voice, the assurance that only came from experience.

“They didn’t take her,” he muttered, wondering why the hell he was bothering to explain this to his father of all people.

“Might not have, but something happened. Something strong enough to make you panic, to keep you awake. To tear your guts up with guilt.”

Son of a bitch.

“She was shot at, Dad, that’s enough to shake any man’s insides.”

Ray sipped at his drink, staring at him over the rim of the glass. Rowdy couldn't hide from the knowledge, no matter how much he suddenly wanted to.

"I know what's going on, Son," he finally sighed heavily. "You think you and those two hardheaded cousins of yours are the only men in this family to think they know what they want in a woman? And in her pleasure?" Ray frowned heavily, his eyes darkening. "You're not. I've tried to warn you since I first caught wind of what was going on, and you've never wanted to listen."

Rowdy watched his father curiously then. Through the years, there hadn't been so much as a hint that his father's sexual experience had been less than normal.

Ray grunted mockingly. "Your generation thinks they know everything. You don't. Mine knew what a reputation was, and we knew what should be kept private and what should be flaunted. Women like Calista James were steered clear of except for a certain few. We knew our actions would always backfire on us, if not at the time, then later, on our wives, our children. I thought I taught you that, but maybe I failed there too."

Ray shook his head as he nodded to the chairs Maria and Kelly had sat in earlier. "Come over here, Rowdy. Let's talk."

"What's there to talk about?"

"Saving face," his father sighed. "Those two cousins of yours have waited nearly as long as you have for Kelly. They don't love her like you do, but when you yank something like that out of a man's hands, they're bound to get pissed. And you don't want that kind of pissed from men you've been as close to as brothers."

NAUTI BUOY

Ray leaned forward in his chair, staring back at Rowdy intently. Damn, that look had the ability to send him right back to his teenage years and the memory of his father's chastisements.

He wasn't a teenager anymore, but at the moment he felt as uncertain as one.

Rowdy turned his gaze to his drink, wondering what the hell he was supposed to say. He'd already figured out the fact that he was making a hell of a mistake, he didn't need his father to point that out to him.

"It's tough, being as close to men as you are to Dawg and Natches," Ray sighed. "You three are closer than brothers, you always have been." He shook his head, staring down at the glass in his hand as he grimaced painfully. "I had a friend like that once, Rowdy." He lifted his eyes then.

"A damned good friend."

Rowdy stared back at him, knowing what was coming. Knowing he didn't want to hear it.

"It was before your mother." Ray cleared his throat. "And there was this woman. One that made the blood boil in my veins, made me want forever. But I was dumb. Brick dumb. I thought I'd always be the man I was then. That what I wanted sexually would always be a part of my life. And I shared that woman. Because I thought that pleasure was the greatest gift I could give her..."

He tossed back the rest of his drink before meeting Rowdy's eyes once again.

"Kelly should have been your sister, Rowdy. If I hadn't been so stupid, I wouldn't have lost Maria all those years ago. She chose the lover willing to love just her, rather than his own selfishness. Willing to give her all of himself, without the childish need to have it all his own way."

Rowdy's jaw bunched tightly.

"Dad, let it go." Rowdy shook his head sharply.

Lora
Leigh

“You’re figuring it out, I can see that in your eyes. The same way I thought I was figuring it out. But I let that bond I thought I had with my buddy get in the way. I was torn between the loss of friendship, and my own wants. And I thought the woman would be there either way. It wasn’t the friend I lost, Rowdy. It was the woman. And trust me, when it comes right down to it, Kelly is no different than her mother.”

Rowdy breathed in deeply. Damn, he had known he hadn’t wanted to hear this. He lifted the whisky before tipping more of the liquor into his glass.

His father was silent then, finishing his drink as Rowdy sipped from his.

“I love her,” Rowdy finally breathed out roughly. “I didn’t expect this though.”

“Love changes us, Son.” Ray rose to his feet, crossing the room slowly to set his empty glass on the bar. “Don’t make the same mistake I did, Rowdy. Once it’s over that first time, once you’ve let another man claim what’s yours and yours alone, you lose a part of your soul. Getting it back is hell. A hell I hope you never know.”

Rowdy stared back at his father silently, finally hearing what the other man had always tried to teach him. What was fair, what he wanted alone, wasn’t all that mattered. He had begun learning it in the Marines, but it was slapping him upside the heart now.

“James Benton was still a friend when he died, Rowdy. And I grew up and learned some damned hard lessons. Maria gave me a second chance, but that chance came at a cost. A very high cost. The daughter that should have been mine came from another man, and the son I love more than life is about to fuck up not just his own life, but that girl’s as well. Watching it and knowing I can’t stop it is hell. Remember that while you struggle between what you love and what you want.”

NAUTI BUOY

As Rowdy watched his father leave the room, a heavy sigh slipped past his lips. Maria's objections to his relationship made more sense now. He shook his head, realizing how well his father, James Benton and Maria had kept that secret. Reputations. Theirs was intact, but his wasn't. And now, he was risking Kelly's as well.

Tipping the glass to his lips once more he finished his drink before grimacing tightly. Kelly obviously had no idea of her mother's past, and she didn't need to know, he decided. They had fought to protect themselves and their children, and Rowdy wouldn't betray the trust. But damn if he didn't wish his father hadn't beaten some sense into him years ago.

Then he grinned mirthlessly, knowing the chances of even that working would have been slim. Some men just had to learn their lessons the hard way.

ad

Kelly was awake when he returned to the bedroom a little after midnight. Sleep wasn't coming, no matter how hard she sought it. Each time she closed her eyes she saw...herself...surrounded by the Mackay cousins, their hands touching her as pleasure whipped around her. But it wasn't pleasure she felt in the memory. She felt the dark swirl of shame.

The same emotions she had felt each time she swore she wasn't waiting one day longer on Rowdy and she was going to find someone to love her. To stick around and be with her. Each time she had tried, each time she had attempted to allow another man to touch her, shame had eaten her alive for days later.

The door closed behind him, the click of the lock causing her to open her eyes, to stare through the darkness as his shadow moved toward the bed.

God, she loved him. If she could give him his every desire then she would do it in a second, but some things she knew she couldn't do. Dawg and Natches she couldn't do. And she had no idea how to tell him. No idea how to broach what she knew could destroy the relationship she had dreamed of.

"Everything's quiet," he said softly as he pulled his shirt from his body.

The room was dark, too dark to make out his expression, but she could hear his voice, see the gleam of his eyes.

"I was waiting on you." She could feel the tension between them, and wished she knew why it was there. Was it hers or his?

Rowdy sat at the edge of the bed, pausing before he sighed tiredly and bent to take off the sneakers he had laced onto his feet before they left the boat.

His broad back shifted, muscles rippling beneath dark flesh as she sat up in the bed.

"Rowdy?" She whispered his name, uncertain what to say, what to do as he rose to his feet and shucked his jeans.

He was naked. As he turned to her she glimpsed the heavy, engorged length of his erection a second before she was suddenly jerked to him.

"Rowdy?" She gasped his name as his lips covered hers, stealing her breath, her startled cry.

And from there, her strength. His hands were hard, dominant as he tore the shirt from her body, tossing it carelessly to the floor before his lips took hers again. Her muted cries built in her head as he bore her to the bed, spreading her thighs, sinking into her.

NAUTI BUOY

There were no preliminaries. No foreplay. One moment she was empty, the next she was full, her pussy stretched to its limits as he groaned into her mouth.

She fought to breathe, and she could feel his struggle as well. The harsh sounds that tore from his throat were almost animalistic in their hunger, their intensity. His lips held back both their cries as he began to move, hard, furious strokes inside her, sending her nerve endings into shock, the pleasure ripping through her with the same desperation that his erection thrust into the slick, heated depths of her body.

Her arms wrapped about his neck, fingers pushing into his hair as one hard hand gripped her hip, holding her in place as he moved. The other arm curled beneath her as he supported himself on his elbow.

He surrounded her. He possessed her. Pleasure became a burning, consuming need as he fucked her with a hunger that swept through her soul. She could almost touch his soul. Then her eyes opened, widened, shock and ecstasy exploding through her as the orgasm overtaking her stole a part of her very spirit. Stole it and merged it with his. Melded them together as he stiffened above her, his cock swelling then pulsing as his release jetted inside her. Deep, almost violent spurts of his seed heated her, triggering another, deeper orgasm, sending stars to explode around her as she screamed soundlessly into his kiss.

“Mine!” The hard, throaty growl that left his throat had to have been her imagination. “Mine.”

Possessive. Consuming. His.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Rowdy, we’re not going to be able to keep her here.” Dawg moved through the living room, checking the windows and their latches the next afternoon. “Your dad’s security system is good, but it won’t stop a bullet.”

“Don’t know many that will,” Rowdy muttered, tamping down his impatience as he pushed his fingers through his hair and surveyed the living room.

He had been through the rest of the house, just as Dawg and Natches had been over the hill above it. The bastard was hiding there at night, watching the house, and he had a clear shot into every room from one point or another, if one of them messed up and didn’t close the curtains well enough.

And that didn’t change the fact that his dad and Maria were refusing to leave. As was Kelly.

“He’ll come back at us quick enough to keep us from making headway into security here,” Natches drawled from the entryway. “He was in that clearing across from her room last night. I never caught sight of him, but I could feel him. He was out there. And he’s damned good.”

Shit.

“We have to get her out of here, Rowdy,” Dawg reiterated. “Now. My gut is going crazy with this. Whoever the bastard is, he’s lost his damned mind. He won’t care who he kills to get to Kelly.”

NAUTI BUOY

“Your place?” Rowdy’s eyes narrowed on Dawg’s expression. He could see the expectation there, the excitement.

Dawg’s house was an underground masterpiece built by his parents. The outside was cement and stone overlaid with roughened wood siding. The windows were extra thick and after Dawg’s return from the Marines, bulletproof. As far as anyone knew, there was only one way in or out. No one knew about the hidden entrance except for the three of them.

Dawg nodded. “It’s the most secure.”

Rowdy braced himself. He could feel the sexual tension beginning to heat up in the room. His cousins had waited years for this. Hell, they all had.

“I’m not sharing her.” The words were out of Rowdy’s mouth before he could stop them.

His head snapped up, his jaw tightening as Dawg and Natches stared back at him in surprise.

“Is that your decision or Kelly’s?” Natches tipped his head to the side and watched him curiously.

“It doesn’t matter whose decision it is.” Rowdy pushed the words past his lips, attempting to contain the anger rising from his cousin’s question. “It’s not happening. We’ll move her to the house, but hands off. Period.”

