



Password to Her Heart (The American Soldier Collection 9)

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, War

Description: Shawna James is struggling through life. Her only family, her brother Keith, comes to visit her when he gets involved in a mission gone awry. Shawna gets thrust into danger like she's never experienced before. Even the fear she sustained most of her childhood with abusive parents doesn't compare to being abducted by terrorists, held hostage in a Mexican make-shift prison, or having to kill in order to survive. Everything her brother has taught her comes into play, except falling in love with the five members of his team, including their gunnery sergeant. These men are older, risked their lives to save hers and Keith's, and now she questions whether they want her out of loyalty to Keith, or if they in fact truly care. They need to prove it to her quickly, because the terrorists they helped her and Keith escape from want revenge, and they'll take it by abducting Shawna once and for all.

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Prologue

“I can’t believe you’re sitting here in my kitchen. It’s been over a year. I was so worried about you. Are you out of the service?” Shawna James asked her brother, Keith, as he looked around the place. He appeared tired, yet on edge since he arrived fifteen minutes ago. He had visited her over the years. He also made sure she was well trained in self-defense and other moves. He loved her, but his military career was his life.

His brown hair was to his shoulders, his beard looked patchy and unkempt. Something was wrong. She just knew it.

He leaned forward, the muscles in his forearm visible with the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his biceps.

“Baby, listen to me. It’s important that you listen to every word I say, and don’t ask any questions.” He looked around the small apartment. Hell, she was embarrassed, but it was hers. She paid the rent. She worked at the club behind the bar. She was the one finishing college. Shawna was a survivor and trust didn’t come easy. In fact, her brother was the only man, never mind the only person, she trusted.

She stared at him, her heart filled with so much sadness and bad memories of their childhood.

“What’s going on?”

He looked to the right and then back at her. He did just tell her to not ask any

questions. She raised her stubborn shoulders as well as her eyebrows in challenge.

“I need you to listen to everything I tell you and keep it in the back of your mind just in case people come looking for me.”

“People? Who?”

“Shawna, I can’t tell you who, but I can tell you that these men are bad. They want things from me. Things that they can’t have. My cover could have gotten blown on a recent mission. It was supposed to be my last.”

“Your last mission? What about the team? Your commander? The other four men?”

Men she never met. Men she didn’t even know the names of, just men her brother referred to as his team and family.

He took a deep breath and released it. “I was solo on this one. It’s important that you know the possible danger you could be in. These men will stop at nothing to get what I have. I came here because you’re my only family. I had to warn you and set up a plan to help you survive. If they come here, and they find you, they’ll use you to get to me and to get this information.”

“Well then, why did you come here? Who are these people and how come the government isn’t helping you?”

He looked down at the table and then back into her eyes. She knew that look whether he was thirteen or thirty. He had done something he wasn’t supposed to do.

He lifted up a black bag from the floor. He had arrived with it. A backpack.

He unzipped it and showed her the contents.

“There’s twenty thousand dollars in here. You take it, its unmarked bills, and you use it to get as far from here as possible. Don’t stay in one place too long. Don’t trust anyone. Don’t go to the police or even the feds. You understand me?”

“No. If you did something so wrong that you can’t even rely on help from a government you dedicated your life to, then this must be very illegal. Why are you dragging me into your problems, Keith? Jesus! Like I haven’t been through a hard enough life as is?”

“Damn it, Shawna, I’m trying to save your life because of all that. I know our childhood sucked. Hell, I got out as fast as I could. Don’t you realize all those times I showed up over the years, and taught you all those self-defense moves, and signed you up for the martial arts training and shooting instructions on guns that it might have been to prepare you?”

“Prepare me for what? I’m not a soldier. I have shit, and I work at a freaking bar. I’m struggling to pay for college and finish up so I can have a real job, a real career, and a life. I don’t even have a boyfriend because of my fears from the past. Look at this shithole I live in because I have no choice.”

She was standing now and pacing in her small kitchen.

Keith stood up and laid the bag on the table. He walked closer and placed his hands on her shoulders. Her brother had always protected her when things got rough, but he did leave her to deal with the mess at home. She took off when she finished high school and never looked back. Keith was her only family.

“I know you’ve been through some rough times. It was why I kept coming back to train you, to prepare you to be safe. My job in the military has taken a turn along the way that I didn’t expect. There are some very evil people out there, Shawna. People that would think nothing of taking you and raping and torturing you to get to me. So

please just forget about the fucked-up shit from the past and take me seriously. They will come for you. I need you to be ready.”

“Oh God, Keith. I can’t believe this is happening. Where am I supposed to go?”

I know my life isn’t perfect. I know the apartment is shitty and I live in an unsafe neighborhood, but it’s my life, my apartment. I worked hard to get here, and I’ve been studying and working to get that degree so I can make more money and get out of here. Why is this happening?

“Bounce around from place to place. There is a passport in there but once you choose a country to relocate to you can’t come back here. That’s your last resort. If they come for you, you must not let them catch you. Use your training, your skills to evade their capture, Shawna.”

She swallowed hard, her heart was racing, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Can’t I go with you? You’ll protect me like always, Keith.” She grabbed his arm. She wanted to cry, to burst into tears and demand that he hold her, take the fear away like he did when they were kids.

“I can’t, Shawna,” he whispered, holding her shoulder and her waist. He stared down into her eyes. “It’s better if you’re not with me. Hopefully I can resolve this and you can go on with your life. I want you safe and I want you happy.”

She swallowed hard.

“And what about you?” she asked.

He released her arms and took an unsteady breath. “I’m going to finish what I started.”

He hugged her tight and she cried, holding him, not knowing if she would ever see him again. Her life was now in danger, too. What the hell was he involved in?

He pulled back and wiped the tears from her eyes. "You're strong, well trained, and smart. They may never come here but that's not a chance I'm willing to take."

"When will I know that you have it all resolved and that I don't have to hide out or move around a bunch?" she asked him.

He stared at her and she could tell that he was upset.

"I don't know. But if these people succeed and they kill me, remember to trust no one. Only trust the person who knows the password and gives it to you."

"The password?" she asked. He smiled as he tugged on her long brown hair.

"Yes, you mean you forgot after all these years?" he asked. She thought about it and then remembered.

"Are you serious? Do you mean the cubbyhole?"

"Of course. It's where we hid whenever they fought and yelled at one another. It was under the stairs in the house and blocked out most of the noise."

She swallowed hard. "It was our secret place," she said, remembering how they ran to it as soon as their parents drank too much and started becoming violent. Keith kept her safe then, and he would keep her safe now. She held his gaze.

"I'll remember the password, Keith. Please be safe. Please come back to me. You're the only family I have." She hugged him and he held her close until it was time to leave. Her life just didn't feel the same.

Chapter 1

Mercury Brooks was looking at the computer screen in the library. He couldn't believe the e-mail he received from a friend inside the government agency. What the fuck did you do, Keith? You were supposed to be here months ago. Retired and living the life with your team.

Mercury ran his hand through black crew-cut hair and leaned back. He felt sick to his stomach. How could Keith go rogue? He had always been one of them. They conducted their missions with the upmost respect and commitment to the Corps and to the United States of America. This couldn't be right.

Mercury looked away from the computer screen and toward the window that looked out at the open land. Their land. He and his team, Tex, Lee, Stitch, and Tiek. They'd moved out here to Texas, to an area near fellow soldiers, people who understood the life they once led and how difficult it was to fall back into civilian life. Keith was supposed to be part of this, too, but the kid never wanted to settle down. Mercury knew Keith had a tough life. As his gunnery sergeant, hell, he knew that he had someone in San Antonio from his past that he went to see from time to time between missions. But what was he doing in Mexico, Brazil, and even Argentina? Had he really gotten involved with some sort of terrorist group?

"Fuck!" he yelled out and slammed his fist down onto the desk.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Lee asked as he walked into the room. Mercury turned toward his friend, well, more like family now. Lee was the team planner. Thirty-six, no family, a soldier through and through, and Keith's closest friend. This was going to be hell.

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“It’s not good,” Mercury began to say, but Lee caught sight of the e-mail and a small picture of Keith along with it.

“What’s going on? Is Keith finally coming here to settle down with us?” Lee asked.

Mercury felt his own temper flaring. “Keith is in trouble. I just got this e-mail from a friend. They think he’s a traitor. They say he’s involved with some shithheads in Mexico and Brazil and planning terrorist activities.”

“No fucking way. That’s just plain bullshit,” Lee stated, raising his voice.

“There’s a lot of fucking evidence.”

“Like what?” Lee asked, running his fingers through his dark-blond hair. He was originally from Oklahoma. Tex was from Texas, Stitch from New York, and Tiek was from Hawaii. After fifteen years together, they were more than friends. They were family.

“How bad is it? Do the feds know where he is and who he’s with?” Lee asked.

“I only got this message. I’m just debating about digging deeper.”

“Why, Gunny? He was one of us. Do you really think Keith would do that? I mean, he’s got responsibilities.”

“Like what? He has no family, and he kept on working with the government even though he could have gotten out. I hate to think why he would do something illegal.”

Lee turned away, and rubbed his mouth with his hand.

“Can you dig a little deeper? Can you find out whatever you can? I know Keith, and there’s no way he’s a traitor, or went rogue as a soldier. You were there when we did that mission in Costa Rica. He wanted Montoya and his entire operation to go down, but our orders were clear.”

“You shouldn’t even be bringing that up right now.”

“I know, Mercury.”

“I’ll look into it. I’ll make the call.”

Lee walked out of the room looking none the happier. Mercury would have to tell the others at lunch about this. But for now, he would make the phone call and see what was happening. They owed Keith that much at least.

* * * *

Lee was furious as he headed toward the kitchen. He pulled his cell from his pocket and tried calling Keith. He didn’t know why he bothered. If the guy was on the run and wanted, then he wouldn’t answer. But Keith was also very intelligent and a great strategic planner. Lee left a message.

“If you get this, you know who it is, and I will help you any way I can, brother. Call me back.”

He disconnected the call.

“What was that about?” Tiek mumbled in that extra deep voice he had. It drove the women wild and made him the worst person to whisper in the fields of battle. He

used hand signals more often than the rest of them. At six feet three inches tall and filled with muscles, the man was intimidating.

Lee took a deep breath, and then explained what he just heard from Mercury.

“Holy shit. I don’t believe it. Not Keith.”

“Don’t believe what?” Stitch asked as he walked into the kitchen carrying his laptop. He placed it onto the island in the kitchen and then grabbed an apple from the yellow fruit bowl and took a bite. He chewed and stared at Lee and Tiek.

Stitch was their medic in the field and was always trading stocks online, his new hobby after hitting it big over the years as a day trader.

Lee explained and Stitch appeared just as upset as he placed the apple down on the island.

“Do you think it’s true?” Stitch asked.

Lee shook his head.

“What did Mercury say?” Tiek asked.

“I asked him if he could look into it. I mean, if Keith fucked up, then so be it, but if he’s in trouble, if he worked some mission and screwed up, then I need to know. There are things that need to be done.”

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“Like what, Lee? He never showed up here as we all planned on settling down on this ranch. He never wanted the things we talked about. You had that job all set for him to work for the US Marshals with Tex and he didn’t take it,” Tiek said.

“We need to tell Tex. Is he stopping in for lunch?” Stitch asked, and Lee nodded his head.

“Why would Keith go rogue? I mean, I know he doesn’t have a family aside from us, so what the hell? Was it the money?” Tiek asked, sounding so angry. He was the biggest of all of them. With wide shoulders, lots of muscles, he worked part-time with the academy to train law enforcement officers in hand-to-hand combat techniques.

Lee swallowed hard. The rest of the team didn’t know what Lee knew. That Keith indeed had a family member. His one baby sister whom he adored.

Just then Mercury walked into the room.

“What is it?” Lee asked.

“I assume you told the others about Keith.”

“Yes, sir, he did. What did you find out?” Tiek asked.

“There are no leads on him whatsoever. I got nothing. I’m sorry, guys. I did ask that my friend contact me if he hears anything at all, even mild chatter.”

Lee ran his fingers through his hair and sighed. His heart was heavy. His gut clenched and he knew that there was more to this.

“Lee, you’re taking this hard. I understand that you and Keith were close, but shit like this happens. As much as my gut is telling me there’s something more to this, we have to prepare for the worst,” Mercury stated.

Lee felt the anger hit his gut. “This shit doesn’t happen to our team members, to any of us. He’s not guilty of treason or aiding terrorists or whatever some federal bureaucrats want to pin on him. I’m not just going to sit around and do shit. He was part of us. He should be here right now.”

“Well, he isn’t. And what the fuck are you going to do? No one knows where he is. Like Mercury said, Keith didn’t have a family,” Stitch stated.

“Just wait it out, Lee. If Mercury gets a heads-up to where Keith is and we can help, then we help him,” Tiek added.

Lee looked at Mercury. “Keith does have someone. He has a sister.”

“What?” Mercury asked, looking shocked and sounding insulted. Lee knew that Keith only shared that he had a sister during a time when Keith thought they were going to die. It was a very brutal and terrifying time in their military careers and they truly thought they were dead. But their team came through and pulled them out. They rescued them.

“He never mentioned a sister,” Tiek stated first. He seemed insulted, too.

“Listen, he told me about Shawna when we were held captive for those three weeks in Morocco. We didn’t think you guys were coming. We thought we were dead.”

“Where does she live? Do you think Keith would go see her and hide out with her?” Mercury asked.

Lee shook his head. “They had a really tough life. She’s all he’s got and he’s all she’s got. I don’t know much about her. She’s got to be in her twenties. I just don’t know.”

“Shit. Maybe I should call my connection and have someone check in on her?” Mercury asked.

“No. Don’t even give up the information. I’m telling you, Mercury, we don’t know all the facts in this. I don’t trust it. I know Keith, and he is no traitor.”

“We don’t believe it either, but if he’s in trouble why wouldn’t he come to us for help?” Tiek asked.

“To keep us safe, just like he probably did with his sister,” Mercury said.

“I’m not sure what to do right now,” Lee stated.

“There’s nothing we can do but wait and see if he’s spotted or if he contacts us. Then we’ll make a decision,” Mercury said.

“Make a decision on what?” They all turned toward the doorway as Tex entered the kitchen, Stetson in hand.

“We’ll explain,” Mercury said.