Dawg sighed heavily, a grimace contorting his expression.

“Now son of a bitch, how did I know you were going to go and get all dog-eared fucking jealous?” he griped, his blue eyes narrowed in irritation. “Hell Rowdy, talk about blue balls going on here.”

“Talk about too damned bad,” Rowdy muttered as his muscles bunched and flexed beneath his flesh in rising tension. Damn, this shit sucked. As though the possessiveness, the emotions he felt for her were a separate being living within his flesh and bone.

“Hell, we can argue over this later,” Natches finally grumped. “After I take out my mad on that son of a bitch stalking her. Then we can fight over sharing rights.”

“No sharing rights. Period,” Rowdy snapped. The only thing that restrained him from taking his cousins apart limb by limb was the fact that he knew them. They weren’t pissed, at least not yet. But Rowdy admitted he was getting there fast.

“Chill out, cuz,” Dawg breathed out roughly. “Hell, it would have been nice, but no one’s pushing here. Wouldn’t be worth a shit if both of you didn’t want it anyway.”

Rowdy narrowed his eyes on his older cousin. There was a vague restlessness in his voice, and he realized it had been there for a while.

“What the hell do you two think you’re doing? Growing the fuck up?” Natches snapped then, disgust lining his voice. “If I wanted to grow up I would have stayed in the fucking Marines.”

Rowdy rolled his eyes. Trust Natches to get to the heart of the matter.

“I guess it was bound to happen eventually,” Dawg sighed. “Come on, let’s get the little troublemaker hid out in the house and see what we can do to make her life a little safer before she takes on the resident grouch here.” He flicked his hand toward Rowdy.

“This falling in love crap obviously sucks,” Natches commented as he turned and headed out of the room. “Remind me to steer clear of it, why doncha, guys? God only knows what kind of fool I might end up making of myself if I made that mistake.” His mock shudder had a grin pulling at Rowdy’s lips.

“Careful, Natches, you know what happens when we tempt fate.” How many times had they assured themselves the fun and games would never end. And now look where they were.

NAUTI BUOY

“Fate can kiss my ass,” he grumbled. “Better yet, she can suck my dick. I’m footloose and fancy-free, my man. And that’s how I’ll stay.”

Rowdy eyed his cousin warily. There was lightning striking somewhere, he was certain, and at that moment he decided he didn’t want to be nowhere around when Natches finally did manage to fall in love.

ad

The sun was well into the sky that morning before they arrived at Dawg’s house. Kelly knew the moment she saw the house why they had chosen Dawg’s as a secure location. She had forgotten about the underground home, built by Dawg’s parents, and set into the base of the mountain that ran through their property outside Somerset.

It had been meant to be a vacation home, private, out of the way, and as unique as his parents had been. The face of the house was warm wood, covering steel and cement, with large windows looking out from the kitchen on the left, and the large living room on the right.

It wasn’t opulent, or expensively furnished, but it was a huge underground dwelling with four bedrooms, accompanied by private baths. There was an exercise room and a basement pantry-wine room larger than some apartments she had been in.

The house was built in three levels—kitchen, living room, and exercise room on the first level, two bedrooms above and below it, and the basement on a third level. She now understood why Dawg’s father, Chandler Mackay, had been considered one of the finest architects in the nation.

Lora
Leigh

It had been surprising when Dawg had entered the Army, then began his own security firm after being discharged. Everyone had expected him to step into his late father's shoes.

Rowdy led her through the large open living room to the wide hallway that opened at the back of it. There, two sets of curved wooden steps led to the other levels. He moved aside as they reached the stairs that led to the upper level, allowing her to move ahead of him.

The steps were narrow, but comfortable, and led into another short hallway and two open doors.

"The left." He nudged her toward the open door, his voice brooking no argument as they moved into the room.

A huge king-sized bed took up the center of the room, draped with sheer curtains that hung from a steel ring in the center of the ceiling and tied at each corner of the bed.

A dark wood dresser and chest, writing desk and vanity table sat along the walls. Scenic pictures set in frames that resembled windows on the far side of the bed. Behind it, another door opened into what was obviously a large bathroom.

"Nice," she murmured as Rowdy moved in behind her and closed the door before setting her bags on the floor. He must have packed everything she had before they left his father's house.

"It suits Dawg." He shrugged negligently. "Go ahead and get settled in, take a nap if you need to. We'll go out to dinner later."

"Just the two of us?" She turned to him slowly, keeping her expression carefully bland.

"If that's what you want." He crossed his arms over his chest as he watched her, the dark gray T-shirt he wore stretching over his rippling muscles.

NAUTI BUOY

“I want to be alone.” She pressed her lips firmly together. “I told you that.”

The argument had raged for hours.

“And I said you can forget it,” he repeated, not for the first time as he dropped his arms and moved closer. Kelly stepped back, ignoring his dark frown. “Kelly, baby, you don’t have to do this, everything will be okay.”

“Sure it will.” She smiled tightly. “That’s why we’re staying in a house that could likely defend against an attack from a foreign government and your cousins are packing in enough weapons to defend against an army.”

“They’re for looks only,” he assured her. “We have a plan, I promise.”

“Like you did last night?”

“Naw, last night was just to see how rock-dumb that bastard could get. He’s dumb enough to need help breathing at this point. He won’t be that hard to catch.”

Confidence gleamed in his eyes, even as dread burned in her belly.

“He would have been caught by now if it were that easy.” She pushed her fingers through her hair as she shook her head. “You’re underestimating him, Rowdy.”

“Maybe you’re underestimating me,” he grunted as his hands whipped out, pulling her into his embrace before she could avoid him.

Heat instantly sizzled across her body, nearly taking her breath as he pressed the hard length of his erection against her belly.

“Want me to help you shower?” He nuzzled his face against her neck, his tongue licking over her pulse erotically as his fingers clenched at her hips.

Kelly gripped his shoulders, certain the weakness in her knees was going to become a permanent thing if he didn’t stop touching her so

damned much. She needed to think, she didn't need her mind clogged by his kiss, his passion.

"I can manage alone." Her voice was hoarse, despite the strength she attempted to inject into it.

"Hmm." He lifted his head, staring down at her knowingly before whispering, "I bet you can, but can you manage this alone?"

His lips caught hers before she could do more than gasp, covering them, taking them as his tongue licked at the curves, tempting her to play with him.

How she had always longed to play in just such a way with Rowdy. His lips tugged at hers as he stared down at her, his eyes heavy-lidded and darkening with sexual hunger. His tongue stroked over hers, retreated, then came back for more until she was moaning and reaching for him, desperate for the kiss he was teasing her with.

"Hungry for me, baby?" His voice was dark velvet, rasping against her senses as she arched against him.

"I've always been hungry for you," she whispered, nipping back at his lips as his eyes narrowed, his expression becoming primitive, deepening with sexual energy as her hands smoothed from his shoulders to his chest and lower.

She needed him. She had never pretended otherwise. She needed everything he was, everything he wanted and needed to give her.

She gripped the material of his T-shirt, pulling it quickly from the band of his jeans as she allowed her nails to rake his flesh. The trembling response that raced over his flesh sent flashes of erotic heat tingling between her thighs.

"Take the shirt off, Rowdy." She pushed the hem to his chest before lowering her head, her lips pressing to the hair-spattered skin beneath

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the flat, hard male nipple that drew her attention. “I want you naked. I want you against me, inside me.”

The shirt was jerked from his body and tossed aside.

Kelly murmured her approval while licking around the tight, hard nipple that fascinated her. How she loved Rowdy’s lips on her breasts, his teeth scraping her own hard peaks.

She raked over the tight point with a tentative little nip.

“Son of a bitch.” He flinched, his hands gripping her hair, tightening in the strands before pressing her to him again. “Again, Kelly. God, baby, do it again.”

She did that and more. She licked, sucked, rasped the point until she could feel a fine sheen of perspiration coating his chest and felt his breath heaving.

She moved her fingers lower, struggling with the metal buttons of his jeans, dragging them free and spreading the material apart. He wore no underwear. Rowdy wasn’t an underwear-type man, and she knew it. Which suited her fine. It made it easier for the hard length of his cock to push free, rising nearly to his navel, thick and heavy, the head bloated and damp from the silky pre-come coating it.

“Suck it.” His voice was a hard rasp as she licked a path down his chest to the hardened flesh below.

“Patience is a virtue.” She could barely speak for the lust rising inside her.

“Fuck patience,” he groaned, his hands tugging sensually at her hair. “God baby, do you know how long I’ve dreamed of watching you wrap your pretty mouth around my dick?”

A punch of excitement convulsed her womb and sent a spasm of response trembling through her pussy.

“You should have savored it last night,” she panted. “Maybe I don’t want to now.”

But she did. She grasped the heavy weight of his erection as she used her other hand to push at the band of his jeans. A growl of impatience tore from his throat as he moved, toeing off his shoes before quickly disposing of his jeans.

Each second it took him to undress, her palm stroked his cock, up and down, tightening at the base before loosening and running up the silky shaft once more. Until his hands were in her hair again, clenching in the strands, sending darts of heat to rake across her scalp as lust slammed through her bloodstream. Prickles of sensation, of need raced across her flesh as emotion erupted through her chest.

Rowdy. She had dreamed of him, lusted for him, waited for him. Now, everything she had ever prayed for was being threatened because of one careless act on her part. Because she had waited. Because she had wanted Rowdy to seduce her rather than take her. Had she belonged to Rowdy before he left last year, then the rapist would have never targeted her. And she could have belonged to him. He would have tried to fight it, but he had wanted her as badly as he did now. He had hungered as much as she had.

She lowered her lips the last inches as she bent to him, taking the mushroomed head between her lips as her tongue stroked over the throbbing crest.

“Oh fuck,” he growled, his hands tugging at her hair, pulling it just enough to light a sudden blinding flame of need inside her.

She liked the pain. Not true pain, that spark of intensity, the erotic burn that emphasized the pleasure. She liked it, and she wanted more.

Kelly wrapped her fingers around the shaft of his cock, stroking, pumping it with slow, measured strokes as she began to suckle the head

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with a growing hunger she could no longer control. She wanted to take all of him. Wanted to feel his cock pulse in her mouth, feel his semen spilling onto her tongue.

“Here, sweetheart, let me help you take those clothes off.” His fingers were pulling at her shirt, tugging at her hands and her head until she released his flesh to have the shirt stripped from her body.

“Come here, darlin’, turn right around for me.” Rowdy turned her as his hands stripped her jeans over her thighs before tugging them free of her legs as he slipped her shoes from her feet.

His lips touched her thigh as he undressed her, her knee, his tongue licked, his teeth rasped.

It was taking too long and it was taking forever and she was certain she was going to scream from sheer excitement as she felt him push her over the bed, his hard, calloused hands parting her buttocks just before hungry lips began to caress the hidden flesh.

She couldn’t breathe. Cool lubricated fingers eased into the narrow crevice, massaged the rippling entrance to her ass as she cried out her pleasure. “There, baby,” Rowdy’s voice whispered across her senses. “It’s just me. Just feel good, sweetheart. Just for me.”

One hand held her in place as the other slowly, methodically prepared her rear.

“I want you there, Kelly,” Rowdy groaned as she felt his finger slide fully inside her before retreating. “I need you there. I want to part those pretty cheeks and watch your sweet ass suck my cock in.”

She couldn’t stop the ragged cry that left her throat, or the overwhelming hunger for him. Rowdy was making her crazy. His fingers were pumping inside her anus now, two, stretching her, making her burn in ways she had never imagined.

She could feel the juices weeping from her pussy, thick, silky, soaking the bare curves as he teased her clit with a finger, made her hips jerk and sent talons of need ripping at her womb.

She needed... Oh God, she needed his fingers pumping inside her pussy, filling her there as the rocketing sensations overwhelmed her body.

She could feel her rear entrance being stretched further, slickened, heavily lubricated as Rowdy kept up the pressure on her clit, kept her begging for more.

Her hips were churning, driving his fingers deeper inside her. He was breathing hard, almost as hard as she was

“More, baby.” Another finger joined the first two, working inside her, stretching her until she was burning alive for more, ready, willing to plead for more if only she could find the strength to speak.

“Oh God!” She shuddered, her back arching at the fullness stretching her.

“Three fingers, Kelly,” Rowdy growled as his arm latched around her waist, holding her upright. “Three fingers buried in that tight little ass. When I pull them out, you’ll be ready for me.” He pressed on her shoulders until she was lying over the bed. Rowdy moved her, arranged her as he pleased, propping her knees on the mattress as he pressed her shoulders down.

All the while he worked his fingers inside her, pulling nearly free, spreading more of the cool gel over them before working them inside her once again.

“Fuck. So fucking pretty...” She felt his hand smooth over her buttock as he pulled his fingers free of her grip. “So pretty, and so damned sweet...”

NAUTI BUOY

“Rowdy...” Her fingers clenched in the blanket as she felt the bloated crest of his cock tuck against the entrance.

“Let it hurt, baby,” he whispered. “Just a little bit. Let yourself feel how the pleasure and the pain mixes, how it can make you fly like nothing else does.”

He pressed closer.

Kelly held her breath, feeling the nerve-laden tissue begin to part, to suck him in, rippling around him as it began to burn.

She was fighting to breathe through the pleasure. Through the burn. Through sensations that tore through her mind and left her dazed with the explosions of heat burning through her body.

“Damn. You’re tight, sweetheart.” He pulled back, pressed forward again, working the thick crest into her further with each stroke.

Below, his fingers circled her throbbing clit, stroked down the parted slit and massaged the entrance to her vagina. She pressed back, desperate to feel them inside her.

“Rowdy!” She screamed his name as she felt the head of his cock pop inside her. A hard, blinding stretch of tissue that had her arching, had her nerve endings flaming as a finger speared inside the depths of her pussy.

Rowdy slid inside her to the hilt then. His hands were tight on her hips, holding her steady as the hard rasp of his breath echoed in her ears. Part growl, part groan, his pleasure was vocal, physical, wrapping around her as it blended with her own. This was what she wanted. Needed. Just this. Just with Rowdy. He moved then, slowly, dragging his cock nearly free before pressing forward again. The movement sent violent waves of pleasure tearing through her as she begged Rowdy for ease.

“God yes, baby. You’re so sweet. So tight. So hot,” he rasped, his voice dark and rough as he began to thrust inside her slow and easy.

“Yes.” She reached back for him. “Please...” She needed him deep inside her. Needed his erection tunneling into her harder as his fingers teased her pussy. “Now...”

He gave her what she was begging for. Slowly. Teasingly.

His fingers caressed the swollen folds of her pussy a second before his hand retreated, only to return. Her eyes flew open, a startled cry leaving her lips as she felt the buzzing vibration of the vibrator he pressed against her vaginal opening. The thick tip entered her pussy, burning her further. “Damn, you’re so fucking tight.” She could feel the perspiration that covered her skin, that dripped from his.

Kelly shook her head. “Take me. Please...”

She heard him, felt Rowdy press the vibrator upward, working inside her slowly. Her anal muscles flexed around the invading cock as her pussy convulsed around the vibrator filling her. The tapered head of the toy pressed forward, making room for the following shaft.

It was unlike anything she could have imagined. As Rowdy filled her ass with his cock, he filled her pussy, filled her until she was certain she could take no more, only to learn she could take more. Much more.

By the time the toy had seated fully inside her, her screams of pleasure had turned to raspy, incoherent pleas. Sweat coated her body as her juices coated her thighs. She was slick all over, wet and pierced and dying for more.

“How’s that, baby?” Rowdy leaned over her, his chest pressing against her lightly as he fucked into her slow and easy. “Can you take it?”

“Please...” She was crying, so desperate to come she was shaking from the need. “Fuck me. Please. Please...”

NAUTI BUOY

He moved. His cock and the vibrator began to power inside her in tandem. The friction, the overwhelming intensity of pleasure consumed her. At first slow, tentative, then faster, harder, he began to thrust inside her with strong, powerful strokes.

Kelly writhed between Rowdy and the toy, the sensations of the dual penetration, of the pleasure flowing between them, just them, no one else, sent ecstasy screaming through her system.

She couldn't survive this pleasure. It was burning, intensifying, stealing her mind, her body. She felt each stroke tightening her womb, pushing her closer, deeper into the maelstrom overtaking her.

She was going to explode. She could feel it, flew closer to it, feeling the rapture build, the pleasure, so deep, so intense, so overwhelming...

Rowdy's name was on her lips. A scream of fear, of ecstasy as she felt the orgasm rip through her. It tightened her body, her vagina, tore through her and flung her into a pleasure she couldn't fight, couldn't resist.

She felt Rowdy stiffen, felt the heat of his release, the hard shudders that suffused his body and the heat, a blinding fiery blaze of emotion that had her screaming his name.

As the hard, wracking shudders eased from her body she collapsed against him, wasted, exhausted, certain she couldn't open her eyes if her very life depended on it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Rowdy walked from the bathroom half an hour later, dressed in fresh jeans and a shirt before moving to the bed and the shoes he had left forgotten beside it. Kelly still slept. A hard, hopefully dreamless sleep. Sprawled on her stomach, one arm tucked beneath the pillow her cheek rested on, boneless and breathing deep. She looked innocent, sweet and untouched.

It was hard to believe she had been a wildcat less than an hour before. The sweet little kitten sleeping bonelessly bore no resemblance to her, he thought with a smile. Rowdy shook his head, the smile creasing his face further at the memory. He had always known she would be a firecracker in bed, ready and willing for any adventure he could give her. She was earthy, lusty, and she liked that sharp little edge of pain he enjoyed giving.

He reached out, smoothing back a thick swathe of hair from her cheek as emotion overwhelmed him, tightened his chest and reminded him of what he could have lost. If he had given in to the demand that he take her the year before, the attack might have never happened. Hell no, it wouldn't have happened because he would have demanded re-assignment. He couldn't have left her. He had known that then. Once he had her, there was no way he could have walked away.

NAUTI BUOY

He was crazy about her. So crazy in love with her that it terrified him clear to the soles of his feet. She was young as hell, and still so innocent it broke his heart.

That innocence was so much a part of her soul that he knew that with plenty of care and love, it would always remain. Women like Kelly didn't come along everyday, and he knew that. Women so innocent that their hearts shone in their eyes, in their smiles. Women who saw past what the world wanted them to be, and who eagerly accepted who they were instead.

Leaning forward, he pressed a butterfly kiss against her forehead before tucking the sheet closer over her shoulders and turning back to his shoes.

Minutes later he was striding from the hallway into the living room where Natches and Dawg waited on him. Natches had his head back on the couch, eyes closed. Dawg just looked grouchy as he stared back from the chair he sat in.

“Bastard!” Dawg grunted as Rowdy dropped into a chair across from him. “Guard duty sucks.”

“Did guard duty pay off though?” Rowdy lifted a brow, staring back at his cousin questioningly.

Dawg grinned in satisfaction. “Guard duty paid. I slipped out the doggie hole and found a nice little perch topside. We had some definite movement.”

Natches' eyes opened as he straightened in his seat, his expression going as darkly dangerous as Rowdy felt.

“What kind of movement?”

“Little fellow, barely taller than Kelly. Dressed in hunting gear with a hooded mask. He was being real careful. Watching the house from heavy cover. I couldn't get a shot.”

“Did you recognize anything?” They were getting close. The bastard was losing his grip on reality if he had been at Dawg’s house this soon after the attack.

Dawg shook his head. “I watched him as best I could. Maybe something will trigger if I see him around anywhere.” A grimace twisted his expression. “Catching him might not be easy, but I have feeling he’ll make another move soon.”

Of course he would, Rowdy thought.

“I’ll take guard duty from here on out,” Natches spoke up then, his voice bland, unassuming. Dangerous. A good ole boy attitude covering a steel core of determination.

Rowdy stared back at him curiously. Natches had changed in ways that were hard to put a finger on. He had returned from the Marines only months before Rowdy had, quieter and a hell of a lot harder than he had been when he went in. That hardness was more than maturity and confidence, more than a soldier who had seen battle in the sands of another nation. Despite his vow that he had never grown up, somehow, Rowdy knew better.

Something had happened to his friend, something Natches was hiding from them all. But he wasn’t the only one. Dawg had changed as well, and until this situation with Kelly was resolved, he didn’t have a hope of figuring out why or how.

“Fine.” Rowdy nodded slowly. “You take watch. We’ll head into town in the morning, take Kelly shopping, do some stocking up. We’ll let the bastard see what he’s missing. If he’s the nutcase I suspect, he’ll hit by tomorrow night.”

“Are we going to give him an opening?” Natches’ voice softened, became more of a drawl.