Lee looked out toward the window, hoping that his best friend wasn’t dead already and that he would call him for help.

Chapter 2

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It had been three weeks since Keith had stopped in to see her. Since then she had been paranoid about every single person who came into the bar and flirted with her or tried to ask her questions. Tonight was no different as two Hispanic men watched her from a table and then headed over for a closer inspection.

She jumped the second Mike bumped her elbow. “Hey, sweets, what’s with the angry expression on your face? That’s no way to get the big tips.”

She locked gazes with him. “Angry? I look angry?”

“Hell yeah, but still sexy as anything. You sure you won’t take me up on the friends-with-benefits thing? It could work well for both of us.” He winked and she rolled her eyes and then gave him a slap with the clean white rag she had just pulled from her waist.

He gave a nod toward the bar, and she didn’t have to look to see the two Hispanic guys were there. “You got two new ones. They’ve been watching you all night. Maybe a ménage is what you need?” he teased and she felt her cheeks warm.

“Can you take them?” she whispered as a group of four people walked up to Mike’s side of the bar.

“Hey, Mike, we need some fancy drinks for the ladies. Can you hook us up? Marley asked for your Mikey special,” one of the guys stated, and Mike waved then looked at Shawna.

“Forget it,” she said. “Go ahead and take their order, I’ll handle these two.”

“Hey, you let me know if they bother you.”

She gave a wink. She may have been five feet six and petite, but she was well trained by Keith. Not that she was cocky, but she could put up a hell of a fight if the circumstances called for it. She swallowed hard. God, she hoped the circumstances didn't call for it. She just wanted to live her normal, boring life alone. Why was she feeling on edge tonight of all nights?

“Can I get you gentleman something to drink?” she asked, wiping down the bar as both men eyed her. One had a very dark expression on his face. His cologne was pungent and she had to hide her distaste so as not to be rude. The other was husky and sort of smiled or maybe smirked. When he spoke, he sounded like he had a thick Spanish accent.

“Three shots of tequila,” he said as he held her gaze and looked over her body. She was well endowed and it certainly helped in the tips department, but something was off about these guys.

“Why three?” she asked as she pulled the bottle from the top shelf and then placed the three shot glasses onto the bar.

“One for each of us,” the other guy said.

At first she thought he meant that they wanted her to have a shot with them, which wasn't uncommon at the bar. But then she saw the big guy. Holy shit, he was huge. He was ugly. His

face sort of distorted maybe from overuse of steroids. The only thing that was attractive about him was his suit he wore. It was strange seeing a man that muscular and big in one. He stared at her and she felt that creepy alert go off inside of her. These men were not from around here. These men were trouble.

She continued to work at the bar, not really ignoring the three men but not exactly keeping too close. She served them their drinks and they tried having a conversation with her. As the night went on and the bar became less and less crowded, she started to worry about them leaving when she left. She had a three-block walk to her apartment and it was a late night.

“Hey, if you want to head out in another hour, I’ll close up,” Mike asked her.

She debated about what to do. Was she just being paranoid? She knew she had the backpack with her. The one that Keith told her to carry everywhere just in case she needed a fast escape.

“I’ll let you know in a few minutes,” she told him and he shrugged his shoulders as he wiped the inside of a glass he’d just cleaned by the sink.

She walked back over to the three men who had polished off a full bottle of tequila themselves. Never mind that they had beers in between.

“Another round?” she asked. The one guy nodded as she fixed the drinks and he placed a hundred-dollar bill down on the bar. She reached for it to get him change and he covered her hand with his. She looked up and tried to move her hand, but his large, heavy hand held hers in place. “Keep the change, Shawna.” He said her name and it gave her the chills. He could have heard Mike call her by her first name, but it was the way he said it and held her hand. It was like he was messing with her. She remembered what her brother said about how bad these men were if they came.

She smiled. “That’s so sweet of you. Are you sure?” she asked, and he lifted his hand and stared at her as if he were trying to figure out how to respond to her.

“He’s sure. You’re real sweet,” the other guy said. They each downed their tequila shots then stood up.

The one who lost his voice and had held her hand, telling her to keep the change, looked her body over again. “See ya around,” he said, and they headed out.

She released a sigh, aware of how truly unnerving the situation was now that they had left. She looked at Mike.

“Big tippers, huh? I thought for sure they were going to hit on you,” he teased.

“Nice. I guess they realized I’m not easy,” she stated sarcastically. Mike raised his eyebrow at her.

“You sure as shit ain’t. Far from it actually. I’ve been trying to get you to go out with me for nearly a year and I never hear you talk about any boyfriend.”

She smirked as she wiped down the bar. Truth was, she wished she could have a boyfriend, someone to cherish her and love her, but she just couldn’t seem to trust anyone. She knew it was because of her past, and she could forget about trusting anyone now. Not with Keith in trouble and the possibility that she may have to skip town in a hurry.

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“Well, maybe I do.”

“No way. You’re just playing hard to get, but I’ll get you to come around. I’ll keep wearing you down until you say yes to me.”

She chuckled. “In your dreams, Mike.”

* * * *

Keith listened to the message numerous times. His best friend, one of his fellow team members, Lee, offered his help. He couldn’t call him. He wouldn’t put his friends, his fellow soldiers in harm’s way. But things were getting worse. Montoya’s men were in the vicinity. They wanted the thumb drive he confiscated off of Guazipan in Morocco.

Chavez threatened to take them all out, including Keith’s sister, if Keith didn’t cooperate. He knew he was working undercover. Keith had done this before, but never so intense and never this close to Montoya. But he took the assignment because he wanted revenge. Revenge on Montoya for killing all those innocent people, and justice in being part of eliminating a terrorist cell group determined to spill blood on US soil. That just wasn’t acceptable. Chavez was an informant gone bad. Or so he thought until a few days ago. Chavez was a spy, an agent, and his loyalty lay with the bad guys. Keith had been gathering evidence, and recordings on Chavez, too. He documented everything so that whether he survived this or not, at least his team, his sister, Shawna, would be safe and the bad guys would be behind bars or dead. He was hoping for the latter one. It was a mess.

Chavez figured out that Keith was a soldier working undercover. He also was tied to Montoya and recently became partners in a small business venture. When Keith showed up at a meeting as part of the security team hired by one of Chavez's associates, he recognized Keith immediately. Keith thought he was a dead man walking, but then Chavez did nothing.

A day later he found Keith and told him that the only reason he didn't give Keith up was that then Montoya would know that Chavez was a rat, paid by law enforcement agencies to give up information. But now Chavez owned him until Keith was able to confirm the terrorist cell, pinpoint a manufacturing site, or even confirm a delivery of weapons. Time was running out for him.

Keith made the copies of the thumb drive, minus the specifications for making the weapon and the specific location of that weapon. It was sealed up and packaged along with the other evidence that Keith would mail to his team, the only men he trusted Shawna with. At least she would have a place to stay and men who could protect her if Keith died.

Originally, Keith was after information of smuggling and general terrorist activities like training facilities, names of members, locations of key terrorist cells, but he got way more. He had been shocked to realize that the drive also contained information on Montoya and Guazipan's newest endeavor. The specs and the location of the hidden lab in Mexico where Montoya and Guazipan's money helped fund the development of a weapon of mass destruction. This was heavy shit. He fucked up when he took that thumb drive, read its contents, and then called it in to headquarters. Commander Louis Smuthers was bad, too. He immediately called Chavez.

But in all honesty Keith thought the thumb drive would contain some of Montoya's secret drug manufacturing facilities, his bank accounts abroad, perhaps a list of the members of his organization. Shit that could help put the fucker in jail for life or get him executed by his disloyal affiliates. No such luck. Instead he stole this damn

thumb drive the moment the opportunity presented itself.

His obsession with capturing and killing Montoya had ruled his every thought.

The man was a ruthless killer, a womanizer, and a heartless bastard. But Montoya was smarter than Keith anticipated. Now Keith had a bull's-eye on his forehead and had placed his sister, his only family, in jeopardy. Chavez was working Montoya over in a double covert operation. He was paid off by a competitor, a sworn enemy to Montoya, who wanted to take over Montoya's assets, as well as his ideas for the weapon. These sick fucking terrorists were now fighting over whose name would be attached to the destruction they caused and the innocent lives that would be lost. Keith was stuck in the middle, uncertain how he was going to get out of this, help to put Montoya and Chavez behind bars for good, and ultimately survive.

He swallowed hard as he watched Shawna walk from the bar to her apartment. The poor kid suffered enough. She lived in a bad neighborhood, struggled to put herself through college, and now her life was in jeopardy because of him. He had to do something. Just then he saw the SUV. So did Shawna as she started to run.

Tires squealed and Keith jumped from the car to head toward them. It was too late when he felt the gun to the back of his head and heard Chavez's voice.

"Don't be stupid or weak. This is exactly what Montoya wants. Your sister will survive for at least a few days. You need to think things through before you fuck up everything."

Keith heard his sister scream, saw her fighting for her life, and then he saw the big man strike her hard. She fell to the sidewalk and didn't move.

Oh God, Shawna. I'm so sorry.

* * * *

Shawna knew she was in trouble the moment the SUV

pulled up alongside the curb. She turned to look as the window went down and she recognized the man from the bar. She took off running, trying to keep the backpack in place. The strike to her shoulder came out of nowhere. She knew she needed to either run faster or try to stand her ground. The decision was made for her when the one guy grabbed her hair and struck her in the cheek. She struck back, breaking his nose and making him holler. As she went to escape she turned and took the hit to her jaw from the big guy. It was lights out instantly. The last thing she felt was her body hit the concrete pavement with a thump.

* * * *

Jerry Chavez brought Keith back to the car where they watched the three men gather Shawna off the ground and dump her into the SUV. It took off with tires squealing as they both watched. Keith felt like vomiting. Shawna was going to die because of him. How could he let this shit get this far?

“You need to focus on the objective at hand. Your sister will only die if I call Montoya and tell him that you are in fact a spy.”

“You’re such an asshole. He’s using you like you used him. You were a federal agent, a spy for our government, and now you’re selling them our secrets? You’re part of the development of that missile?”

Chavez struck Keith in the back of the head, surprising him. “I need that thumb drive.”

“Where are they taking my sister?”

“Someplace safe and where her screams won’t alert police of any kind.” Chavez chuckled.

He was a traitor and the one person Keith least expected to be double-crossing him and the United States. He was still working undercover and coming up with squat. Especially while Montoya and Guazipan kept Chavez on the payroll.

“What do you want from me? I don’t have anything you need.”

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“That’s where you’re wrong. I know about the thumb drive and about the secret operations going on. I need those specs. My associates will pay big money for them.”

“You already know everything about the missile, the terrorist cells. You’re part of them.”

“I’m not.”

“You are and you’re a fucking traitor, too.”

“You don’t know everything. Why do you think I chose you to go undercover with me? You had your sister and no one else. She doesn’t date. She never even has a man over to her place. You protect her so that makes you weak. You’re predictable. When Smuthers told me about you, I of course jumped at the opportunity. You’re too patriotic. You love this damn country so much you’d give your life for it.”

“What do you mean you chose me? You were a snitch for the government. Now you say you’re an agent, too, and you picked me to be part of this? I don’t believe you.”

“You should. You think everyone in our government wants to keep the peace? You’re a fool. A terrorist attack gives the government power and control over the people to persuade them. Everyone gets all patriotic. Meanwhile a select few of us know that it’s a game.”

“You’re lying and you’re sick.”

Chavez struck Keith again, this time hitting him in the mouth.

“You think I’m lying? You’ll see. But either way, the choice of whether your sister lives or dies in Mexico is yours.”

In Mexico? They’re taking her across the border into Mexico? Fuck! Montoya and Guazipan were there. The place where the missile was created and built is there, too. Could they take her to the same location?

Keith felt his blood pressure rising. He couldn’t make a move yet. Once he did and if he killed a spy of the US government, even though he was bad, his life was over. They would never believe him. He needed to keep Chavez alive. Plus, Smuthers was bad, too. He couldn’t kill them both without getting his sister killed.

“Now this is the plan. You’re going to hand over that thumb drive. You’re going to call headquarters and tell them that you’re giving yourself up as soon as I tell you to. Then you’re going to run, and keep them on your tail so they think you’re about to do something foolish.”

“Something foolish?”

“Yeah, like set off a bomb in a highly crowded area where hundreds if not thousands of innocent people will probably die.”

“No. No. I’m not doing that.”

“You will, or your team and your sister are dead.”

Chapter 3

Shawna slowly came to. Immediately her head and jaw were throbbing, and she had no feeling in her arms. She blinked her eyes open. The smell of dampness, cold, dirt, and—was that food?—attacked her senses.

She caught sight of the concrete, the darkness, and slight bit of light coming from a door. Her wrists were cuffed behind her back as she sat tied to a chair of some kind. She moved around with the little room she had and felt the stiffness all over. It was as if she had been run over by a truck. She hurt everywhere. Slowly her memory of what happened came back to her. She felt her heart racing. She closed her eyes as they welled up with tears. The three men from the bar had grabbed her. She'd failed. She hadn't done what Keith had said. She wasn't a trained soldier. She'd fought them best she could, but in the end the big guy struck her so hard he knocked her out.

She swallowed hard and blinked her eyes open. She wondered where she was. Vaguely she remembered driving in the van. She remembered someone holding her on their lap. They stopped, and someone asked them questions. They mentioned her passport. Her chest tightened.

She inhaled, the smell of food growing stronger as her belly rumbled. She was starving. Where had they taken her? Out of the country?

She heard what sounded like male voices and footsteps. She didn't know what to do. Should she pretend she was still unconscious?

She closed her eyes, but the moment they entered they had planned on waking her. The kick to her chair jostled her body, almost making her fall over onto her side.

She tensed the moment she locked gazes with their eyes. They looked Hispanic, maybe Mexican, and they looked evil.

They yelled at her in their language. It was Mexican Spanish. They were holding large guns. AK-47s, if she was correct. They wore what appeared to her to be military uniforms. One guy thrust the butt of his gun at her thigh.

She cried out. "What do you want?"

He stepped forward, straddled her thighs, and grabbed her by the neck. He squeezed tight and she gasped, unable to fight back or fend him off because her hands were tied behind her back.

“Cuadrone, release her now,” the other man said. Cuadrone gave her neck a shove, causing an instant ache. She nearly tumbled over.