NAUTI BUOY

“We can’t make it look too easy. He has to work for it.” Rowdy sat back in the chair, considering their options. “Dawg, weaken the security monitor on the kitchen window, and in the shrubbery beneath it. Make it look natural, something he can get through. He’s broken the women’s security systems so he’s not a stranger to security. Let’s see what the bastard’s made of.”

Dawg nodded sharply as Natches continued to watch them with a hard, merciless stare that assured Rowdy that he wasn’t the only one waiting to shed blood.

Rowdy turned his gaze back to Natches, realizing in that second that he had seen the look in his friend’s eyes before. He had seen it in another man’s eyes, a Marine assassin. He had worked alone, disappearing for weeks at a time and returning with that same dead, cold chill in his eyes. Hell. He blew out a silent breath as Natches met his eyes, his expression never changing.

“Go ahead and set up,” Rowdy told him quietly. “Let me know before morning how you want to play it.”

Dawg’s head had lowered, proof that he was aware of a truth that Rowdy hadn’t been privy to. A truth he still wasn’t certain of the details to.

“I’ll go public with you when you need me to,” Natches said softly. “I’ll use the bolt-hole otherwise.”

The bolt-hole, or dog door as Dawg had amusingly named it, was the single, secret entrance into the house from a shrub-hidden door several hundred feet around the base of the hill. Dawg wasn’t the trusting sort, and his time in the Marines hadn’t helped his trust issues any.

“Boys, we need to talk when this is all over and done,” Rowdy sighed, watching the weary resignation in his cousins’ eyes. “Keeping secrets among ourselves isn’t a good thing, ya know?”

Lora
Leigh

Dawg grunted, a sound of wry amusement that was typical Dawg. Natches' lips quirked into a smile.

“A good drunk maybe,” Dawg growled as he rose from his chair and paced across the room toward the kitchen. “Until then, boys, I need food. You want me to take mess duty?”

Rowdy's eyes met Natches' in shock, as his cousin's widened in horror.

“Hell no!” They both came out of their seats, rushing for the kitchen as they heard pans rattling beneath the stove cabinet and remembered Dawg's past attempts at manning a stove. The memory wasn't a pleasant one.

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He had checked on his girls. His special good girls. Kelly was weak, she was allowing herself to be degraded, to be taken. Oh, how he had hoped she had been the only one. He had prayed, prayed so long and hard that his good girls were waiting on him.

He curled into the corner of the small dark apartment, rocking himself gently as he stared at the first of his lovers. He had thought she was so pure, so sweet. With her long, silken blonde hair, and her innocent blue eyes. She had a soft voice, one that stroked the senses and made him think of his mother before she became a whore. Before she had turned his father away, before his father had stolen him away for his mother's sins. They had to punish her. She hadn't been a good girl.

He sniffed, realizing he was crying. He hated crying. Crying never helped, tears made a man weak, he remembered that from his father's lessons. A man had to do what he had to do. His father had been weak.

NAUTI BUOY

The old man had cried, he had raged but he had left the depraved creature he had married rather than punishing her.

He should have punished her. If his father had punished his mother, then she wouldn't have been so bad. She would have been the good wife and mother she should have been. If she had been a good girl, then she wouldn't have lost her son.

He flinched at that memory, shaking his head to force it back from his mind as he reached out to touch thick strands of hair that flowed out from his good girl's head.

He touched the silken strands, rubbed them between his fingers, remembering how soft and sweet she had been. Before she had let herself grow weak. Before she had let another man convince her to be bad.

He stared at the man, a tight smile crossing his lips at the sight of the nude man, laying half on the bed, half on the floor. He wasn't dead, but he would soon wish he was.

The girl. He sighed wearily as he let himself stare at the blood staining the carpet. She stared back at him sightlessly, her china blue eyes reflecting the horror of her punishment.

Kelly must have somehow convinced this one that she could be bad too. How, he wasn't certain. He could have sworn his girls didn't know about each other. He had taken pains to be very careful. But Kelly was so bad, so depraved, that she would have found a way to convince the others that they too could escape him.

They belonged to him. They were his good girls. He wouldn't allow another to touch them, not like his mother had.

He pulled himself to his feet, careful to pick up the knife and clean it of the blood that stained it. Her blood.

"You'll always be my good girl now," he whispered as he stepped around the blood and moved for the spare bedroom.

Lora
Leigh

He had hidden there for hours, waiting for her to come home. Waiting to assure himself that she was a good girl. Only to listen in pain and fury as another man touched her, reassured her, promised her safety.

He fought back his tears again as he entered the dark room and headed for the window he had used to slip inside the apartment. He had bypassed her security. How easy it had been. She had thought she was safe from him. That she could disobey him as his mother had disobeyed his father. She had found out wrong. Just as Kelly would have to learn as well.

NAUTI BUOY

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The next morning, Kelly would have preferred to enjoy the awakening caresses Rowdy was bestowing as she swam toward reality rather than the warm, sensual dreams twining around her. Unfortunately, the moment was interrupted by Dawg's growling message that her mother and Ray were on their way, and they had better get their asses ready before the arrival. His words, not hers.

She had enough time to shower and dress, and only seconds to eye the outfit Rowdy cajoled her into wearing. The wispy skirt and high-rise shirt were pale blue and suited her pale skin, even as they displayed it. His wink and the hungry glint in his eye assured her that it had achieved the effect she had bought it for though. To tempt Rowdy.

The hungry light died in his eyes though, as did Kelly's feeling of security and her newly awakened sense of hope with the news her mother and Ray brought.

"Her name was Dana Carrington." Ray's voice was low, angry. "She was murdered and her boyfriend was molested."

Kelly sat in shock, listening as Ray recounted the murder that had taken place the night before. She sat at the kitchen table, her hands wrapped around her coffee cup as Rowdy stood behind her, his hands resting on her shoulders as she felt fear tremble through her.

“Kelly.” Her mother leaned forward in her chair, staring back at her worriedly. “I called your Aunt Beth in Dallas, she wants you to come stay—”

“No.” Rowdy’s voice was hard.

Kelly’s gaze flickered to Ray. He glanced at Rowdy in concern, but said nothing more.

“She’s not safe here, Rowdy...” her mother protested.

“She won’t be any safer there,” he argued as Kelly tightened her fingers on the coffee cup. “At least here, Dawg and Natches and I have a chance of catching this bastard.”

“By letting him think she’s screwing all three of you?” Maria came out of her chair then, her cry filled with fear as she faced Rowdy. “For God’s sake, Douglas, what if using her doesn’t work? What if he gets to her—”

“Enough,” Rowdy growled warningly.

“Kelly, listen to me, whoever this is has killed now. He won’t stop...” Her mother stared back at her, her eyes damp with tears, her lips trembling.

“That’s enough, Maria,” Rowdy protested.

“Let her have her say, Rowdy.” Ray shook his head regretfully.

“She’s her mother.”

“What she says doesn’t matter,” Rowdy bit out. “Kelly stays here.”

“You’re going to get her killed...”

“Maria, sweetheart...” Ray protested.

“Stop defending him, Ray,” she cried out furiously. “He’s no more responsible now than he ever has been. I won’t let him get her killed...”

“Maria, stop it!” Ray’s voice hardened as his wife stared back at him in shock. “Let Rowdy do what he has to do, sweetheart. It’s going to be okay.”

NAUTI BUOY

Kelly wasn't certain what the look Ray gave her mother meant. It was filled with regret, tinged with sorrow as he glanced from her to Rowdy, then back again. But she watched her mother's eyes widen, her face pale. And at that point, Kelly had enough.

"All of you stop it!" Kelly's palm cracked on the kitchen table, sending an enveloping silence to fill the kitchen as all eyes turned to her. Ray and her mother, Dawg and Natches, Rowdy, she could feel their gazes boring into her as she lifted her head and stared back at her mother.

Kelly drew in a deep, hard breath. Fear was like a snake coiling in her belly, striking at her chest in an effort to be free.

"Rowdy's right," she whispered. "If he's going to go after anyone next it will be me. If I stay here, there's a chance—"

"Oh God, Kelly, listen to yourself," Maria protested desperately. "That girl last night is dead. He raped her boyfriend while he was unconscious. He's not sane."

"And I can't run." She shuddered at the thought of being terrified of the dark for the rest of her life, of being terrified of what could happen. But even more, she knew there were a lot of things Rowdy would allow, but he would never let her go. "We have to face it. Now. Here."

God, for a minute she wished Rowdy were less intense, less determined. She wished she didn't know him as well as she did.

"Come on, Aunt Maria," Dawg grunted as she continued to glare at Rowdy. "You know lookin' at him like that don't work. He's just going to get in a bad mood and pout on us all night long if you do."

Maria flashed her nephew by marriage a dark look. Dawg grinned back, flashing strong white teeth though his gaze remained hard.

"You boys are going to get her killed," she snapped. "This isn't a game you're playing here. It's Kelly's life."

**Lora
Leigh**

“Which makes it my life,” Rowdy assured her. “I’ll be damned if I’ll let this bastard hurt her more. Now stand the hell down and we can talk about this reasonably or by God we won’t talk about it at all.”

Ray breathed out wearily.

“He’s right, Maria. You know he’s right. She can’t run all her life,” he said, the regret heavy in his voice as Maria gasped in surprise.

“Ray, you don’t mean that. She would be safe...”

“She’ll never be safe as long as that bastard is on the loose, Maria.” He grimaced, shaking his head. “We both know it. She has to make her stand here.”

“I won’t have it...”

“I said I’ve heard enough!” Kelly scraped her chair across the floor, coming to her feet and pushing her fingers through her hair with an edge of frustration.

“Kelly...I’m scared for you,” Maria whispered. “If Rowdy is so determined to stay with you, then the two of you can go away for a while.”

“This isn’t something I can run away from.” Kelly swallowed tightly as she stared back at her mother.

“You mean he won’t let you run away,” Maria accused. “Don’t let him risk your life like this, Kelly.”

“I’m letting him save it,” she whispered. “Because without him, I’m dead. It won’t matter where I go, or how long I stay, he’ll find me. Just as he found the other girl. He won’t let it go.”

“He would have,” Maria bit out. “He left that girl alone until she found someone, and he would have left you alone if Rowdy hadn’t drawn you into...this...” Her arm swung out to encompass Rowdy, Dawg and Natches, and Kelly knew what her mother was referring to. Knew that her mother was aware of the relationship she had stepped into.

NAUTI BUOY

Heat flamed in her cheeks as she breathed in roughly, staring back at her mother, hating what her mother suspected, hating that the danger she was in now was tearing at them all. No explanation would make a difference, her mother would no more believe that she wasn't sleeping with all three men than the stalker would.