After Cuadrone pulled his gun back into position, a third man arrived with three other men.

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He wore a different type of uniform and appeared important. The others bowed and then saluted him. One small nod of his head and the men returned to their casual stance, staring at her.

The big shot approached.

He eyed her over. She damned the short shorts she wore to the bar and the stupid tight T-shirt that accentuated her large breasts. She was shaking she was so scared. Keith had said the men who might try to take her were evil men who would think nothing of torturing her, raping her, and beating her to get to Keith.

She looked down, not even wanting to piss the man off by making eye contact with him.

His shadow loomed over her. He was a tall man, bulky and thick. Not fat but muscular, she could tell.

When she felt his fingers under her chin, she slowly looked up until their eyes met.

“I am Captain Montoya. I’m in charge here. Do you know why you are here?”

She shook her head. He squeezed her chin. “No,” she whispered, assuming that he wanted a verbal answer.

“Your brother is in a lot of trouble. He has caused a bit of a situation and we need to find him.”

She held his gaze, zeroed in on his tight, firm jaw, the goatee, and the scent of his cologne. His uniform was crisp, clean, and neat, unlike the other men in the room.

He squeezed her chin. "Where is your brother, Shawna?"

"I don't know."

He stepped closer, let his fingers slide down her throat and over the material of her shirt against her breasts.

"You're a very beautiful woman. Young, ripe for the taking, it would be a shame to have to hurt you to get the truth from you."

He stared at her and she didn't know what he wanted her to say. She didn't know how to respond. Did she lie, did she tell him exactly how Keith had come to visit her?

"I don't know."

"Don't lie to me."

"I don't know where he is."

The backhand came across her face so fast she cried out and then he gripped her face firmly.

"Do not lie to me. You will only suffer more. There are ways to make you talk, to get the whole truth from you."

"I don't know where he is. I swear to you," she said, her lips now bleeding and her cheek throbbing.

He ran his hand from her face to her shoulder. He squeezed it and then smiled softly at her.

“I believe you met Cuadrone, and also his partner Guazipan. Cuadrone has a special way of making women talk. You see, I don’t want to have him question you. I’d rather do it myself, but I’m on a tight schedule with time. Your brother visited you at your apartment three weeks ago. Where is he staying now?”

“I don’t know.”

He struck her again and she cried out and felt as if she’d sprained her neck from the hit.

“Please stop hitting me. I don’t know where Keith is.”

“I need to be sure.” The captain stepped away from her and Cuadrone took his place. He squatted down, got into a fighting stance, and struck her stomach and ribs repeatedly. Shawna cried out in pain, her stomach and ribs aching terribly until she threw up.

That got Cuadrone to stop using her stomach as a punching bag.

She was gagging and couldn’t catch her breath.

Someone yanked her head up by her hair.

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“Oh God, please stop.”

It was Montoya. He wiped her mouth with a handkerchief and held her gaze.

“I believe you, Shawna. We sit and wait. He will come for you, and when he does, you both shall die together.” He jerked her head, releasing her hair and causing her head to snap back against her shoulders. She was shivering, felt the chills run through her blood and veins.

I’m going to die. They’re going to rape me and torture me. Where are you, Keith? Help me.

* * * *

“What did you find out about her?” Stitch asked Lee as Lee pulled up the files on the computer. Thanks to Tex and his ability to access motor vehicles and a search engine established for federal agents, they were able to locate Shawna.

“Tex is sending over a picture of her now and all her information,” Lee said.

Tiek walked closer as the screen downloaded and Shawna’s face filled the empty space.

Tiek whistled long and softly.

“She’s gorgeous,” Stitch whispered.

Lee swallowed hard. His phone rang. It was Tex, so he put him on speaker.

“Did you get everything?” he asked.

“Yes. I sent it to the printer. Stitch is getting the papers now,” Lee said as Stitch pulled the documents from the printer and looked them over.

“She’s only twenty-four years old.” He handed Lee some of the documents and the rest to Tiek.

“Yeah, I did a little digging, and it looks like she lives alone, works at a bar, and get this, some guy there, Mike, reported her missing yesterday. She never showed up for work. That was four days ago,” Tex told them.

“Fuck. Do you think she’s with Keith?” Lee asked.

“Don’t know, but I don’t like my gut feeling on this. What has Mercury come up with? Any chatter on the federal end?” Tex asked. Just then Mercury walked into the room.

“What’s going on?” he asked them as he entered carrying a package.

“We were finding out more about Keith’s sister. She was just reported missing,” Tiek told Mercury and handed him a picture of her.

Lee saw Mercury’s eyes light up and then go back to serious again. The man was hard as nails and never showed emotion, but Lee could tell that this situation was bothering him as much as it was bothering them.

“She’s gorgeous, isn’t she, Commander?” Stitch asked.

“Here, this came addressed to you. I just got off the phone with Commander Louis Smuthers. He was in charge of Keith. He believes that Keith is now working with a terrorist cell in Morocco. It’s out of our hands. So if the sister is with Keith, then their fate is set.”

Lee looked at the package. His heart was heavy and he just didn’t want to believe that Keith was capable of treason. He spoke with Tiek and Stitch this morning and they agreed that it didn’t sit right with them. Tex added his comments, too.

“Hey, where did you get this?” Lee asked as he pulled the contents from the package. There was a thumb drive, a key, and Keith’s handwriting.

“It’s from Keith,” he blurted out.

“What?” they all asked, including Tex, who remained on speakerphone.

“Look. He sent me this. There’s a phone number, too.” Lee looked at his brothers, his team.

“Call it,” Tiek stated.

“Wait, should we see what’s on the thumb drive first?” Stitch asked.

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“No, what if it’s incriminating evidence and he drags all of us into his shit?” Mercury stated.

“Use the untraceable computer. It’s fine,” Stitch suggested and pushed the laptop in front of Lee.

Lee stuck the thumb drive in as he pressed a few keys. “Are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Lee asked.

“Holy shit,” Tiek said.

“What is it?” Tex asked.

“Evidence that shows exactly what Keith has been up to,” Mercury stated.

“I’m on my way,” Tex said and then disconnected the call.

“I’m calling Keith. He sent us this stuff and this number for a reason. He needs us,” Lee said. Lee reached for his cell phone.

Tiek stopped him. “Wait, you may want to use an untraceable line, or one of the untraceable phones.”

“You’re right. We don’t know what the deal is,” Lee said.

“It’s better to be safe. This stuff looks like some sort of plans for developing a weapon. Look at these specifications,” Mercury said as he scrolled down until they

came to pictures.

“Here, use this.” Stitch passed Lee a cell phone.

“Where did you get this from?” Lee asked.

“No questions, you know I like to be prepared,” Stitch said, brown eyes sparkling with mischief. All Lee knew was that if he were ever in trouble or in need of help, these men were the only ones he trusted his life with.

Lee took a deep breath and made the phone call.

“I don’t have a lot of time. I hate to drag you guys into any of this but I have no choice,” Keith stated.

“What the fuck did you get involved in?” Lee asked.

“Heavy undercover assignment gone badly.” They listened as Keith explained about his mission and about how his commander was working against him and with Montoya to develop this missile intended to be used in a terrorist attack. He explained about Chavez, and about the number of people involved with this terrorist cell.

“There’s no one in the government you can take all this information to?” Stitch asked.

“No, not without jeopardizing what I need to do. Chavez has the upper hand.”

“Fuck, and I just talked to that guy, Smuthers, thirty minutes ago. He knows about your sister, Keith,” Mercury stated.

“They took her, Mercury. They’ve had her for five days, held up in a secure base in

Mexico.”

“What? Oh shit, Keith,” Lee replied.

“It’s why I sent you all the stuff. Chavez is making me call into the commander and claim that I’m going to give myself up, but say that I have a bomb that has the potential to destroy and kill. It’s a decoy to the real attack, and to keep the military unaware of the missile they built and where it’s located. I need your help.”

“What do you need, Keith? You know we have your back,” Tiek stated.

“They know about you guys. They threatened to kill all of you, including Shawna. I won’t put you at risk of getting killed. I already have Shawna to try and save. This is what I need you to do.”

He began to explain his plan and it all sounded like it would work because of Mercury and their connections, but how was Keith going to get Shawna out of harm’s way all by himself?

“Keith, you need our help to infiltrate that facility where Shawna is being held,” Lee stated.

“Lee, if you bring all this information to the right people and plan this accordingly, then you can go with the troops they send in. The location of the missile is nearby and the threats are real. It’s more than enough for the military to come into Mexico and seize everyone and everything they can.”

“I can meet you before that team arrives. I can go in there with you and save Shawna,” Lee told Keith.

“Me, too,” Tiek added.

“You know I’m in,” Stitch said.

“No, I won’t put your lives at risk. If you follow my directions, then this will all be over soon enough. I can’t even fathom what they’ve done to Shawna so far. I have to play my part. I just need you guys to promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?” Mercury asked as Tex walked into the room.

“If I don’t make it out of this alive, please take care of Shawna for me. Make sure you use that key to the safety deposit box, follow the directions, and ensure her safety and her future. She’s been through so much and something like this can set her back even further. I told her to trust no one. There’s a password that only her and I know. You use it to make her realize that she’s safe with the five of you. She’ll need reassurance because god only knows what these fuckers did to her already.”

“You’re going to make it, Keith. You’re not in this alone,” Lee said, and the others agreed.

Lee could

hear the fear in Keith’s voice. Lee felt sorry for him and also feared for Shawna. She was gorgeous and young, an innocent civilian shoved into the middle of military warfare. It just wasn’t right. He would do whatever was necessary to ensure she make it out alive and was well taken care of.

“Okay. Follow the timeline starting from midnight tonight. By tomorrow I’m headed inside after I make that call. Hopefully Chavez, Montoya, and Guazipan are in the near vicinity and get what they deserve. And guys, thank you. I’m sorry for getting involved with this and fucking things up. I should be hanging out with you guys in Texas, drinking with friends at Casper’s and working for the US Marshals with Tex.”

“That can still happen. We’re going to help you, Keith. The team will be together again and living the retired life out here in paradise,” Stitch stated.

Keith chuckled. “Follow that time line. I’m making the call in an hour.”

They disconnected the call and Lee looked at his team, his brothers, and then at Mercury.

Mercury said, “Well, we’ve got ourselves a mission. Lee, you, Stitch, and Tiek prepare our gear. I think when I call the Master Gunnery Sergeant Calico, he’s going to want us right there where we belong. I’m not taking any chances. Keith is one of us and we never leave a man behind. Let’s move.”

“Oorah!” they all said at once and scattered out of the room.

Chapter 4

They sat at the table feeling both on edge and confident. It was the way of a Marine. Gunnery Sergeant Mercury Brooks knew his men were more than capable of handling any situation they were forced to face, but this was a bit different. Their brother, Keith, was in harm’s way and so was his innocent sister. Mercury could see her face when he closed his eyes. She was a beauty, sweet and innocent, but knowing Keith, she was trained. Yet she wasn’t a soldier. She was a civilian. He also received information on Montoya, Guazipan, and Chavez, and his fears for Shawna’s life were stronger. These men were very evil men who would think nothing of torturing a

beautiful, young woman like Shawna just for fun, never mind for information. It made him feel antsy and impatient. The longer they waited, the more likely the outcome would be worse for her.

As he gathered the information he received from Master Gunnery Sergeant Calico, the man whom Mercury took his orders from while active in the Corp was keeping them abreast of the situation. All the necessary branches were notified, and special teams were gathered, preparing to intervene and raid the facility where the missile had been built and stored. They were just waiting to hear who would be raiding the highly secure facility where Shawna was being held.

They had no idea if Keith was already there or making his way in to infiltrate the building and try to save his sister. It was getting close to sunset and they were running out of time.

He glanced at Lee, who looked serious and charged up. He and Keith were the closest.

“I wish they would give the order already. We’ve looked over the blueprints of the building. We can take this on ourselves if need be,” Lee stated. Lee was the planner, the one who decided how and where they would enter, how they would complete the mission. A lot rode on his natural capabilities. He had the Jeeps set in position, and a chopper on standby for a swift escape if things got out of hand on the compound. A lot of planning was involved in this.

“We need to wait. It’s the way it has to be. Although it seems to me that their greatest concern is that missile. Shawna being held hostage is minimal,” Tiek stated. They all mumbled in agreement.

Mercury looked at Tex, who held his weapon and glanced at his watch. He was the sniper of the group. Quiet, soft spoken, over six feet tall, and a superb marksman.

Known as one of the best snipers in the Corps. He knew where he was to go, what position to take, and how to kill the first sets of guards quietly as the rest of the team snuck their way in. Then there was Stitch. A fast talker, the comedian of the group, and also their medic. He was swift to aid any injuries, evaluate the intensity, and then proceeded to provide medical attention sometimes in the most unclean and dangerous of locations.

Tiek was their infiltrator, their hand-to-hand combat psycho who feared absolutely nothing. He was a wrecking machine at six feet three, filled with muscles, agility, and a sole purpose to invade, destroy, and make sure his team all left the mission together and in one piece. He was intimidating, had a deep, rugged voice, and wild, untamed hair to his shoulders. Mercury knew each man was an asset to the team.

They were used to one another and could read each other's thoughts to the point that hand signals sometimes weren't even necessary.

Mercury's radio went off and he looked at his men as he answered the call from Calico.

"It's a no-go on the building. Teams are moving into the facility where the missile is now. The acts of possible terrorism are taking precedence over Keith's sister. I'm sorry, Mercury, but these are the orders."

"What the fuck, Calico? How can they stand by and let Keith and his sister die? Keith is the one who busted this whole operation wide open."

"I understand and I agree, but these are the orders. They're not sending a team in there right away. Eventually, yes, but right now, no. The word is that Montoya and Guazipan aren't even in the facility or where Keith's sister is being held."

"And Chavez?"

“No clue.”

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“Great. We can’t just sit here and do nothing. Keith is part of our team. He called us and asked us for help.”

Calico was silent as Mercury looked at his brothers-in-arms. “Do what you need to do. I know nothing.” The radio cut off.

Mercury looked at his men. “Well?” he asked them.

“Fuck it. Let’s go in. Keith needs us and so does Shawna,” Stitch stated.

Mercury felt his chest tighten. This was going against the rules, but considering they were all technically retired from the military, and they were off US soil, who gave a shit.

“Okay, our last mission, men. Be smart, and don’t get killed,” Mercury said.

Tiek chuckled. “Ain’t planning on it, Gunnery Sergeant. We’re all going home to the ranch with an extended family.”

* * * *

Keith hid behind the building. So far, so good. No one had detected him. He had watched the compound for a day and a night, noting how food was brought to a small building at the far corner of the compound. That was where they had to be holding Shawna. He checked his weapon and the silencer. If he could get in there, take out the guards, and then get her out without causing too much commotion, then maybe they would make it out alive.

As he crept down the side building, keeping his back to the wall, he heard voices. There was some commotion going on in Spanish. He understood certain words. The dialect was different than what he was familiar with. There was a raid. Something was happening at the facility. Keith smirked, knowing that his team pulled through and got the information to the government to stop the potential terrorist attack. He had to move. Time was running out. Just as he rounded the corner, he saw men dragging Shawna across the courtyard. She appeared barely conscious and looked bloody and beaten.

His chest tightened. His sister had gone through hell. First as a child living in an abusive household and then as an adult struggling to make ends meet and trying to secure her degree for a better life. He came to see her when he could. He taught her as much as he could about protecting herself and preparing for the unexpected. But this was different. This was insane, and he wished he had never let on to anyone about her existence.

He thought of his team. The men were good men. If something happened to him, he hoped they would follow his instructions and protect Shawna and keep her safe. His chest tightened. That was if he could get her out of this hellhole alive.

He took a deep breath. He'd die for her. It was his fault that she was here. He needed to save her. It was now or never.

When he went to make a move, sirens blared, gunshots echoed through the night. His team was there.

* * * *

Shawna could hear the commotion and knew that something was happening. Was her brother coming to rescue her? She understood bits and pieces of what these men, her captors, were saying. Something about invasion or fight, the military, the United

States, and a missile. She had no idea what was happening.

She was nearly to the point of wanting to die. Cuadrone had taken a liking to her body. He touched her, caressed her breasts, and squeezed her groin hard as he asked her questions about her brother. For days he tormented her, tried breaking her down to make her give up and give in. But she was a survivor. She had always been one, even as a child when her parents struck her. She survived on her own, in a shitty neighborhood filled with drug dealers and riffraff. She worked at the bar and dealt with drunk after drunk who thought because she served them drinks that she was fair game to take to bed.

Little did they know her tough attitude and experienced persona was all an act. Play the part and people believe it. She was quiet, compassionate, and yearned for love and to be loved deeply. She wasn't even sure if she would recognize that kind of emotion. Especially now. She may never get a chance. She'd never dated, and wished she had. She never had sex, and now regretted it even if it was meaningless. At least she would know what it felt like to be taken and connected so fully.

She closed her eyes and held in the moan from the throbbing pain in her ribs. She wondered if they were broken.

She could hear Cuadrone yelling. He was giving orders. He was abusive, and she waited, knowing without a doubt in her mind that he would rape her. Fighting him off was not an option until that moment when she knew it was life or death. His or hers.

Guazipan shoved her to the ground in another small room. Her knees hit the dirt floor and she barely made a sound. The sting of pain was nothing compared to what she had been through thus far. She hated these men and wanted them to die.

Cuadrone grabbed her by her shirt, ripping the material.

“I’m going to love this,” he said in his thick accent, and then licked his lips as his eyes zeroed in on her abundant breasts. She was heaving with fear. It was becoming more difficult to take each breath because the trepidation was so f

ierce.

His eyes widened before he backhanded her across the mouth. She roared in anger, looked up, and she spit at him, hitting him on his lips. He wiped the spit away, smiling as he undid his belt.

The evil in his eyes warned her that she would suffer, but it seemed to her that that was his ultimate intention now anyway. Something was going on as the sirens continued to blare and gunshots were heard in the distance.

He stepped toward her, caressing the belt.

She attempted to crawl backward, the fear that he had chosen now to take her body made her adrenaline begin to rush. The weakness she had moments ago now turned to anger and disgust for this man and for the way she had been treated. He smoothed the belt across the palm of his hand as he stalked toward her, and she knew his intentions.

“What are you going to do? I’ve cooperated with you. What are you doing?”

He struck her with the belt. She put her arms up to protect her face and the sting lashed across her forearms. Again and again he struck her, breaking the skin as she cried out.

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Her eyes locked on his gun as the other man, Guazipan, began to undo his pants. She shook with fear and Cuadrone fell to his knees, spread her thighs, and began to reach for the button on her shorts as he used his other hand to cup her breast and squeeze.

“No!” She screamed out and grabbed for the gun. Cuadrone grabbed for her throat and she fired the weapon at his chest. His eyes widened and Guazipan reached for his gun. She jerked as someone else shot him in the back of the head.

Looking at the doorway, she saw Keith.

“Keith!” she screamed out.

Cuadrone shoved his forearm to her throat, the gunshot wound not enough to kill the bastard. But then came the sound of more men entering the room, guns went off, and Keith fired back. Shawna pulled the trigger one, two, three times and shoved Cuadrone off of her. She looked for Keith and saw him and three men on the ground. Keith was bleeding, the other men appeared to be dead.

She crawled to him, grabbing his collar.

“Keith. Keith.”

He wouldn’t respond. She laid her head on his chest as the door burst open.

There stood two men in black, fully armed and huge in thickness and height. She reached for Keith’s gun.

“No, Shawna. We’re the good guys,” one of them yelled, but she pointed the gun at him, while the other one kept his straight on her. She could practically feel the red dot on her forehead as she locked gazes with an intimidating man in black and the large rifle pointed right at her. Her hand was shaking. But she didn’t pull the trigger.

Her hands shook, but she kept the gun on the man who knelt down and stared at her from behind the special gear he wore.

“Honey, we’re Keith’s team. He contacted us.”

She shook her head.

“Cubbyhole. Keith said the password was cubbyhole.”

The tears streamed down her face and she gasped as she lowered the gun and hugged Keith.

She felt the hand on her shoulder.

“Let me check him. I’m Lee, Keith’s friend. Behind me is Tiek.”

More gunfire could be heard beyond the room. There were explosions and then the one called Tiek placed his finger against his ear.

“Lee, we need to move. Is he alive?” Tiek asked.

“Just barely,” Lee said.

“You get her, I’ll get him,” Tiek stated and moved his gun to the side before reaching for Keith.

“Come on, Shawna, we’re getting out of here.” Lee reached for her hand and she looked at him. She was shaking so hard now.

The big guy lifted Keith up and over his shoulder like Keith was light as a feather.

Lee squeezed her hand, and then pulled her against his side. They came to the doorway, looked out, and made their way through the courtyard and away from the continued gunfire. It looked like a war zone. There were dead bodies everywhere. The thought that Keith’s team did all this to help to save him and her stirred something deep inside her heart. She owed them her life and her brother’s if he made it.

God, Keith, make it. I have no one if you die. No one.

“Get down!” Tiek yelled. Lee grabbed her and covered her as bullets ricocheted against the wall right above their heads. Bits of concrete showered over their heads and stung against her bare skin. She didn’t even care that she was only wearing her bra and shorts. She could die here. They all could.

“Fuck, that was too close for comfort. Now what?” Tiek asked.

Lee placed his finger against his ear. “Just wait five seconds.”

Shawna pressed against Lee, holding on to him for dear life as she wondered if she would survive. The scent of his cologne, the feel of hard body, masculine and capable, filled her senses. These men were Marines. They would save them.

A set of multiple shots rang through the air. Men yelled and screamed right before another explosion rocked the ground.

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“Move, now,” Lee stated. Tiek led the way and Lee held Shawna tight, covering her like a human shield as they walked as one unit against the building and out of the area. She dared not look up. She concentrated on Tiek’s black combat boots and following closely and keeping up with their pace. They headed into the darkness, only the fire from the building’s blaze lighting some of the area ahead of them. Before long they were in complete darkness, and the smell of burning building became less and less.

Lee spoke into his mic.

“Got Shawna and Keith. I need Stitch immediately. Keith is down.”

They walked through some brush and woods-like area and came upon a Jeep she hadn’t even seen. How did these men know where they were and where the Jeep was?

Tiek lay Keith in the backseat then jumped into the front driver’s side.

“Come on, Shawna,” Lee told her as he lifted her up and held her in his arms in the front seat. She clung to him, her skin now cold and fully exposed. It wasn’t until they drove out of there and she saw the other two vehicles in the distance that she sensed the possibility they would survive.

The cold air collided against her skin and she turned into Lee’s embrace. He held her tight and caressed her hair as she cried.

* * * *

Lee glanced at Tiek, who looked angry, yet determined. They had heard what the one man was doing to Shawna and were preparing to enter when they saw a figure in black enter the room. Shots were fired, and then more men came barreling inside. He couldn't help but wonder if Shawna had killed her attackers herself.

He held her close, immediately feeling protective over Shawna, not only because she was Keith's sister, but also a beautiful woman who had been tortured and abused. She needed medical attention, too.

The Jeep jerked and bounced a few more times and they finally came to a stop.

"Leave the Jeeps here, someone will take care of them. We're boarding the Mi-17. There's a medic on standby along with Stitch. How is the woman?" Mercury asked.

She didn't turn to look, and Lee felt her shivering in his arms. As he got out of the Jeep he locked gazes with his team members. "She needs medical attention, too." Tiek was already carrying Keith to the chopper.

Lee didn't want to let Shawna go but he passed her to Tex and they all got into the chopper. Lee pulled off his jacket the second they began to take off and wrapped it around her shoulders. "You're safe now, Shawna. We're going to take care of you, and Keith."

Stitch was looking over Keith. There was blood everywhere. On Keith's shoulder and over his belly. Stitch looked at them.

"How is he? Is he going to be okay?" Shawna asked, voice quivering.

Stitch ran his hands over his mouth. "It's bad, Shawna. I don't know if he'll make it."

Chapter 5

Keith was brought to a hospital near Dallas. There was a van waiting for them all when they exited the chopper.

“We’ll look over her injuries on the way,” Stitch said as he eyed the voluptuous woman in Lee’s arms.

They climbed in, all

having heavy hearts as their concern for Keith intensified. There was only so much Stitch could do for him on the way to the hospital. The bullet to his shoulder was still embedded. The one to his stomach was more serious and would entail major surgery if he didn’t bleed out before they could operate.

But Stitch now focused on Keith’s sister. She clutched the military jacket and remained against Lee. He locked gazes with Lee, who seemed not only taken aback by her need to cling to him but also had a look of possessiveness.

“Shawna, my name is Stitch. I’m the medic of the team.” He knelt down in front of her. He could see all the cuts and scratches on her legs, her ripped shorts, and how she wore no shirt. Her skin was bruised and battered, her face swollen and bloodied from being struck. It pissed him off and he needed to rein in his anger, knowing that they killed the fuckers responsible for this shit. Plus the other facility where the missile was located was under US control. The only negative was that Chavez was still missing. But at least the teams were able to catch and kill Montoya and Guazipan.

“Shawna, it’s okay, he knows the password, too. Keith told us to take care of you and protect you,” Lee whispered.

She slowly lifted her head. The jacket fell slightly from her shoulders, revealing more bruises and a ripped bra. He took a deep breath and gave her a reassuring smile. At

least he hoped it was reassuring.

Her eyes darted to the others.

“That’s Tex, he held you in the chopper. The other one is our team leader, Gunnery Sergeant Mercury.” Stitch gently touched his fingers to her chin. She looked at him, one eye swollen, her cheek and jaw badly bruised, but it was her ribs that appeared to be the worst.

“You’re going to need X-rays. We’ll have the doctors check you over at the hospital, too. What hurts the worst?” he asked her.

She lifted her arms, showing him her forearms and the lines of red marks.

“What did this?” he asked.

“Belt,” she whispered as tears rolled from her big ocean-blue eyes.

Lee pulled the jacket snuggler against her. Stitch noticed that her hands were really shaking and he covered them with his own.

“You’re safe now. You’re shaking because of the shock of it all. It will probably get a little worse until the doctors give you something to help calm you down.”

“I killed him.” She lowered her eyes.

Stitch looked at Lee and then glanced at the others, who all looked exactly like he felt. Sick and angry.

“Who?” Mercury asked her.

She looked at him and sniffled. “Cuadrone. The man who did all this to me.”

Stitch swallowed hard. She was a fighter. She would survive all of this, and each of them would make sure of that. A protective feeling consumed him immediately. Shawna was part of their family now. They would always protect her.

“Good, then he can never hurt you again,” Lee whispered to her. She turned her face toward Lee’s chest and snuggled into his hold. Stitch reached up and caressed her hair. “We’re almost there, Shawna. Everything is going to be okay now.”

Chapter 6

“How is Shawna doing today?” Mercury asked Tiek as he walked into her room. She was sleeping, just as she had been for the last three days. She would come in and out of consciousness and moan in pain. The tests the doctors ran showed she had some internal bleeding and they were monitoring it and debating whether surgery was necessary. But keeping her resting seemed to be helping the process. She was strong and doing well. Unlike Keith, who was touch and go after three consecutive surgeries.

“They’re going to bring her down in an hour to do more tests to make sure that the bleeding has stopped.” Tiek looked at his watch. “She woke up a few times calling Keith’s name. She’s going to want to see him.”

“I know. As soon as the testing is done, and she’s in the clear, we can see about getting her down there to ICU. Tex got the stuff moved from her apartment. She didn’t have much. Plus it appeared to me that the place was ransacked. Not sure if it was done prior to her being taken or what. Calico has men on it,” Mercury said as he walked closer to the bed. He reached out and touched her hair. “The bruises are healing.”

“What was her place like? Any info on her and the kind of person she is?”

Mercury took a deep breath and released it. “She’s in college. Almost finished. She worked at a bar, but they already hired a new bartender. The guy Mike, who reported her missing, has been asking about her. He’s coming by today.” Mercury felt his gut clench. He had this feeling that Shawna was becoming so much to them. His men were constantly figuring out a schedule to stay here with her, and were setting up a bedroom for her to stay in as soon as she was discharged, which would be way before Keith was.

“Who is this guy? You checked him out? Is he her boyfriend?” Tiek asked in his very deep voice. Mercury signaled for him to lower his voice and Tiek stood up and paced the room.