"This is my business," she said softly. "Remember that, Mom. And don't forget it. My relationship with Rowdy is my business, and it will stay that way. Period. I love you, but I can't deal with fighting with you right now. I want you to go home."

"No—"

"Mom, go home." She strengthened her voice, fought back her tears and stared back at her mother firmly. "I'll call. I promise. But this isn't going to help anything, and it's sure as hell not going to make this easier. For my sake, just go."

"Kelly..." Rowdy's protest as she moved quickly from the room was ignored, as was Ray's curse and her mother's cry.

She couldn't handle the combined pressure, or her mother's fears. Her own were choking her, strangling her with tightening bands of remembered horror as she escaped the tension building in the kitchen.

She had tried to tell herself that the man who attacked her would go away. That it would stop. That it couldn't be worse than what she had already endured. But now the nightmare was growing worse. Her stalker had become a murderer.

She rushed into the bedroom, carefully closing the door behind her as she capped her hand over her mouth in an effort to hold back her screams of horror. She wasn't the only one at risk now. She had known when the shots were fired into the boat that the stalker was going to try to hurt Rowdy. It hadn't sunk in though, not all the way to the bone, until Ray and her mother dropped their bombshell.

“Kelly, open the door.” Rowdy wiggled the doorknob as he spoke on the other side of the panel. His voice was soft, gentle, nearly breaking her resolve to hold back her tears.

Pressing her lips together she turned the lock before moving away, unaware she had locked it in the first place. She moved to the center of the room, wiping her fingers over her cheeks in an attempt to dry the tears from her face.

The door opened then closed as silence engulfed the room for long seconds.

“I don’t want him to hurt you,” she finally whispered, keeping her back to him as she wrapped her arms over her breasts. “What will I do if he hurts you, Rowdy?”

She heard the male snort behind her, mocking, filled with stubborn pride. She turned to him slowly, wishing, praying, that none of this had happened. That she could have had her dream of holding Rowdy without the danger that surrounded them.

He was staring back at her tenderly, but there was no missing the spark of rage behind the tenderness, or the pure confidence that poured from him.

“What happens if you run, Kelly?” he asked her, moving toward her, a slow, predatory movement that had her heart racing in anticipation even as fear overwhelmed her. “Can you stay one step ahead of him? Can you live your life knowing he can strike at any minute? Knowing that eventually he’ll get tired of just watching you, and find a reason to kill you instead? Just as he found a reason to kill that girl last night?”

“I’m not stupid.” Her breath caught as his hands cupped her shoulders, his thumbs smoothing over the flesh the straps of her shirt left bare. “I’m scared, Rowdy,” her voice lowered. “I’m so scared.”

“That’s natural,” he whispered. “Do you know I’m scared too, Kelly?”

NAUTI BUOY

She stared back at him in surprise.

“Scared you won’t trust us to protect you. Scared you’ll leave, that he’ll hurt you in ways you won’t be able to come back from. That I’ll lose you forever. That’s what scares me, Kelly. Hell, it terrifies me.”

“Don’t...” She shook her head, shaking at the throb of emotion in his voice, the pain that threaded through it.

“I’d rather die than see that, Kelly,” he whispered painfully, his eyes tormented, dark with emotion. “Don’t you understand, sweetheart? I love you until I can’t breathe without feeling it move through me, feeling your presence around me. You’re my heart. My soul. I won’t let that bastard take that from me. If it means I have to lock you up for your own protection and listen to you rage for a lifetime, I’d do it. Anything, Kelly, to keep you safe.”

The tears were streaming down her face now, shudders whipping through her body at the sound of his voice. Her big, tough Rowdy, his tone soft, thick with emotion, his eyes brilliant with it.

“I love you so much, Rowdy.” Her hands moved from his chest, no longer pressing to hold him back, but moving to his shoulders as he drew her to his chest, holding her close, secure against him.

“It’s going to be okay, Kelly.” She felt his head lower, felt his lips move over her forehead. “Everything’s going to be fine, babe. I’m not stupid, or careless. And Dawg and Natches sure as hell aren’t. We’re going get through this. All of us, baby.”

She lifted her head for his kiss, needing it, desperate to fill the dark places moving through her soul with the fire of his hunger, his need. She could feel his cock straining beneath his jeans, pressing against her stomach as she drew his head down to her.

“Kiss me, Rowdy,” she whispered. “Kiss me like I dream—”

Lora
Leigh

His lips stole her words as a hungry groan filled the air. His groan, her whimpering cry of need as she felt the heat and lust moving from him, into her.

Her lips opened as her arms curled around his neck, pulling him closer to her as he tilted her head back, sipping from her lips, licking at them, nipping until they opened as she was crying out for more. Needing more. His tongue was a stroke of fire, his hands were everywhere. Hunger heated the air, filled her body and whipped around her like forked fingers of lightning tingling over her body.

In those moments there was no stalker, no danger, no death or pain. There was only passion. There was only Rowdy.

Amazement flared through Rowdy, not for the first time, at the pleasure he received from just kissing Kelly. Holding her head between his hands, feeling her silky hair fall over his hands, feeling her lips, like hot satin beneath his.

And her taste. She intoxicated him. Nothing but Dawg's white lightning had ever had the power to affect him so quickly, until Kelly's kiss. Her touch. Her passion.

He groaned against her lips as he let his tongue dip past them, feeling hers waiting, tangling against him like damp silk and sending his senses spinning.

A man shouldn't be so weak in the face of a kiss, he thought with a sliver of amusement. But damn if she didn't sap his will to resist her, to keep from taking her again and again.

And he was going to have her again. Now. He was going to lay her back on that big bed and sink inside her until she screamed his name.

He backed her toward the bed, keeping his lips on hers as his hands moved from her head to wrap around her back before gripping the hem of

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her shirt and pushing beneath it. She had the softest skin he had ever touched. Everything about Kelly was different, better, hotter and sweeter, and with each touch he only wanted more.

“Let’s get you out of these damned clothes,” he muttered as he tore his lips from hers, his eyes lifting to stare down at her.

Her lips were swollen, cheeks flushed with arousal, and her pretty gray eyes were dark, stormy with hunger. Damn, he liked her hungry. She was like a little tigress, scratching and mewling and uncaring of anything but the pleasure she was attaining. The pleasure he was giving her.

Getting undressed was a matter of a few ripped seams, some buttons popping and strangled curses as they both struggled with stubborn jeans. But within seconds he was tumbling her back to the bed, his lips zeroing in on her hard, peaked nipples as the taste of her filled his mouth.

God, she was sweet. Arching to him, hoarse cries leaving her lips as he suckled at the tight little points. Her head was thrown back, her hands gripping his head, holding him to her as he went from one swollen mound to the other.

All the while her hot little body twisted and writhed beneath him as her thigh caressed the tight length of his cock. He could feel his balls tightening with the need to fuck and to do it now. It was always like this with Kelly. He couldn’t wait to get inside her, to feel her silken heat clasp him, rippling around him as he thrust into the liquid fire of her tight little pussy.

And that heat was so close. He could feel it whispering over the head of his erection, drawing him to her. He wasn’t going to be able to wait long, he knew. Long enough maybe, maybe, to ease down her straining body. He did just that, laying quick little kisses down her abdomen,

licking at her skin, tasting her with every cell of his body. Just long enough to spread her thighs and settle between them before dipping his head for one quick little taste of her sweet, juicy cunt.

The taste of her exploded against his taste buds as he slid his tongue through the syrupy slit before circling the tight, swollen bud of her clit. Sweet, tart, silken ambrosia that entangled his senses and kept him coming back for more.

Her cries echoed around him as he enjoyed the taste and feel of the slick folds of her flesh. Silken and bare, her pussy flowered open for him. Peaches and cream and soft syrup, and he was a man with a taste for this particular fruit. Especially when those gorgeous legs lifted and her feet propped on his shoulders to allow him maximum access.

He could happily drown in her. He licked at the sweet cream, tasted the hunger and passion that rained from her. His fingers caressed the tender opening to her vagina, teased and tempted her before working inside her. His senses exploded with the heat that surrounded them, with the moist, rich juices that flowed from her.

He ached for her. His cock throbbed like a demon's kiss but the thought of leaving the succulent flesh beneath his lips was more than he could consider. Not while she burned like this for him. Not while her cries filled the room and her lithe legs spread wide for him.

He licked around her straining clit, grimacing as her pussy tightened further around his fingers. His dick was screaming in pain, begging to push inside her. He pulled his fingers back, pushed inside again and flicked the little nubbin with his tongue as she screamed for more, begged to come.

Not yet. God, the taste of her, the feel of her. He wanted to feel her coming around his cock, not his fingers. He wanted to feel the tight

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muscles rippling around his erection, sucking the semen from the depths of his balls and sending his head racing with ecstasy.

He pulled his fingers from her, groaning at the effort it cost to pull back from her, to lift his head from her tender pussy and force himself to rise over her.

He pushed her legs back as he moved, opening her further for him as he pressed the head of his cock against the moist, flexing entrance to her pussy.

She stared up at him, her expression dazed, her eyes the color of storm clouds as her hands lifted to his chest. Her palms pressed against the hair-roughened muscles, her nails biting into his flesh.

“Now,” she whispered. “Please, Rowdy, now.”

He pressed in the barest fraction, his breath catching at the heat that surrounded the tip of his cock. Looking down, he watched as the smooth, naked lips of her sex parted, glistening with her juices and hugging his cock as he began to work inside her.

Flames traveled from the sensitive crest to his tortured balls as he fought to breathe. Release was a torturous need that sent fingers of electrified pleasure racing up his spine. He couldn't come yet. Not yet. He thought of baseball, fishing, auto mechanics and cleaning his gun, but each subject fizzled within his mind as he sank further and further into her heat.

Shaking his head, he threw his head back and plunged in the last inches, growling at the tightness, the suckling heat. He was a man on the verge of madness, control gone, only the wild need to fuck and mate spurring him now.

He didn't stop with one thrust. Pulling back, he began fucking inside her deep and hard, snarling at the pleasure that built with each stroke,

at the extreme sensations overtaking his body. His thighs bunched, his balls nearly drawing into his body before he finally felt Kelly explode.

“Fuck. There, baby. So sweet and hot. Come for me, Kelly. Come for me so hard...”

Her pussy tightened around his cock nearly to the point of pain as it began convulsing around him. Liquid heat engulfed him, burned him, then sent him careening into a mad, furious drive toward his own pleasure.

“God yes! Sweet baby...” The words ripped from his chest, from his soul. “God help me, I love you.”