“She needs us. She needs men who understand how to deal with the consequences of war, of being prisoners, of surviving something like what she went through.”

“Tiek, she’ll need professional counseling. I already spoke to Spocko, and he can see her at the house as soon as she’s up to it. Keith is going to need a lot of rehab when all is done, and if he pulls through, he’s got a long fight ahead of him. I’m certain that Shawna will want to be here with him.”

“We’ll work it out,” Tiek stated and then walked back closer to the bed.

Shawna began to moan and then blink open her eyes. She jerked and gasped. Both Mercury and Tiek placed hands on her shoulders and spoke softly to her.

“You’re safe, sweetheart. You’re still in the hospital,” Mercury told her. He looked her over as she glanced at Tiek and then at him then closed her eyes and took a deep, unsteady breath before releasing it. He could tell even in the hospital gown that Shawna was well endowed. The feel of her muscular shoulders and arms beneath his hold caused an immediate attraction to her. It was crazy, but no woman seemed to affect him just by her eyes alone. Shawna did, as her blue eyes locked on his and she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth then cringed. They were still swollen.

“Do you need a sip of water?” Tiek asked, moving toward the cup and straw. She nodded her head. As she tried to sit up, she closed her eyes and Mercury helped her.

“Bruised ribs can be just as sore as broken ones. But they’ll heal fast,” he told her.

Tiek held the cup as she took a sip and she locked gazes with him. He held her gaze

and Mercury realized that Tiek was probably feeling that attraction and possessive feeling, too. He would need to talk to them when they had the chance to see how the others felt. A lot of their friends shared women and were in ménage relationships. It wasn't uncommon around where they lived. In fact, the thought crossed their minds many times, especially over some beers and feeling like life finally had some normalcy. But Shawna had been through something really traumatic. Although, thank God, the doctors confirmed she hadn't been sexually assaulted despite the bruising around her groin. She may have some lasting effects that perhaps may make her fearful of men. The best thing they could do was make her feel safe and comfortable with them.

"How is Keith? When can I see him?" she asked in a shaky voice.

"The last surgery appears to have gone well. The doctors said he needs lots of rest, but I think after you get your tests done today, and the doctor gives the all clear, we can wheel you down to see him," Tiek told her.

"How long do I have to stay here?" she asked.

"As long as the doctors say," Mercury replied. She looked at him and then swallowed hard.

"You don't need to stay here all the time. I'm sure you have jobs and things to do. I'll be okay alone," she said.

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“Shawna, we’re all here to watch over you and take care of you now,” Mercury stated.

“I’ll be fine alone. I just want Keith to be okay. There seems like so much to figure out. I have to contact work. I have to take care of the rent for my apartment, and the medical bills here.”

Mercury covered her hand and held her gaze. “We got it covered. We moved your things out of the apartment and into the house on the ranch. We spoke to your boss at work and told him that you won’t be coming back.”

“What? Why would you do that?” She swallowed hard.

“Shawna, Keith had a plan in mind, no matter what the outcome of the incident in Mexico,” Tiek told her. “We’re to protect you, take care of you now so that you no longer have any worries. So don’t fret about the bills. They’re covered.”

“I still need to work. I’m trying to finish college.”

“Honey, you will be able to finish college. You can grab a job if need be in town where we live. It’s a beautiful ranch in the country. We even have a place set up for Keith when he’s all better. But all you need to concentrate on right now is getting better.”

Mercury could tell that she was getting emotional. Her blue eyes glazed over with unshed tears.

The door to the room opened and a nurse and the doctor were there. The doctor, Lawrence Fisher, smiled wide. "How wonderful. You're sitting up. That's a good sign." He walked closer to the bed. Mercury stepped away, but still remained close by, as did Tiek.

He checked her pulse and then pressed his hand over her forehead. "No fever. How do you feel today?" he asked her.

"Better."

"Good."

"I want to see my brother."

The doctor nodded.

"How about we go downstairs and run those last tests to be sure that you're in tip-top shape? Then we'll see about visiting Keith."

She nodded.

"One of you can accompany her downstairs if you like," the doctor stated.

Mercury looked at Tiek.

"You go, Commander. I'll go call Lee and Tex." Tiek walked over to Shawna and clasped her hand. "You do what

the doctor says and just relax. I'm sure you'll get the all clear so you can go see Keith." He winked at her and she smiled.

“Thank you, Tiek. And thank you for staying here and watching over me.”

“Always, darling,” he said then walked from the room.

* * * *

Shawna was feeling overwhelmed with emotions. She was supposed to be strong, independent, and self-sufficient, yet these men, her brother’s team of soldiers, were making her feel special. She couldn’t help the attraction she felt to each of them. It was so crazy, but since Lee arrived with Tiek at the compound to save her and Keith’s lives, she hadn’t been then same. She thought of herself as pretty damn smart. She knew from experience the many times that Keith visited her when he was going through post-traumatic stress disorder. She recognized the signs, knew he needed reassurance, and she was certain to make lots of noise and never approach him while he was sleeping in fear that he could hurt her or worse.

Right now she was feeling pretty on edge and just wanted to be out of the hospital and safe in her apartment. But even when she thought of that, she knew it wasn’t a safe neighborhood and she would more than likely end up in a psych ward if she isolated herself from society. The best thing to do now was to focus on Keith and getting him better. She’d survive her own fears and misery someday, but Keith was most important to her.

“Are you up to sitting in a wheelchair?” the nurse asked. Shawna nodded her head. After she moved her legs over the side of the bed, the nurse assisted her into the wheelchair.

Mercury remained by her side the entire way. He was quiet but his presence and demeanor drew the attention of just about everyone. He was very tall, like Tiek, maybe six feet three. He looked older, if the lines by his eyes and over his forehead were any indication of his age. But he was handsome in a very stern, mature way. He

seemed experienced and tough as nails. She swallowed hard. All five of the men in Keith's team were intimidating. But she felt safe with them nearby. Thinking about leaving them and going back to her lonely life brought on an instant feeling of anxiety. She needed to get a grip.

She felt the hand on her shoulder as the nurse indicated that she was to get up onto the bed in the exam room. Before she could get up, Mercury lifted her gently in his arms and placed her down onto the long, narrow bed. She locked gazes with him. The feel of hard muscles beneath her palms elicited something in her that she was beginning to feel whenever one of the men were near her or touched her. She looked above her at all the elaborate devices and machinery. The large machine above would come down and determine whether or not she was still bleeding internally.

She clasped onto Mercury, relieved that he was here with her, and obviously affected by his move of compassion.

“Thank you, Mercury. I'm okay.”

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He stared at her as if he weren't too sure that she was telling the truth, or perhaps he read through her tough exterior. Either way, this was who she was. She didn't back down from anything. In fact, after surviving what she did, life couldn't throw her into anything more dangerous or scary than what she'd gone through.

"You are one lucky lady to have five military men caring for you. I'm jealous," the nurse said.

Shawna felt her cheeks warm. At the same time the nurse said that, Shawna had felt the loss of Mercury's presence so close to her. Was she becoming attached to the five men? Did the nurse think that Shawna was involved romantically with all five of them?

As she lay back and closed her eyes, trying to relax while they prepared her for the exam, she thought about her five rescuers. They were definitely an attractive bunch. They were raw, hardcore men. Their good looks and calm demeanors would attract any woman around them, but it was that same raw, hard appearance that ran deep within their veins and made them so intimidating, lethal, and unpredictable. These men went through war, killed people so they themselves could survive. Anyone, especially a woman like her who just survived such an ordeal, would latch onto them, and imagine feeling an attraction they wouldn't reciprocate. They knew pain, they knew taking things to the limit, and they didn't do vulnerable or trust. The trust they shared was between their team members only. Just as her trust lay within her brother and no other person on this earth. It was how she conditioned herself to be. Guarded, untouched by a man so intimately in body and in soul.

She took a deep breath as the testing began and hoped that she was well enough to

see her brother. She had heard the doctors and even the men talking when they thought she was asleep. Keith's injuries were life threatening, even now after three surgeries. He might not recover.

The tears filled her eyes as she thought about life without Keith. How would she survive? These men, his team, couldn't take care of her forever. She didn't even know them. As she thought about that, Shawna realized something. She may not know them, but she felt safe and comfortable with them. Maybe because Keith had talked about his team like they were his family and he trusted them with the password. They represented everything a family should be or could be in a perfect world. They supported one another, they risked their lives for one another, and their trust and bond ran deep. Deeper than her own bond with Keith.

The tear rolled down her cheek and her heart ached. She took the time to pray that Keith survived, and that life would get better now for both of them. But something tugged at her heart. A fear, an inkling of a sensation that told her it wouldn't. She would always be afraid to open up her heart, and to trust anyone but Keith. She couldn't hold on to an attraction to five men just because they were compassionate and cared for her while Keith was trying to fight for his life. They were doing their job. They were protecting their own. As always it was time to suck up the pain and the fear she had and take care of herself. No one was reliable or trustworthy. Her life had changed in a matter of two weeks. Now, she was more alone and scared than ever before. Fear was a very powerful thing.

Chapter 7

Tiek was relieved that Shawna was healing well and there was no more concern over internal bleeding. In fact, the doctor said she could be discharged tomorrow. There was a lot for them to discuss with her to make her feel comfortable. As he slowly pushed the wheelchair through the ICU, they came upon Keith's room where Tex and Lee stood outside, and Mercury was in there. He took a deep breath, knowing how

difficult it was for himself to have seen Keith hooked up to so many wires and looking pale and weak. He couldn't imagine Shawna's reaction.

He locked gazes with Lee and Tex, who went from appearing sad and stern to smiling softly as their eyes lit up at the sight of Shawna. Both men bent down next to the wheelchair and said hello.

Lee touched her chin and smiled softly. "You look better. How are the ribs?" he asked.

"Good." She tried looking past him toward the room.

"How did the tests go? No more bleeding?" Tex asked. She nodded.

"Everything is great. The doctor said she will probably be discharged tomorrow and placed in our care. We'll talk about it later."

"I want to see him. How is he? What have the doctors told you?" she asked Lee.

Lee and Tex stood back up and Tex looked away. Lee held her gaze.

"It's touch and go, Shawna. They don't know how his body will take to the surgery he had this morning. They're monitoring him and say all we can do now is let him rest and heal."

* * * *

Shawna nodded and felt the tears reach her eyes. She wouldn't cry though. Keith needed her to be strong, and she needed to be strong, especially in front of these men who had taken over a caregiving role. She had to place some space between them so she could pull off independent and strong despite the desperate feeling to be close to

them. She was becoming attached and that wasn't healthy.

She spotted Mercury by Keith's bedside and immediately saw the sadness in his eyes. He heard the sound of the wheelchair and turned to look at her. She felt her chest tighten as his eyes seemed to light up from seeing her. Maybe it was wishful thinkin

g or her subconscious trying to make her believe it was all right to feel attached to these men. But it wasn't. They were strangers, too. Their commitment and dedication was to Keith and she was just extra they were forced to care for.

She placed her hands on the arms of the wheelchair and went to stand up when Mercury reached for her.

"Whoa, honey, you shouldn't be standing. You're ribs are still healing."

"I want to see my brother," she whispered, her eyes focused on Keith and all the tubes and wires. The sounds of beeping filtered loudly through all her senses. That scent of hospital and antiseptic after someone had surgery filled her nostrils. There was a large bandage over his shoulder. She immediately noticed the blackness under his eyes and his lips where a tube was taped to and going into his mouth. She grabbed onto the bed rail as Mercury's large, hard hands gripped her hip bones to steady her.

She stared at her brother and felt deep concern. He didn't look well at all. In fact, he looked like he was dead. But to the left she saw the monitors and the breathing tube that kept him alive. She knew he wasn't dead, just resting and hopefully healing. The tears rolled down her cheeks as she reached up and caressed his cheek. "I love you, Keith. I'm here with you. I need you. I don't have anyone but you. Please, Keith, please fight to stay alive."

She sobbed softly and felt as if she would pass out when Mercury lifted her up into his arms. She heard the others by the doorway gasp, and she fought to be strong.

“Put me down,” she said to Mercury while trying to make her eyes focus clearly. She was so overcome with emotions and fear. It consumed her and took all the strength out of her. Lee was there with the wheelchair, but Mercury held her in his arms. His stern expression, his firm lips, and piercing blue eyes held her gaze. His older, more mature and experienced demeanor was comforting, and she fought to not give in to the need to be held and hugged, consumed by the security he and his arms could provide. She cried. “Put me down. I don’t need coddling.” His expression changed to something other than upset, but then it went blank and she couldn’t read him as he slowly set her down in the chair. Lee was starting to push her from the room.

“No. I want to stay. I am staying here for a little while. Alone,” she said. Lee looked at the others and she couldn’t bear to see the insult and disappointment on their faces. She felt terrible and damned herself for wanting to keep these men by her side for support.

Lee wheeled her closer to the bed. She stared up at her brother as he rested. The sound of the machines keeping him alive pounded in her head.

“I’ll come back in a little while. The nurses won’t let you stay too long.”

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She nodded her head but stared at her brother.

I need you, Keith. I'm scared.

* * * *

"She's pushing us away. Did you see her reaction to me in there?" Mercury asked as he slammed his hand on the wall and then ran his fingers through his hair. His team looked at him.

"No, she's just scared and worried about Keith. She's used to being alone and handling things alone," Tiek stated.

"She's starting to heal and come down from the high of trying to survive what she went through. You know the drill. Anyone who hasn't been formally trained like we were to handle being a prisoner, going through what she did, would react the same way. Fight everyone around them so they feel some control again," Lee told them.

"Keep her emotions, her heart, locked in so no one can get inside and hurt her again. It's typical, and worse because she's a civilian. She's alone aside from having her brother, and she doesn't really know us, even though Keith supplied us with the password to gain her trust," Stitch added.

"I think getting her to the ranch and speaking with Spocko will help her through the process." Tex expressed his thoughts.

"You're right. But there's more going on here." Mercury looked at his friends, his

brothers.

Lee took a deep breath and released it. "She needs us."

"It's more than that and you know what Mercury is saying, Lee," Tiek stated firmly. They looked around the hallway and made sure no one was in earshot, not that they cared anyway.

"She's so beautiful and kind, and when I'm near her I want to hold her in my arms and take all that fear and sadness away," Lee admitted.