The release exploded through his body, drawing him tight as an animalistic snarl left his lips. He buried his cock to the furthest depths of her before he felt the harsh, blinding explosions tearing through his scrotum. Pleasure was ecstasy, destructive and consuming as he felt his semen spewing inside the hot depths of the sweet cunt wrapped around him. It held him on edge, milking spurt after spurt of rich seed from his body before the last shudder tore through him and left him wasted.

Rowdy collapsed to Kelly’s side, barely retaining enough sanity to keep from falling atop her. He was gasping for air, rippling echoes of pleasure still racing up his spine as he used the last of his strength to drag her into his arms and cushion her against his chest.

“Okay...that was wild enough,” she panted weakly against him. “You could have warned me first.”

“Would have had to suspect first,” he mumbled. “Go to sleep or something. Let me rest.”

“I’m not sleepy.” But her voice was weak, drowsy. “We were going to shop. I heard Mom and Ray leave after we came up here. We could go shopping before they come back for the next round of arguments.”

“Nap.” He groaned. “Just nap. God, you just killed me. I gotta sleep.”

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A soft laugh against his chest was the last thing he heard as he sighed deeply and let himself drift off. Dawg and Natches could watch her for half an hour, she had wiped him out.

Kelly rose from the bed, a frown furrowing her brow as she found a loose T-shirt and shorts before heading to the bathroom. She was hungry—breakfast had been set aside because of Ray and her mother’s visit, and she was feeling it now.

She forced herself not to think about the reason for that visit. If she thought about it then the fear would take over. The helplessness and overwhelming dread threatening to attack her lingered at the back of her mind, shadowing her thoughts though.

She cleaned up quickly before dressing and leaving the bathroom. She glanced at Rowdy where he lay facedown on the bed, breathing deeply in sleep, before leaving the room. The beginnings of a smile tipped her lips as the need to curl up against him unfurled inside her.

At the same time her stomach growled warningly. Sex with Rowdy became a secondary need in the face of her hunger. But, she reminded herself, she had worked up a bit of an appetite with the sex part.

She moved slowly down the narrow staircase, listening for Dawg and Natches. She couldn’t hear either of them, but the television was playing in the living room. She knew Natches had intended to sneak out somewhere, and she wouldn’t put it past Dawg to be hiding as well.

She was surprised to see him lying on the couch instead. He was stretched out in what had to be an uncomfortable angle. His head was hanging over the side as he lay on his back and one leg bent at an odd angle, his arm falling to the floor.

Kelly tipped her head, staring at his dozing posture before shaking her head in confusion at it. She had seen some odd sleeping angles, but that one took the cake.

Restraining a soft laugh, she tiptoed through the living room and made her way into the kitchen. Despite the television, there was a heavy silence in the house that bothered her, made her wary. The moment she entered the kitchen she knew why.

She stopped in shock at the sight of Natches, face down on the floor, a trail of blood oozing from his temple to stain the floor beneath him.

Her heart slammed into her throat, stealing her breath and the screams that tightened her chest. She gasped for air, certain she was going to smother, knowing the terror filling her would kill her before anything else could.

Rowdy. Oh God, she had to get to Rowdy. She turned, the blood rushing through her veins as her mind screamed at her to run, only to slide to a stop as she moved back into the living room.

Eyes wide, her lips parted in shock, she stared at the form standing in the middle of the living room, a gun pointing toward her chest.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It took Kelly a moment to realize that she knew him. She blinked in surprise as she recognized the young deputy who had come to the apartment with the police the night of her attack. He had been so quiet she had barely remembered him being there.

“They thought they could catch me.” He smiled back at her, his hazel eyes gleaming with triumph as he waved the barrel of his weapon toward where Dawg lay on the couch. “They thought they were better than me because they were big tough Marines.”

His voice was soft, almost girlishly so. His expression was benign, calm, terrifying.

Deputy John Barnes. He hadn't been on the force long, a few years maybe. He was easy to overlook with his nondescript plain features and quiet voice.

“Why are you doing this?” Oh God, had he killed Dawg and Natches? From the corner of her eye she tried to make certain Dawg was still breathing, but she just couldn't be certain. Natches had seemed to be breathing, but was that wishful thinking or had he been?

He sighed as though in regret.

“I didn't mean to make them pay, but I guess the past is catching up on all of us.” He glanced at Dawg before his gaze came back to her. “I lost count of the beatings I took from my father because of what your lovers did with my mother.”

Lora
Leigh

“What are you talking about?” She shook her head, confused.

“Loren Barnes was their lover,” he snickered. “She was my mother. Dad stole me away from her a few years before she seduced them into her bed. She was such a whore. One man was never enough for her.”

Kelly remembered Loren Barnes. She had died several years before, an older woman, perhaps her mother’s age. There had been a rumor that the Mackay cousins had been her lovers years before, but Kelly knew none of them had ever confirmed it.

“That doesn’t tell me why you’ve done this.” She couldn’t breathe, fear was strangling her, weakening her, and she knew right now she couldn’t afford to be weak.

He looked at her in surprise, his thin lips curving into a smile.

“You don’t know who I am, do you, Kelly?” he asked her.

She shook her head slowly, suspicion and horror beating at her.

“My poor little girl,” he whispered, confirming her worst fears. “And you were such a good girl at one time. You know I’m going to have to punish you now. You were supposed to be mine.”

Her eyes widened as his finger tightened on the trigger.

“How was I yours?” She was desperate now, knowing there was no way to run from that bullet or from him. “You raped me.”

A frown edged at his brows as she fought to remember everything she had heard Rowdy and the others talking about concerning the other rape victims. What had they said? He made them beg for it, made them swear to love him.

“I didn’t ask you to touch me.” She forced the words past her numb lips. “You know I didn’t.”

His hand trembled.

“You loved me.” She saw the madness light his eyes.

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“Did I say I loved you?” She had to buy herself some time. Rowdy would be awake soon, he would know something was wrong. Oh God, where was he?

He blinked at her question before a pout curled his lips. “That stupid neighbor broke in...”

“I never said I loved you, John.” She fought to stay in control. “I didn’t want you to touch me. I was never yours.”

He blinked back at her. “No. You were mine.” His voice was almost childlike. “You were a good girl until they touched you. You wanted to be mine, because I knew you were a good girl.”

God, he was insane.

“I have always belonged to Rowdy.” She kept her voice calm, fought to still the hysteria rising inside her. “You knew I was Rowdy’s. Everyone knew. His cousins made sure of it.”

Anger leapt to his features.

“They’re depraved,” he yelled back at her, his features contorting with fury. “They touched my mother. They made my father know what they were doing to her and he told me about it. How they made her a bad girl. She wasn’t supposed to be a bad girl. She was my mother.”

“Your father misunderstood.” She was shaking, horrified. “They were just boys.”

“He didn’t misunderstand.” John shook his head furiously. “He would sneak and watch them and then he would punish me. He would come home and make me lie down while he punished me with what they were doing to her. He had to teach me not to be bad. Now I have to teach you, Kelly.”

Oh God. She felt her stomach pitch with the horrifying knowledge of what he was talking about. How could a father do such a thing? Drive his own son into insanity in such a way.

“John, you have to listen to me.” Her fists clenched in her shirt. Just a few more minutes. Surely Rowdy would be here in a few more minutes.

“You have to leave. If you shoot me, Rowdy will hear...”

He smiled then. A confident, mad smile that sent terror racing through her mind.

“I took care of Rowdy already, Kelly. He won’t wake up until I’m gone. I’m going to take care of you, then I’ll punish him, just like Daddy punished me. He’ll learn not to touch what belongs to me.”

She was going to throw up. The insanity that spewed from him was the most sickening thing she had ever known. Worse even than the attack she had suffered at his hands.

“Why?” Her voice trembled despite the effort she used to hold it steady. “He didn’t take what was yours. Why should you punish him?”

There had to be a way to get around him, some way to get to Rowdy. She could lock the bedroom door. There was a gun in the dresser, she had seen Rowdy put it in there. A big black pistol that she knew she could use.

“You are mine!” he snarled, his voice rising in fury. “I took you, I marked you. You wear my mark.”

“I didn’t ask for your mark,” she yelled back, fury rising inside her. “I didn’t want you, John. Love is given freely. You can’t force it.”

He shook his head as his eyes glistened with tears, his lips wobbling with some demonic emotion.

“You didn’t give me time,” he pouted. “You would have told me you loved me.”

“I knew I didn’t love you.” She edged back as his head turned from her. If she could get to the kitchen and he chased her, then she could use the hall exit to get back to the stairs. All she needed was a head start. “I’ve always loved Rowdy, John. Always.”

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“No! Mine!” he screamed back at her. “I’ll show you you’re mine then I’ll kill you.”

He rushed for her. Fury lit his expression as rage transformed his face and he rushed her. Kelly turned, sliding on the slick floor as she heard an enraged howl of fury echo through the house a second before the sound of two bodies impacting pulled her up short.

Gripping the doorframe, she turned back, shock filling her as she watched Rowdy struggling with the smaller man. Rowdy was bigger, but the blood at his temple showed the earlier blow which was now slowing his reflexes.

The gun John had carried slid across the room as he fought to get to it. Kelly rushed for it, crying out in rage as a hand snagged her ankle, bringing her to her knees.

Her head turned as she saw the knife in John’s hand and Rowdy’s reached to grab at his wrist as the other man aimed at her leg. She kicked out, breaking loose before scrambling for the weapon.

Her fingers latched onto the handgrip as she flipped over, bringing it up with both hands as she fought to get a clear shot.

The two men were snarling now, wrestling for the knife as she heard the sound of sirens in the distance. The gun shook in her hand as she blinked back her tears, terrified that the deputy would manage to actually find a way to wound Rowdy with that knife. There was no way to shoot yet. No way to be certain if she did, that she would miss Rowdy.

There had to be something she could do. But if she did the wrong thing, it could mean Rowdy’s life. She prayed, sobbing in terror as she watched the two men grappled until the knife was between them a second before Rowdy jerked the other man closer to him.

They both froze.

Lora
Leigh

A whimper left Kelly's throat as the front door crashed inward, and as though in slow motion, she watched Deputy John Barnes slide slowly from Rowdy's grip to collapse on the floor.

His head turned toward her, his hazel eyes filled with shock and surprise.

"My good girl..." he whispered before his gaze dimmed and his body went limp.