"I feel it, too, Lee. It's not just because Keith asked us to watch over her," Stitch said.

"It's more than that. I want her to count on me, on us, and know that no one can ever hurt her again," Tiek added.

"She needs us as much as we need her. We talked about this a few times before. We all have trust issues except with one another. Finding a woman like Shawna to share, to care for together and make part of our family would make our lives complete," Tex said, and they all agreed.

"She's going to fight us on this. She's going to think we're caring for her because Keith asked us to," Mercury said.

"Then it's our jobs to ensure her that it's more than that. Yes, Keith brought us together, but it's the attraction, the connection we all know is there that will make us more. I want her. I want to keep her safe, I want to make her happy. She needs a new start and a new life. She deserves better than what life has dished out to her so far," Lee said.

They all agreed and then made a plan to get things moving in the right direction.

Mercury knew it wasn't going to be easy, but Shawna was definitely worth it.

Chapter 8

Shawna couldn't believe how beautiful the men's ranch was. Even the small town on their way here was stunning and inviting. She never had seen anything like it before and it made her feel both excited and sad. Her emotions were all twisted, despite her gut sensation telling her to trust these men. She swallowed hard. She wished that Keith could talk and tell her everything she wanted to know about the men. But he couldn't. He was going to be like this for a while as he healed. She twisted her fingers together on her lap as she sat between Mercury and Lee in the front of their SUV. Tiek and Stitch were at the house, and Tex would be stopping in from work to have lunch with them.

She felt guilty for leaving her brother, but the hospital wouldn't allow her to sleep there and she had been officially discharged. She had no place to go, and when Mike came to visit her, she knew that her job at the bar and living in that crappy neighborhood and apartment were behind her. She recalled Mike's words as he visited her.

"You're going to be just fine, Shawna. Your brother will pull through, and maybe you finally found some men you can trust your heart with. Although I'm jealous and wish I had what they have," Mike said.

"I don't know what you're talking about. They're my brother's team members. They helped to rescue us," she replied.

"Oh, it's more than that. Their eyes eat you up, their protectiveness and jealousy that I'm here and they don't know what our relationship is, is obvious. They care for you and it's more than just as your rescuers."

Her belly tightened. Her emotions, her analysis of the men's intentions was unreadable as far as she was concerned. As much as she felt an attraction to each of them, the idea that it stemmed out of loyalty to their brotherhood bothered her. She shivered as the SUV pulled up a long dirt road. Lee covered her hands.

"It's okay. This is going to be your home now, too," he told her, his hazel eyes appeared warm and inviting. She looked away as the gorgeous, huge house came into view.

"It's beautiful."

* * * *

The house was absolutely stunning and huge, just like the five men. As Lee helped her out of the SUV, she fixed the sundress she wore that he had purchased for her to wear home. It was pretty and light against her ribs. She was a bit taken aback at the fact that he brought her new undergarments, too, and now knew her size, and even that caused a spasm of attraction to hit her belly. They purchased her a lot of new things after informing her that her apartment had been ransacked, probably prior to her abduction. She swallowed hard.

It was becoming obvious that she may never return to that apartment, that city again. Did she really want to? Not after everything that happened to her. Not after seeing this ranch. But this wasn't her life. It was theirs and she was a visitor, the sister of their comrade, and baggage they were responsible for. Nothing more.

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There were acres and acres of property as far as her eyes could see. A much smaller, almost identical house sat in the distance from the main house. There were horse stables, and some sort of garden with a pathway. Everything was done up with intricate landscaping with use of lots of paving stones and grand materials indigenous to the area.

Lee took her hand and guided her up the large stairs and open porch area. The home had to be worth millions. As they entered the front door, she was greeted by an open floor plan with high cathedral ceilings and a massive stone fireplace. The bright light from the sun shining through the large floor-to-ceiling windows cascaded over the entire main floor as well as the entrance to the formal living room and the kitchen.

“Welcome home, Shawna. Feel free to look around,” Mercury said as Lee released her hand and both men headed toward the kitchen. Shawna couldn’t believe she was standing in such a magazine-worthy home. It was like something she saw on TV or on a show where movie stars let cameras into their homes to see how the wealthy lived. But the men decorated it in such a way it was warm and welcoming, not cold and delicate. She chuckled to herself as she ran her hands along the huge sofa and glanced at the extra-large flat-screen television on the main wall in the living room. It had to be seventy inches wide. But the men were all big men, they would need lots of space. She spotted the painting on the wall, the Texas and American flags with the Marine Corps flag in the center. It had to be custom designed.

She turned toward the kitchen and could see Tex and Lee placing some things on the island, probably getting ready for lunch as she continued to explore. As she walked down a small hallway off the living room, she spotted the six sets of cherrywood French doors that led out to a grand patio and a swimming pool. She felt her chest

tighten. Children she went to school with had swimming pools. She ne

ver really wished for one. She only wished that her parents stopped drinking and wouldn't hit her. She shivered from the memory and she thought about Keith.

They would sneak off to the swimming hole during the summer. They snuck onto the Palmer's property to do it but they were desperate to cool off and home just wasn't safe the way a home should be. No child should have to live with such fear and such pain. It just wasn't fair.

"Do you know how to swim?"

She gasped and turned around to see Lee standing there leaning against the doorway with his arms crossed in front of his chest. She held her side and shook her head.

"I didn't mean to scare you." He looked so attractive and sexy standing there. His bulging muscles peeked out from beneath the tight T-shirt he wore. The green somehow brought out the hazel color of his eyes. She licked her lower lip and turned away. She had been caught off guard deep in thought. Why was she remembering her past so much? It was nothing but painful memories. He moved closer. She felt him behind her, and then he placed his hands on her shoulders. "Was that a yes or a no about knowing how to swim?"

"I haven't swum in years."

"Well, we'll get you a bathing suit and make sure you know how to swim. I can teach you." He gently squeezed her shoulders. She closed her eyes, and loved the feel of this big, strong, capable man behind her. She wanted to lean back, to give in and allow him to comfort her. But she made a promise to herself to be strong, not weak. She needed to take care of herself. Once Keith healed, they would talk about their future and where they would go to live. She stepped from his hold and wrapped her

arms around herself. She walked further down the hallway and around the corner.

“Shawna.” He said her name and she stopped. She didn’t turn around to face him. He was just so damn handsome and she knew she would have a hard time stepping away from him again.

When his arms wrapped around her from behind, she gasped and tried stepping away, but he spoke softly to her against her hair.

“Don’t push me away. I promise that you’re safe here. I’ll protect you. We all will.”

She turned in his arms and pressed her palms against his hard chest.

“You’ve done so much already. I’m used to doing things on my own, and that hasn’t changed.”

He smiled softly then reached toward her face and cupped her cheek. His large palm covered her cheek and upper neck he was so much bigger than her. She stared up into his eyes, her head tilted back to nearly her shoulders.

His thumb caressed her lower lip.

“You’re not alone anymore. We want to protect you. We want you to feel comfortable and trust us.” His eyes zeroed in on her lips and the thought of him kissing her flashed through her mind. She closed her eyes a moment, trying to hold on to the fantasy that there were real feelings here and not ones brought on by his loyalty to Keith. But then she felt his lips against hers. He was gentle but then the kiss grew deeper. The sound of voices echoing through the house had her pulling from him, but Lee’s hold was firm. He smiled at her.

“I’ve been wanting to do that since I first saw you.”

She swallowed hard. “At the compound?” she asked.

He shook his head. “The moment we found a picture of you after Keith contacted us. You’re so beautiful, Shawna.”

She shook her head and stepped from his hold. “I shouldn’t have let you do that.”

He was about to respond when Tex walked toward them. “Hey, lunch is ready. Did you get to look around a bit?” Tex asked as he approached, smiling. She nodded her head and avoided looking at Lee, who appeared upset.

“The house is big. I only made it this far.”

Tex took her hand. “Well, I’ll give you the full tour after lunch, and then we’ll show you your room. We hope you like it.”

They headed out of the room toward the kitchen and she looked back toward Lee, who ran his fingers through his hair and appeared upset.

Could he really have feelings for me, and a real attraction, or is he feeling obligated because of Keith?

Chapter 9

“What’s wrong with you?” Tex asked Lee, noticing his change of attitude since Shawna headed upstairs to lie down. The poor woman was exhausted after Tex had shown her around the house. They never even made it outside. But there was time for that.

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“Nothing.”

“Nothing my ass. Did something happen when I walked in on you and Shawna before?” he pushed.

Lee took a deep breath and released it. He looked around them, making sure the others weren’t in earshot.

“We shared a moment, and I thought she was feeling the same attraction.”

“And what? You kissed her?”

Lee ran his fingers through his hair. “Sure did.”

Tex was surprised that he didn’t feel jealous, but on the contrary he was feeling hopeful.

“Did she kiss you back?”

“Yes, but then she panicked. I told her I had been wanting to kiss her since I first saw her.”

Tex smiled. “That damn picture of her that I sent to you guys affected me immediately, and not just because she’s a good-looking woman. It was something in her eyes.”

“Exactly, but she took it the wrong way. It’s like we talked about at the hospital. I

think she thinks we're being nice and taking care of her simply because it's our duty as Keith's team."

"What? Why would she think that...Oh hell, of course she would think that. She doesn't know us. We haven't expressed our attraction to her."

"This is going to get all fucked up."

"No, it won't. If what you say is true, then we just have to make our intentions clear and where the attraction stemmed from to begin with. Her beauty, that lost expression in her eyes, and then upon meeting her, getting to know her over the last week, the physical attraction. We're not faking it."

"She won't believe us, Tex. Trust is not something earned very easily by her."

"That's understandable, Lee, especially if her and Keith had a shitty upbringing."

"That's what we need to do. We need to find out more about her life, her experiences and fears. We need to court her."

Tex chuckled. "Court her, huh? Now that's a bit of your real Southern charm coming out, Lee. I've never courted a woman before. Not even sure how that's supposed to go."

Lee smiled. "Honesty. We need to be honest about how we feel. That's a definite start."

"Okay, I'm heading out but will be back in time for supper. Mercury and Stitch are handling that meal. Tiek is fixing up the other house for when Keith heals up."

"He'll like that. Especially if things work out between all of us and Shawna. Keith

won't want to be living in the same house."

Tex chuckled. "I hope he's not going to be pissed off."

"Are you kidding? If anything, he'll be happy. We'll keep her safe and well loved. He won't ever have to worry about any of that again."

* * * *

Shawna woke up from her nap feeling extra sore. She missed taking the pain medication the doctor prescribed and now was suffering for it. But as she looked around the huge room, she knew if not for the sore ribs, she would be in heaven. The bed was queen sized and filled with thick fluffy pillows and an even thicker comforter all in white. The windows led to a balcony, and although there were only an armoire and a long dresser, it felt very welcoming and comfortable.

What really called to her most was the luxurious spa bath and large bathroom. It was stunning and had Jacuzzi jets in it, too. She wondered if she should try to take a hot bath. Perhaps it would loosen her tight muscles and allow her aching ribs to feel better. She hated taking the pain medicine because it made her groggy. She also was worried about sleeping alone tonight. In the hospital there was always a nurse coming and going to check her vitals or see if she was okay. It gave her a little peace of mind but also kept her sleeping in spurts. Except for the last two nights when she awok

e in a cold sweat screaming for help. The doctor prescribed something for that, too, and she asked him not to mention it to the men. She didn't want them to know she was scared like that.

It took some time to get to the edge of the bed and then make her way to the bathroom. She noticed that it was after four thirty but figured she had time for the bath before supper. She walked into the bathroom and turned on the one light that

illuminated the tub in a soft, gentle glow of dim golden light. It was something a woman would want when taking a bath in such a luxurious tub. She started the water, found some assorted bath bubbles and other items that looked brand new. In fact, they were some of her favorite scents but in a more famous, expensive brand as opposed to the cheap ones she could afford. She wondered if they searched her apartment and figured out she liked these scents. She couldn't help but wonder if one of the guys had purchased them for her. They thought of everything, including clothing, bras, and panties. She felt the tears reach her eyes. Was she hoping they cared so much, even though she knew they took care of her because they had to?

They were forced to go shopping for her and replace her clothing and things after her apartment was ransacked. She believed it was worse than Mercury had told her but didn't want to upset her more.

When she found the sexy thong panties and pretty, barely-there bras she couldn't help but feel sexy and desirable. Whoever picked those out had a very naughty mind and obviously liked their women wearing such things. It had to be Tiek. For some reason he and Stitch seemed most assertive when it came to women. Mercury, as the leader, was uptight and fierce. He probably ordered women around in bed and liked a submissive woman. She felt her pussy throb. She swallowed hard. But then again, what did she know? She hardly knew these men at all.

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The tub was filling up and she slowly discarded the dress Lee had picked out for her. She folded it neatly, placed it on the counter along with the pretty matching panties and bra, and then looked into the mirror.

She would be relieved once these bruises were all gone. She looked black and blue almost everywhere, and her forearms were now an even deeper black and blue. As she grabbed onto the top of the tub to step inside, she felt the instant pain in her arms and in her ribs. She took a deep breath and stepped into the hot bubble bath. She moaned as she sunk into the water, letting the bubbles and the floral scent take away the pain.

She used her foot to turn off the faucet and then leaned back and closed her eyes.

She wasn't completely surprised to imagine Lee in her head. She thought about the way he kissed her, how when their gazes locked, it was as if they shared some sort of deeper connection. Was that her mind's subconscious trying to make excuses for her unacceptable attraction? But then she imagined Tex, Mercury, Stitch, and Tiek kissing her, too, sharing that same connection, and immediately her body responded.

Her nipples tightened to hard, sensitive buds. Her breasts felt full and her pussy ached. She couldn't help but try and use the soap to rub along her large breasts and attempt to alleviate the ache she felt. It didn't work and she released the soap, running her hands over her belly and wondering if that deep ache she had in her gut was actually from her bruised ribs. But she found herself moving her fingers lower, over her mound, between her bare pussy lips, and she knew where the ache originated. Her unused, unexplored cunt.

Maybe I'm just horny? Maybe the lack of sex, the near-death experience combined with meeting five sexy, muscular, to-die-for soldiers is bringing forth my own desperation?

She removed her fingers from her pussy. She had never touched herself like that before. She never imagined any man, never mind five she didn't really know, touching her so intimately. Yet she let Lee kiss her. She pushed him away when all she wanted to do was hold on to him and let him in. Let all five of the men into her heart. She felt so lost and out of control. How was she going to live her life after everything that happened to her? How was she going to leave when the men realized they couldn't fake their desires out of guilt and commitment to Keith? It wasn't right. It wasn't fair.

I finally feel an attraction to a man, well, five men, and I can't have them because I'm so fucked up. I can never let my guard down. They'll hurt me worse than anything if I let them inside my heart, never mind inside my body.

The tears filled her eyes as she squeezed them tight and tried to relax in the glorious bath.

* * * *

The guys were fixing up dinner and Tiek headed upstairs to check on Shawna. He knocked on her bedroom door but heard no response. He wondered if she were still sleeping. She looked exhausted after lunch today. He opened the door and walked into the room. The scent of flowers filled the room and he could see the light on in the bathroom. He walked deeper into the room.

"Shawna, it's Tiek. Dinner's ready." He thought he heard some mumbled sounds and walked closer to the door. He knocked.

“Yes.”

“It’s Tiek. Dinner is almost ready.”

“Uhm...okay. You can start without me.” He didn’t like the sound of that. In fact she seemed like she was mumbling.

“Is everything okay? Do you need help?”

“Well, come in, but cover your eyes,” she told him. He felt his heart racing. Why the hell would I need to cover my eyes? Unless she’s naked. Oh God.

He used one hand to cover his eyes and the other to turn the knob on the door.

“Shawna?” he whispered.

“I’m in the tub. I tried taking a bath because I didn’t take the painkillers like I was supposed to and my ribs are sore.”

“Shawna, you need to take the pain meds,” he stated, uncovering his eyes and zeroing in on a very naked Shawna trying to use a small square washcloth to cover her rather voluptuous breasts. He turned away.

“Tiek, please. This is embarrassing enough. I can’t get out of the tub. My ribs hurt too much and I lose my breath when I tighten up to strain to get out.”

“Okay, don’t panic.”

“That’s easy for you to say, I’m shivering and have been in here for far too long. The water is cold, I’m shriveling up. God, I feel stupid.”

“Stop that. Don’t ever say any such thing. You’re injured. Bruised ribs can be just as sore as broken ribs. You should have called one of us to come help you. That’s why we’re here.

“I’ll need to grab a towel and see where I’m reaching to help you.”

“Oh God.”

“Shawna.”

“Fine. Okay,” she whispered, her breath sounding shallow and raspy. She probably didn’t even know how sexy she sounded.

He uncovered his eyes and tried to be a gentleman. But damn, Shawna was incredible. He grabbed the big fluffy towel and then half closed his eyes and reached for her. He submerged his hands and arms into the water to lift her up from her hips. She grabbed on to his upper arms and he couldn’t help but to open his eyes. Her plump, full breasts’ creamy skin and taut nipples called to him immediately. His cock hardened, his grip tightened, and he lifted her up and against him.

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“Tiek, the towel,” she stated. He took his time moving the towel around her back, absorbed her curves and her clean-shaven pussy, then looked into her eyes. “You’re one sexy little lady,” he told her. Then he wrapped the towel snugly around her and cupped her cheek.

“Thank you for trusting me to help you.”

She widened her eyes. “I thought I was going to be stuck in there for another hour. I’m sorry that I got in there. This is damn frustrating for me.”

He ran his thumb along her lower lip and held her gaze. “Shawna, I’ll always be here for you. Do you know that?”

She lowered her eyes and he used both hands to cup her face and tilt it toward him. He towered over her. She was so petite. Maybe five feet six and he was six feet three.

“You have a sexy body, a sweet smile, and appetizing lips.”

“Tiek, don’t say such things. You can’t possibly—”

He slowly lowered his mouth toward hers, and when she closed her eyes, he thanked the good Lord above and kissed her.

* * * *

Shawna held on to Tiek even as the towel began to fall from her body. He lowered to his knees as he released her lips and then leaned forward and kissed her belly.

She reached for his head and held it, ran her fingers through his hair, and shivered from the intimate contact. She was out of her mind, but his mouth, his size, and his gentleness captured her full attention.

“Tiek.”

“I wish I could take all the pain, the bruises, and bad memories away, baby. You’re too beautiful, too perfect to have them on this sexy body.” His words combined with the warm breath tickling her skin made her close her eyes and hold him closer to her bosom.

Was it so bad to want so much? To feel a desire and attraction to every man in this house even knowing it was a bad idea. She could get lost in Tiek’s extra-large arms, feel safe and content in his embrace, and his lips. God, his lips felt incredible.

When he used his tongue to lick along the lower part of her breast, and then tilted upward as she lowered down so he could suckle her breast, her pussy spasmed and she came.

“Sweet Jesus, you’re so responsive. God, that excites me and makes me happy.” He suckled more of her breast as he wrapped his arms around her over her ass and hips and squeezed her to him.

“Tiek, you have to stop. It’s too much. I can’t believe this. This can’t be happening,” she whispered, half meaning it and half wanting to feel more. She couldn’t believe the attraction she felt, the connection and hunger, just from his touch and compassion.

“Baby, it is happening. It’s incredible. You’re incredible,” he whispered against her breast. She was shaking with desire. She wanted to press her pussy ag

ainst his chest and rock her hips to feel more of the sensations running rampant

through her body. It was foreign, yet felt too good, too right to ignore. But then came the concerns, the fact that if she gave in to her desires she would only get hurt. Was she a glutton for constant pain in her life? Her heart ached and her belly tightened as tears filled her eyes.

He kissed her breast and then began to kiss along the bruises on her ribs. His mouth felt so good on her skin. She battled between pushing him away and letting him explore her further. She imagined her fantasies coming true, but the reality was that she couldn't allow this. Tiek was huge, intimidating, wild, and dangerous. The thoughts had her nipples hard as pebbles and her pussy dripping with desire. She gripped his shoulders and tightened up.

She closed her eyes and then she felt his fingers caress up her inner thigh. Reality came back fast as she pushed away from him, grabbed the towel, cringing from the quick movement, and turned away from him to wrap herself.

“Shawna?”

“Please, Tiek, I shouldn't have let that happen. What you must think of me.”

She felt his hand on her shoulder, and his large, charismatic presence fill in the space behind her. He was so big, so tall and filled with muscles that even in this huge bathroom it felt small and cramped.

“Look at me, baby.” He turned her around and she looked up into his eyes. He smiled softly and cupped her cheeks.

“That was bound to happen sooner or later. I'm attracted to you, I wanted to kiss you for days.”

“But, Lee.”

“Lee wants you, too, just like Stitch, Mercury, and Tex do.”

She shook her head.

“You don’t believe me? Then we’ll prove it to you. Nice and slowly, so you know it’s not fake, it’s not put on because of Keith or the situation you were in. It happened, plain and simple, we fell for you, we want you, and you want us.”

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He leaned forward and kissed her softly on the lips as his words sunk in. They want me and I want them. Is he out of his mind? Are they? Am I? No, this is not real. It can't be.

He released her lips and stepped back. "I'll wait for you in the bedroom and we'll head down together." He walked out of the room and she grabbed the counter. I came from him sucking on my breast and kissing my bruises. He must think I'm so inexperienced and easy. Well, I am inexperienced. What the hell am I going to do now? Could he be telling the truth? Are they actually attracted to me? Shawna James, a nobody?

She swallowed hard and let the towel fall. Looking into the mirror, she saw her flushed skin. The coloring on her cheeks never looked so good. Her pussy still spasmed and yearned to be touched by Tiek, by any of the soldiers. Her breasts felt full and all the sensations running through her body were stronger than any pain her bruised ribs may have caused and any sensation she ever felt before.

She stared at her reflection in the mirror.

"You'll get hurt. They'll use you, or control you, and when you stand your ground, they could demand their power and hit you. Then what, Shawna?" The tears rolled from her cheeks as thoughts of her past came rushing back to her. Her parents' abusive ways, the creepy guys who tried picking her up at the bar or following her home, and the suffering she sustained from Cuadrone's physical abuse. She had to resist these men. She couldn't be weak. They could hurt her worse than anyone ever had before.

* * * *

“What’s taking them so long?” Stitch asked as they all gathered around the kitchen waiting for Shawna and Tiek.

“They’re coming down now,” Mercury said as he walked over toward the counter to finish making the salad. Lee was pulling the steaks off the grill.

The moment Stitch caught sight of Shawna and Tiek, he smiled.

“Hey, sleepyhead, how are you feeling?” he asked her. Her cheeks turned a nice shade of red and Tiek placed his hand against her lower back, escorting her into the kitchen. Something was different. He didn’t know how he knew, but both Tiek and Shawna looked different. He wondered if he kissed her like Lee had done.

“Mercury, Shawna didn’t take the pain meds, do you have the prescriptions the doctor sent home with us?” Tiek asked as he pulled out the chair for Shawna to sit on.

“No, Tiek, I don’t want to take them now.”

Tiek raised one eyebrow at her while he kept a hand on the back of her chair and one on the island as he stared at her. She lowered her eyes. He reached out and placed his fingers under her chin. “You’re going to take them so you don’t feel any pain.”

Mercury walked over with a bottle of water and a pill. “You need to take them, darling,” he said.

Stitch walked closer, instantly inhaling the scent of flowers or something feminine. They never had a woman in their home. Never one who smelled and looked as beautiful as Shawna.

“Did you have a hard time sleeping? Were you in pain?” Stitch asked, moving closer and placing his hand over her forehead to check for fever.

“I’m fine now,” she whispered.

“You weren’t fine when I found you stuck in the tub upstairs,” Tiek stated firmly.

She swung her head toward him. “It worked out fine.”

“It worked out better than fine,” he said and then stepped away.

Something definitely went down between these two. Stitch opened the bottle of water. “Take the pill, honey, and then before you go to bed, you can take another one.”

“No, Stitch.” He inhaled her scent, the smell of her hair, the bath soap Mercury brought her. He held her gaze.

“You smell fantastic. What is that you’re wearing?” he asked her, changing the direction of the conversation. She instantly appeared annoyed.

“Something I found in the bathroom upstairs. But you all should know that. Someone snooped through my apartment and my things.” She looked toward Mercury.

“Well, obviously that person cared enough about you to want to make you feel right at home here with us. Now take the pill. Doctor’s orders.” Stitch crossed his arms in front of his chest. Shawna looked at his muscles on his arms. He was certain she was feeling a bit intimidated, but he wasn’t worried. She was a tough one, and the more she healed, the sooner she would feel more confident and probably stubborn. He smiled as she swallowed the pill and held his gaze.

He reached over and brushed his thumb over her lower lip, wiping away a small spot of water.

“Good job. Now, I hope you like your steak rare, ’cause that’s the only way Lee knows how to cook them.” He pulled back and she nodded her head and then looked toward the doorway as Lee entered the room. His eyes lit up and so did Shawna’s.

* * * *

Shawna swallowed hard and clasped her hands on her lap. Her belly quivered as she looked around the kitchen at each of the men. They were just so damn large. Their muscles had muscles, and they all seemed to be sporting some sort of tattoos. She thought about how it felt to be held in Lee’s arms and Tiek’s. Both men were tough as steel. A woman knew she was safe and secure in any of their embraces. Tiek gave her a wink and she felt her cheeks warm and her breasts tingle. She still couldn’t believe he saw her naked and she let him suckle her breast and nearly touch her pussy. What the hell was I thinking?

She quickly turned to look at Mercury. He was definitely the one in charge, and took his role as gunnery sergeant seriously, even in retirement. He stood guard by the counter, watching everyone, including Lee as he returned from turning off the grill.

“We’re all set,” he exclaimed.

She jumped when she felt the hand go to her shoulder and someone press behind her.

“Come on, Shawna, I’ll show you to your seat.”

She looked back and saw Tex. He held her gaze and she felt embarrassed for acting so skittish. But truth was, she felt intimidated with all these muscular men around. They were capable of things even her wildest imagination couldn’t conjure up. She also thought about the men in uniform that held her captive. Their military positions, their authoritative attitude and abusiv

e ways made her subconsciously attach a stigma to any man in uniform. Even though deep down she knew these men were not like that, she still knew they were capable of hurting and killing as part of their positions as soldiers. It all made her so damn nervous.

She slowly climbed off the stool. Tex placed his hand on her hip and guided her around the room to the dining area. She pressed his hand away from her and turned to look at him.

“I got it,” she said, with more attitude than she meant to.

He held her gaze firmly, and the others were quiet as they watched them.

Tex took her hand and spoke to her as he brought it up to his lips.

“It’s my pleasure to care for you, Shawna.” He kissed her hand and she felt her entire body warm in response. Quickly she sat in her seat. He let her hand go and helped push the chair closer to the table. The scent of his cologne, the feel of his masculinity behind her made her close her eyes and try with all her might not to inhale before he walked away.

She opened her eyes and placed the napkin on her lap before looking around at the others.

The table was huge. The wood thick and solid. Another simile to the men who began to take seats around it. Mercury took the head of the table on one side and Lee took the other. She sat between Mercury and Stitch, while Tex and Tiek took the two seats across from her.

The smell of the food was enticing despite her nervous state. She had barely eaten at the hospital. The food was bland and she was still so afraid. She thought about tonight, and sleeping in this new place with the fears of her dreams causing restless sleep. She wondered if the doctor forgot to place the prescription sleeping pills in the bag with the painkillers. Stitch didn’t mention it. If she asked him, then she would have to explain why she needed them. She could lie, and say the doctor said it would relax her, but the thought of lying to them bothered her. She didn’t know why. It wasn’t like she knew them that well. She didn’t really trust them completely, just enough at a moment of desperation and with the help of knowing the password Keith had given them. From here on out she wanted independence again and to feel safe and secure.

“Is your steak okay?” Mercury asked her.

When she looked up, all eyes were upon her. “Yes. Thank you.” She began to cut into it, seeing steak as a delicacy she never could afford on her own. The entire spread before her looked so appetizing. Did these men eat like this every night? From the

fresh-colored vegetable medley to the hot baked bread in the basket, it was a meal she only read about or saw pictures of in magazines. She was poor. There was no other way to describe her way of life.