Kelly stared back at him, the sounds of police filling the room receding to the background as adrenaline began to crash inside her. She lifted her head as the gun dropped in her lap, watching as Rowdy began to move toward her, only to have the sheriff block him as the room continued to fill up. She could hear her mother, or was it merely wishful thinking? Rowdy was yelling and Sheriff Mayes was barking orders.

She knew she should get up, knew she should do something. But all she could do was turn her gaze back to the dead deputy as she heard his final words ringing in her ears. "My good girl..."

She wasn't his good girl. A sob tore from her throat as she pushed to her feet, fighting past the shock winding its way through her. He was dead. He was dead, and Rowdy was surrounded by the police.

"Let him go!" she screamed out hoarsely, fighting past Sheriff Mayes as she struggled to get to Rowdy. She kicked at someone, her fist landed against another, but they parted, staring back at her in shock as she flung herself in Rowdy's arms.

"Thank God! Baby." Rowdy's arms closed around her as his voice whispered in her ear. "Sweet Lord, Kelly. Don't ever terrify me like that again."

She was crying and couldn't stop. She could feel the sobs shaking her body as her arms tightened around his neck.

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She could hear Rowdy explaining the deputy's insanity as he held her close. Somehow, he had managed to regain consciousness and call the police, informing them of who was there and what was going on as he slipped down the stairs.

They were prepared, but questions had to be answered. Dawg and Natches were brought around by the medics and the house continued to fill with people. But Kelly refused to leave Rowdy's side. He refused to let her.

She held onto him through the evening, answering questions when she had to, but otherwise remaining silent as the knowledge slowly filled her mind that it was over. The stalker had been John Barnes, and he was gone. He was dead. It was finally over.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Kelly stared around the living room the next morning, amazed that there had been nothing left, not so much as a spec of blood, to prove that the night before had been no dream.

The only proof left was the egg-sized knots that had been left on Dawg's, Natches' and Rowdy's heads. John Barnes hadn't come to the front door, he had known about Dawg's back entrance through his father, who had spent years spying on the Mackay cousins, and used it to slip into the house.

He had gotten Dawg first, while Natches was outside getting the last supplies from his truck. When he came in, he had seen the same thing Kelly had, what appeared to be Dawg napping on the couch.

He had moved into the kitchen with the supplies where the deputy had moved in behind him, and knocked him unconscious as well. He had waited until Kelly had left the bedroom upstairs, hiding in the other room until she started down the stairs before he had disabled Rowdy. Or thought he had.

Rowdy had been coming out of his nap as he was struck; the blow had dazed him, taking precious minutes for him to get his bearings enough to struggle from the bed.

The sheriff had called that morning after running a night-long investigation on his dead deputy. He had indeed been Loren Barnes' son,

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kidnapped by his father several years before the Mackay cousins had become her lovers.

There was a long history of abuse as a child, foster homes and disappearances that hadn't been followed up on at the time. As the full story emerged, everyone who had known him on the force had been shocked. His father had molested him for years, punishing him for the supposed crimes his mother had committed. Richard Barnes, the father, had been insane, and his insanity had been forced upon his son until it had warped his view of women.

Four women had paid for that crime.

"Feeling better?" She turned her head as Dawg moved from the kitchen, followed by Rowdy and Natches.

She stared at the three men, feeling the tension that suddenly filled the room, the intensity in their eyes. She had known this was coming, had known Rowdy's cousins would soon put his decision to the test. She could see it in the ready tension of their bodies. There was none of the expected anger in Rowdy's expression though. His body was relaxed, easy, his gaze simmering with amusement.

"Do we have a problem?" She crossed her arms over her breasts and stared back at the three curiously.

"Rowdy's being greedy," Dawg grunted. "How do you feel about that?"

"I'm rather greedy myself, Dawg," she informed him fondly. "I can't do it."

"We wouldn't hurt you." She could see the frustration in his face.

"Hell, Kelly, our cousins in Texas have survived just fine."

The Augusts. They didn't even live in Somerset and they had a reputation here.

She breathed in deeply.

“I’m not Marly or their other wives,” she informed them as Rowdy straightened, slowly tensing.

Dawg glared back at Rowdy then. “You didn’t even give us a chance...”

“You don’t love her, Dawg,” Rowdy snapped, striding across the room to Kelly’s side.

When he turned to face Dawg and Natches, his arm curled around Kelly’s back, pulling her closer to his hard body.

“We love her enough,” Natches protested, his jaw pulsing tightly.

“Oh give it up!” Kelly stepped away from her lover, staring between the three men incredulously, laughter bubbling from her throat at their fierce expressions. “Geez, do I look like a bone between the three of you?”

They stared back at her in surprise.

“Dawg, how many times did I flirt with you, just for the hell of it, while Rowdy was gone?”

“You did what?” Rowdy turned to her in surprised irritation.

“Save it.” She rolled her eyes back at him. “You were gone so the jealousy is a little late.” She turned back to Dawg. “And I’m waiting on an answer, Dawg?”

Dawg shifted nervously, rather like a little boy caught in a fib. He cleared his throat, glancing at Rowdy with a grimace.

“You belonged to him first.”

“I’m his always, Dawg,” she informed him gently. “Now, forever and always. And that’s my decision. Not Rowdy’s. And it’s one you won’t change.”

“I told you she were trouble,” Natches griped. “Dammit, Kelly, we didn’t ask you to mess things up like this.” He cast her a brooding glare.

“You’re welcome.” She smiled back placidly.

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They weren't angry, she could see it in their eyes, feel it in the affection in their gazes.

Natches turned to Dawg and lifted his fist.

"We're the last."

Dawg lifted his fist in return, touching it to his cousins. "The last."

He appeared firm, decisive. Kelly tilted her head and watched both men curiously. Natches may never let go of the more extreme needs, but there was something there in Dawg's expression. Something hesitant. Something uncertain.

"Let's go." Rowdy's arm hooked around her waist, dragging her toward the stairs.

"Where?"

"To bed," he growled.

"But, Rowdy, I'm not sleepy."

"I promise, you will be. Later..."

She was laughing as he swept her into the bedroom. Hunger was a physical force that whipped around her. Sexual, heated, insistent. Rolling from Rowdy in waves.

As she turned to him, she felt Rowdy's hands at the hem of the overlarge shirt she wore, lifting it, easing it over her hips. She lifted her arms silently, allowing him to strip it from her before his fingers snagged in the waistband of her shorts and pulled them down. He didn't stop there. As soon as the material cleared her feet, he was kneeling before her, pushing her thighs apart and licking into the already damp folds of her pussy.

"Oh God!" She jerked, her eyes widening at the hungry desire of the caress as Rowdy's hands flexed at her thighs. She wasn't going to be able to stand for much longer. The pleasure was too heated, too intense. It stole the strength from her legs and left her feeling helpless, weak. It was

a sensual attack, an ambush of the senses. Rowdy held her steady before him, his tongue a devilish conqueror as it flicked and probed and drew the slick juices from her aching vagina.

“There you go,” he whispered before placing a gentle kiss at her clit before looking up at her once again. “Your eyes are getting all stormy, Kelly, so big and dark. Are you enjoying it?”

She couldn’t speak. The pleasure was overwhelming, different. There was a difference to his tone of voice, to his touch. A possessiveness, a dominance she gloried in.

“I bet you are,” he answered his own question as gentle fingers parted the folds of her pussy and began to press inside, stroking her, adding to the sensations tearing through her. “Do you know how fucking sexy you look, Kelly? How sweet and hot you taste?”

Her hands tightened in his hair, though she wasn’t certain she remembered how they got there, pressing him to her again as his tongue swirled around her clit, pushing her closer to climax as his fingers thrust slow and easy inside her pussy, filling her, stretching her, preparing her.

“Rowdy...” She could feel the orgasm building in her womb, knew she wouldn’t last long.

“Not yet, baby.” His smile was filled with lust. “Soon, but not yet.”

He eased the friction, causing her to whimper and arch to his mouth as he slowly drew back.

“Come on, baby, to the bed. I want you beneath me when you come for me,” Rowdy growled. She gasped as he suddenly swung her into his arms and moved to the bed.

“Come here, baby,” Rowdy whispered as he placed her in the center of the bed, laid back and spread open. He returned to her pussy, stretching out below her and easing her thighs wider before his tongue plunged into the needy depths of her cunt.

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Oh God, she was so close. She could feel the warning pulses of sensation tightening in her womb, dragging across her nerve endings. And she was lost. A ragged scream tore from her lips as her orgasm ripped through her, blazing across her body and mind as she arched, eyes closed, lights blazing across the canvas of her mind.

Her breath was lost as she felt Rowdy move, felt his cock tunnel into the clenching depths of her pussy as she writhed beneath him. Her release was still tearing through her, refusing to ease as he began a hard, intense rhythm.

Rowdy was lost within Kelly. The hard contractions of her orgasming pussy around the thick length of his cock was milking him straight to paradise. But it was the knowledge that he alone was driving her to this, that no one man had known her perfect body, had felt the hard contractions of her cunt, or her sweet cries of release that pushed him higher, drove him deeper into the pleasure racing through his bloodstream. He was locked into a sensation that built by the second, a pleasure that tightened not just his muscles, but his soul.

He could feel her. Deep inside her, not just with the part of his body fucking her like a madman, but with his soul. He could feel her wrapping around him, threading through his heart with the precision of a surgeon and binding together wounds he had no idea existed.

Within the pleasure was solace, ease, never-ending, forever ecstasy.

“Hold me, Rowdy.” Her voice was desperate, ragged as her arms tightened around his neck, her whispered plea tearing into his heart.

With his elbows braced on the mattress, his forearms slid beneath her, pulling her tighter to his chest, holding her as close to his heart as he could pull her. Electric energy pulsed from his scrotum, along his spine. Pleasure sizzled through the shaft of his cock, and as he felt her tighten around him once again, her gasping cries in his ear, he spilled

himself inside her. Violent pulses of semen jettied deep inside her pussy as he slammed his hips against her, a harsh, guttural groan tearing from him as their releases merged.

“Mine. Mine.” His lips were at her neck, kissing, nipping, relishing each touch, each sensation.

“Always...yours...” One last, keening cry tore from her before she finally collapsed beneath him.

Shaking, sweating, Rowdy rolled to the bed, dragging her limp body with him as contentment and satiation surged through him.

She was his. Always. Only his.

NAUTI BUOY

EPILOGUE

“Well maybe we are the only freaks in the family.”

The deep, amused male voice had Kelly’s eyes flying open in surprise even as Rowdy struggled to tug the twisted sheet from the bottom of the bed over her bare body.

She peeked over his shoulder as he twisted around, surprised to see the three men who had stepped into the room and the women who stood at their sides.

The August boys, distant cousins to the Mackays, had been threatening to visit for more than a year. Cade, the eldest, was watching the tangled scene on the bed with hooded gray eyes, while Brock and Sam were openly amused by the fact that only Rowdy shared the bed with Kelly. She knew the relationships the other men shared with each other’s wives.

“Sam, you’re a menace,” Rowdy grumped drowsily as Kelly held the sheet over her breasts and watched as he stumbled from the bed, searching for his jeans.

“Here you go!” The jeans were tossed across the room to Rowdy as Brock winked back at Kelly. **“Get your lazy ass dressed and we’ll fix coffee. Dawg is threatening to fix breakfast, and that boy scares me when he starts cooking.”**

“You could have knocked,” Rowdy snarled as he ran his hands over his face before glancing back at Kelly. **“And why is Dawg cooking?”**

“Because he’s the only option at present. I didn’t see a Waffle House in the driveway, cuz, and Heather refuses to cook for all of us.”

“I couldn’t make enough food in a week to feed the six of you,” Heather laughed, winking back at Kelly in amusement. “Come on, Kelly. Get dressed and I might help you cook.”

“I could handle that better than I can Dawg’s cooking,” Kelly snorted. “I’ll definitely help.”

She watched them leave curiously. There was an intimacy and comfort between the three couples that Kelly promised herself she wasn’t going to delve into. Some things you just didn’t need to know about people, she thought.

“You okay, baby?” Rowdy sat on the bed beside her, staring back at her, his eyes warm, filled with love.

The love that filled his gaze humbled her, left her in awe. In his eyes, she could see every dream she had ever prayed for.

“I love you, Douglas Mackay,” she whispered. “With everything inside me.”

And he didn’t protest the name. His lips lifted with gentle humor as his hand cupped her face with calloused heat.

“And I love you, Kelly. More than I ever knew it was possible to love... Now, dressed, baby,” he chuckled. “Let’s go see if the August boys have chilled out in marriage.”

Kelly shook her head as Rowdy left the bedroom, leaving her alone to rise from the bed and slip into the bathroom for a quick shower. She had a feeling Cade, Brock and Sam would never completely chill out.

Nearly an hour later, dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, she made her way back to the living room, catching the tail end of Rowdy’s explanation of what had happened the night before.

All eyes turned to her as she stepped into the room.

NAUTI BUOY

The six men took up the seats in the room, while the three women were perched on their husband's knees.

"You kept her safe, Rowdy, that's all that should matter," Cade muttered as his black-haired wife stood up, smiling back at her sympathetically.

"We've made these perverts coffee already, Kelly." She smiled as she extended her hand toward her. "Come on into the kitchen and we'll get ours while we help you and Heather get some breakfast together."

Rowdy's grin was pure wicked amusement as he stepped forward, his arm curving around her waist as he kissed her cheek.

She jumped as his hand landed on her ass, a soft laugh leaving her lips as she followed the other women into the kitchen.

The black-haired minx who had sat on Cade's lap, she knew fairly well. Marly had accompanied the brothers years before during their first visit. She was several years older than Kelly but had, through example, taught Kelly much about driving Rowdy crazy. She had kept the August brothers on their toes even then.

Sarah, Brock's wife, and Heather, Sam's wife, introduced themselves easily as they began searching, putting sandwiches and coffee together. The August men, like the Mackays, had always shared their women. After Cade's comment earlier, Kelly had a pretty fair idea that marriage might not have changed that.

As they put together a quick meal, Kelly learned of Marly's son, who was presently sleeping in the extra downstairs bedroom. Heather was several months pregnant, and Sarah and Brock were hopeful that she was. They were all confident, and close. Surprisingly so to Kelly, considering the facts of their relationship with each of the men in the other room.

Kelly watched them, searching for any hint of turmoil or jealousy, wondering how they had managed to form such a close friendship. She couldn't imagine being so easy around a woman that she knew Rowdy was touching, holding.

Sandwiches and coffee were taken into the living room where the men were discussing the details of John Barnes' life. Kelly returned to the kitchen, unwilling to hear more. She wanted to forget what happened, at least for a while, before she attempted to make sense of it.

"Have some coffee." Marly set a steaming mug in front of her as they all sat at the kitchen table. "You look a little shell-shocked."

And that was true enough.

"I think she's still trying to figure out Sam's earlier comment." Heather chuckled as she sat across from her, her green eyes smiling back in warmth.

"Oh, I think she's smart enough to figure that one out," Sarah murmured, quieter, in ways more confident than even the other two women, though they all seemed fairly sure of themselves.

"I'm normally not stupid," Kelly assured them all as she lifted the mug to her lips and took a tentative sip.

"And you're wondering how we manage to stay so close, while we've shared the men we love with each other," Marly finished for her.

Kelly stared back at her as she breathed in roughly. "Yeah, that little thought has been running through my head," she admitted.

"Love doesn't always have boundaries, Kelly." Sarah leaned forward. "For the three of us, we knew our lovers had demons to fight, and there was only one way for them to fight them. From what I saw, Rowdy's a bit more possessive though." Sarah grinned wickedly, without censure or jealousy.

That one was sure as hell the truth.

NAUTI BUOY

“He’s not the only one,” Kelly said softly, a smile tilting her lips.

“And it obviously works for you.” Marly reached over, gripping Kelly’s hand as Kelly stared back at her. “But one day, when Natches or Dawg find the woman they love, that need could be transmitted to Rowdy, Kelly. No matter his decision now, the past, and the bonds they’ve shared, could turn around and slap both of you. Then...if you need to talk...” The offer was laid on the table.

Kelly sighed deeply. “I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it,” she said quietly.

“That’s good enough.” Heather reached out, followed by Sarah.

Kelly stared down at the three hands, clasped one atop the other, and realized the tentative bond that had formed in that moment.

She stared back at the other three women. “I’ll call,” she whispered, knowing that when the time came, she may very well need the advice that only these three women could give her.

“Good.” Marly nodded. “Now, I want to go shopping. I saw the cutest little dress shop in town. Please tell me the owner will do fittings...”

The conversation shifted, moved and flowed until the men stepped into the room. Kelly turned her gaze to Rowdy as he came to her side, leaning down to kiss her gently as she smiled back at him in reassurance.

She loved him more than she had ever imagined possible and as the conversations continued, the women’s laughter joined by the men’s huskier tones, she felt at peace, comforted and oddly unworried about the future. Rowdy would always be there, she knew. The love they felt for each other wasn’t a budding love, it had been there for years, growing, strengthening. With it, answers would be found. They might not be easy answers, but they would work out. And in the end, she knew, that was all that mattered.

Two Weeks
Later

Midnight was the witching hour. The moon rose full and bright over the marina, flowing with glowing fingers over the surface of the lake, turning the light fog into a halo of mystery as it drifted through the trees that surrounded the single-story home sitting beneath them.

The surrounding mountains echoed with the call of the night. The song of the crickets, the hoot of a lonely owl, and the serenade of the frogs. The soothing music of a mountain night that did nothing to still the shadows that fed Dawg's soul.

He paused at the door of the house, eyes narrowed at the faint glow of a light through the tinted window. He reached out, gripped the doorknob and turned it slowly, a tight smile curving his lips as he opened the door and stepped inside the shadowed living room.

She was waiting on him, just as he had warned her to be. Her eyes were wide with apprehension, her body tucked into the large chair across the room. He closed the door behind him, seeing the small flinch that betrayed her nervousness.

She was dressed in a long gown, full and flowing, the cotton material enveloping her slight body but doing little to hide the tight, hard nipples that pressed against it.

His cock was raging beneath his jeans, pressing against the material painfully as it demanded release. He watched her gaze flicker to his thighs, her tempting pink tongue swiping quickly over her lips before her gaze jerked back to his.

“Don't do this,” she whispered, her voice trembling with fear and arousal as her eyes glistened with tears.

NAUTI BUOY

Dawg felt his chest clench at the vulnerability in those eyes, the memory of a night he couldn't forget slamming into his head, just as he knew it haunted her as well. A night he refused to forget.

His fingers went to the buttons of his shirt as he began to undo them, watching her mercilessly as her fingers clenched in the material of her gown.

"Take the gown off, Crista." He hated the hardness of his voice, the anger that fed his lust.

"Please, Dawg..." Tears were thick in her voice as she watched him.

"We have a deal, baby." He drew the shirt from his shoulders, watching her helpless reaction to the baring of his chest, the hungry response in her eyes. "Take the gown off." His hands went to his belt, releasing it slowly.

She was shaking, her hands trembling as her breath hitched and she moved to her feet. Her hands gripped her gown, pulling it over her head and holding it before her as he finished undressing.

God, he hated this. Hated the hunger he couldn't control, the need he couldn't fight. It had been like this for years, too many years, it seemed like forever. She changed the rules he had known to sex and to love, and kept him completely off balance.

"Drop the gown." He advanced on her, wrapping his fingers around his cock and stroking it slowly as he fought for control.

"Dawg..." She was shaking, her eyes so big he felt the bite of guilt even as he saw the heat lurking behind the anger and fear.

"We have a deal," he whispered as he stepped before her. "Remember that, Crista?" He ignored her tears. "I killed for you. I would die for you. I asked for only one thing in return. Are you going back on your part?"

Her lips trembled.

“Now,” he snarled. “I’ve waited as long as I can, damn you. Now give me what you promised.”

She dropped the gown to the floor before moving slowly to her knees. He watched, his eyes narrowed, ignoring his need for her kiss, knowing it wasn’t going to happen yet, maybe never.

But he could have this. His breath caught as her slender fingers wrapped around the thick shaft of his dick, his body tightening in a hunger he had known only with this woman as she leaned forward, her lips opening before her hot little tongue peeked out to lick over the head of his cock.

His hands fisted at his sides. He didn’t touch her. He had promised he wouldn’t. He stood with his legs spread, his teeth clenched as her mouth surrounded him, velvet heat and hunger spearing to his balls as a trembling moan left her lips.

“Suck it, baby,” he whispered. “Wrap those pretty lips around my cock and show me again why I lied to protect your pretty ass.”

Because he loved her. Because he had always loved her. He knew why, but he’d be damned if he’d let her know...

Lora Leigh

To learn more about Lora, please visit www.loraleigh.com. You can email to her at loraleigh02@aol.com, join her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as Lora <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/loraleighchatters> or keep up to date with Lora's events by joining her newsletter <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SensuousEscapes>.

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