Of course, she wasn't homeless, but she did spend a stint of time renting a small bedroom advertised by the college for a few months her first year. Then it became unsafe. The young woman she rented from was a party girl and when strange men hung out all the time, it got scary. She swallowed hard, recalling the one guy who decided to walk into her bedroom and wait for her when she finished showering. She swallowed hard. She was always on a budget, always sacrificing to make ends meet. Her daily salads, canned tuna, or chicken constituted most of her main meals.

"Do you like steak?" Lee asked her. She softly gasped, caught so deep in her bad thoughts she hadn't expected the male tone. She held his gaze.

"Who wouldn't like steak?"

"Do you like it rare?" he asked.

"I like it, Lee. I rarely have steak."

"Shoot, are you a vegetarian?" Tiek asked and then took a huge chunk of meat and pulled it off the fork and into his mouth.

"No, nothing like that," she replied softly.

"Then what?" Stitch asked her, pushing for a better answer.

She stared at her plate. "I never could afford to have steak. It's something special. And this is a filet, right?" she asked, noticing how they all had extra-large steaks like porterhouses and she had the filet. There were more steaks on the platter in the center

of the table.

“Sure is. We love steak. And now that you’re here, you can have steak whenever you like,” Tiek told her. She felt a bit ashamed, or maybe foolish, for revealing that info about herself to make them feel obligated to provide for her. She didn’t want that. She wanted to be alone. She did alone perfectly.

“That’s very kind of you. But I don’t expect I’ll need taking care of for much longer. In fact, I can’t accept all these things you’re doing for me. I could never pay you back.”

“You don’t have to pay us back. We’re doing it because we want to. Can’t you see that?” Lee asked her.

She held his gaze. “I know it’s what Keith asked of you. To take care of me no matter what happened in Mexico. But, I’ve taken care of myself for this long.”

“You’re more than that to us,” Lee started to say, but Tex grabbed his arm to stop him from continuing.

“Darlin’, let’s not talk about any of that right now. It’s your first night here. We want you to feel safe and comfortable. We’ll talk about what may or may not happen another time,” Tex said.

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“Tex is right. Let’s eat up and enjoy the food and being here together,” Mercury added.

The men focused back on their food again while Shawna focused on her emotions.

What did she expect them to do, express their undying love for her, and tell her that they wanted her to be part of their family forever?

Her heart ached as she focused on not wasting the filet and not letting her tears fall. Even though she had a nice long nap, she was suddenly feeling very tired and spent. As soon as they were finished and she helped them, she was going to bed.

Chapter 10

Stitch joined Shawna at the hospital while she visited Keith. Tex had driven her in the morning and she remained all day. They had been sitting there quietly for an hour when Shawna turned to look at him.

She looked so young with one leg tucked underneath her and her hair in a long ponytail to the side. He wished that her bruises would fade quickly.

“I keep trying to think of happy things. Things that will keep the sadness and fear away.”

He pulled his chair closer, and placed his hand on the arm of her chair. “What about memories from when you were a kid? Maybe good times you had with Keith?” he asked.

She turned toward the hospital bed, the sounds of machines beeping and Keith's heartbeat echoing in the background. She looked down at her hands she clasped on her lap.

"Unfortunately, there weren't many," she whispered.

He heard the strain, the sadness in her voice. "Things were tough growing up?"

She turned to look at him. "Stitch, Keith gave you guys the password so I would trust you enough to go with you."

"Yes, it was cubbyhole, but we didn't know why he picked that word."

"It was where we had to hide from our parents when they drank too much," she whispered, her voice cracking on the last syllable.

He felt terrible. His heart ached for them. "They were abusive?" he asked.

She stood up and wrapped her arms, hugging herself while she looked at Keith. "They drank too much. We had to hide and wait until they sobered up or they would hit us."

He felt nothing but hatred for their parents. Anyone who could abuse a child was sick in the head. He stood up, turned her to face him, and gently rubbed his hands up and down her arms until she let her arms fall to her sides. He stared down into her gorgeous blue eyes.

"That must have been hell to go through, but you and Keith survived. You're both very strong."

She held his gaze, and he could see her eyes well up with tears. "I don't always feel

so strong.” A tear escaped her eye.

He pulled her close and hugged her as he whispered against the top of her head. “You can pull strength from me, or any of the others when you’re feeling weak. We want to be here for you, Shawna. We want to learn everything there is about the woman you are.”

“Why?” she asked, tilting her head up toward him. He cupped her cheeks and held her gaze. He could feel the beat of her heart and smell the scent of her perfume.

“Because you’re everything we’ve ever wished we could have and more.”

She shook her head. “Don’t pretend to feel something for me other than responsibility.”

“Responsibility? Do you seriously think that myself, Lee, Tex, Tiek, and Mercury are doing all this, are taking the time to help you, get to know you, just because of Keith?”

She held his gaze, swallowed hard as another tear fell. “Yes.” She tried to turn away. Stitch wouldn’t allow it, and held her firmly against him.

He held her cheeks between his hands. “Initially, knowing that Keith had a sister who was being held captive brought on a surge of our loyalty to Keith, and our beliefs in preserving your life. You were a civilian caught in the middle of a military operation. But then I saw you on the chopper. I looked into your beautiful eyes and all I wanted to do was protect you and keep you safe. I had this overwhelming possessive sensation that only becomes stronger the more we’re together. I want to get to know you. I want to be more than friends, more than your brother’s team member to you. So do the others.”

“I can’t accept that.”

“Why not, Shawna? We’re offering ourselves to you, to care for you and to protect you, provide for you, so no one can ever make you feel scared. With us, no one can ever hurt you.”

She was silent, and her lips called to him. He wanted to kiss her, to taste her. He lowered his mouth to hers and she closed her eyes right before their lips touched. The kiss was slow and sensual. He pressed his tongue between her teeth and she opened for him, allowing him deeper, to explore her mouth and fully taste her. When she wrapped her arms around his midsection, he felt overwhelmed with desire and emotions. Slowly he pulled away, kissing her cheeks, her chin, and neck before staring back into her eyes.

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“You feel it, don’t you? When one of us kisses you, you feel the attraction, the power of this connection.”

“I want to. I want to accept it, to explore it and take a chance, but I can’t,” she said, pulling away.

He grabbed

her hand and pulled her back and against his chest. He held her tight and stared down into her eyes. “Why, Shawna? Why can’t you let us in?”

“I’m afraid. Afraid to trust you, afraid to let you into my heart, and afraid that you will hurt me even though you claim such noble intentions.”

He thought about her words and the emotions he saw in her eyes. She needed time. They couldn’t push her.

“I understand. But our desire for you grows stronger every day you’re in our lives. I know that you’re scared. Hell, we’re scared, too, because we’ve always had just one another and now we all want you to be part of us. One team, one family. It’s a risk. But it’s one we’re willing to take. Won’t you take the risk, too? Baby steps and all, just don’t turn your back on these feelings. They’re too strong, and too perfect, baby.”

She hugged him tight and never responded as the nurse came into the room to check on Keith. Stitch would tell his brothers about this conversation and make them see that she needed time. Now that the danger was behind them all, time is what they had plenty of.

* * * *

Shawna was so tired she fell asleep against Stitch's shoulder on the drive back to the ranch. She didn't even wake up until she felt the hands on her body as someone opened the door. She blinked her eyes open to see Mercury standing there looking concerned and serious. She was shocked at how good of a rest she had against Stitch. So far at night she pulled her comforter and pillows into the large walk-in closet and slept in there, deep in the corner. She felt safer having the walls around her. If the men only knew.

"Come on, honey, I've got you," Mercury whispered.

"It's okay. I can do it," she said as she slid to the passenger door, her dress lifting to her upper thighs as she eased toward Mercury. She saw him look down and then lick his lower lip before he lifted her up and into his arms.

"Mercury, you can put me down, I said I'm fine."

He looked down into her eyes and then glanced at her lips. "Maybe I want to carry you, and hold you close."

She kept her arms wrapped around his shoulders and stared at his face, the shadow of whiskers on his skin as he walked her from the SUV into the house. The sun was already beginning to set, the rays cascaded through the large windows in the living room and toward the staircase. She could hear the other's voices echo from the kitchen.

"Everyone's in the kitchen."

"I need to get washed up. You can let me down."

He squeezed her a little snugger and carried her to the washroom. When he set her down, he trapped her against the wall with one hand against her hip and the wall and the other against her shoulder and the wall. He leaned forward. "I missed you." Gently he pressed his lips to hers, and she closed her eyes and enjoyed the kiss. She was surprised at how comfortable she felt being kissed by Mercury. He was the fiercest, and the one in complete control. She didn't feel guilty for letting him kiss her, she felt guilty for fearing that she couldn't give them all what they were asking for. Yet the numbness she felt deep within her heart was turning to an ache. She didn't know what it meant, but she fought, pushing to understand it.

He released her lips and then gently pushed a strand of loose hair away from her cheek.

"I'll wait for you."

She knew it was useless to tell him that he didn't have to wait for her. Instead she nodded and then walked into the powder room, closed the door, and stared at her reflection in the mirror. Her face was flushed, her breasts full, and her body moist just imagining what it might feel like to be made love to by a man. But then came the thought of five men wanting her. Five retired military soldiers who represented her newest fears, yet her every fantasy come true.

* * * *

While Mercury and Shawna were in the hallway, Stitch explained quickly about his conversation with Shawna in the hospital today. Tex, Lee, and Tiek nodded their heads. "She'll come around. She'll see that this can work and it's real," Tiek stated.

"You seem pretty confident," Tex said.

"I told you about what happened in the bathroom. Now with each of us working on

kissing her, letting our feelings show, she'll see this is legit and not some scheme to show loyalty to Keith," he replied.

"Let's talk more later. She had a rough day, and I think she'll want to go to bed right after we eat," Stitch stated.

As they gathered the food, the baked chicken, breadsticks, corn, and mashed potatoes, and set them on the table, Mercury and Shawna appeared.

"Hey, how are you feeling, darling? How was Keith?" Tex asked as he placed his hands on her waist, leaned down, and softly kissed her on the lips. Her cheeks turned red and she shyly looked down then at the others. Stitch saw everyone smiling softly. This was a good thing.

"I feel pretty good. Keith is the same. No change. He's not worse, so that's a positive," she replied as Mercury guided her to her seat at the table.

"That is a positive sign," Lee chimed in as he stood next to her chair, gave her shoulder a squeeze, and then walked to his chair.

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“This looks so good. Do each of you know how to cook?” she asked, taking a spoonful of potatoes and placing them onto her plate.

“We sure do. How about you, do you like cooking?” Tex asked her.

“Oh, I like cooking, I used to watch all the cooking shows and wish I could whip up some of the meals they made.”

“I bet you could do it. It’s really not that hard,” Lee added.

“If you have the right tools and ingredients, I’m sure it’s pretty easy,” she said.

Stitch hated hearing her sound so sad. “Well, now that you’re living here, and we have this gourmet kitchen, fully stocked for any recipe you might want to try, you can have a go at it. Whenever you’re feeling energized enough,” Stitch told her. She looked at him and then around the room at the kitchen.

“We’ll see,” she whispered, and Stitch smiled. She didn’t flat out say no way, so maybe making her feel more comfortable here was happening after all.

Chapter 11

“So he’s alive? That piece of shit destroyed my life,” Chavez stated as he spoke to Emoy.

“My men tell me that he isn’t doing well and that he is still in critical condition.”

“Unless he’s dead, your enthusiasm, Emoy, better be lined with some good news for me.”

“Well, unfortunately his sister is alive, too. She made it out of the compound with help from Keith and his team. They went in solo. That’s what caused the entire operation to fail.”

“Son of a bitch. I thought they were washed up, retired, and out of the whole military op thing. Why would they get involved?”

“Camaraderie?”

“Camaraderie my ass. What did the men find out?”

“Well, it could be the woman. It seems Keith’s team is taking care of her. She moved in with them.”

Chavez squinted his eyes and clenched his teeth. “Really? Now this is something I can work with.”

“What do you mean?”

“I want Shawna. I want her here with me in Brazil.” Chavez looked away, only partially hearing Emoy’s questions behind him. He was too transfixed on an idea formulating in his head.

“Chavez, did you not hear me? Why is this woman so important to find and bring here?” Emoy asked him as Chavez stared out the window that overlooked the Brazilian beach from a private estate he now called home.

He looked at Emoy, his partner, his associate for the last ten years. He was the one

who warned Chavez about getting involved with Montoya. His friend had been correct. But the plan would have worked fine, and he could still be living in America, freely traveling to all his private estates he would have purchased with the money he would have gotten from the Iraqis.

“It is simple. Keith, one measly American soldier, stole my life and my future from me. His team helped him and apparently they desire the lovely woman. Keith wrecked the operation, and now that missile is under US control.

By taking the only thing he holds dear, his sister, I will look at possessing her as a prize for my misery.”

“We are building more missiles right now. The plan is just on hold for a while. Is she worth the risk? Just because you seek revenge against this soldier? Kill him while he lays in that bed fighting for his life. That would be a successful and fulfilling revenge, my friend.”

“Emoy, have you looked at the folder on the table yet?”

“You know I haven’t. I was enjoying the sunset, the sound of music in the distance.”

“Well, look at them. You’ll see what I see in her eyes, and in her beauty.”

Emoy walked over to the table and lifted the folder up. He opened it and made a humming noise.

Chavez smiled as he turned to lock gazes with his partner and friend. “She is quite lovely, don’t you think?”

He watched Emoy trace his finger along the picture. He scanned through the others and then stopped. “You are right. Her eyes are stunning, too.” He looked at Chavez.

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Chavez smiled. “If you are successful in getting her here to me, I will share her with you as well.”

Emoy widened his eyes. “This is unexpected, Chavez.” He bowed his head and Chavez smiled then walked closer, placing his hand on Emoy’s shoulder.

“It’s the least I could do. You saved my life. You were right about Montoya, and I should have listened to you. Shawna will be more than a replacement of Monique, she will be our everything.”

“Monique was supposed to be that.”

“Monique failed us. I’m just glad I caught her before she killed us both. Shawna will be different. Without her brother, Keith, with no family, no ties to anyone, we can make her into the woman we both desire.”

“I’ll make the arrangements and prepare a plan. It may take some time to coordinate.”

“Do what you do best, Emoy. I know you will bring her to us, that you will be successful, and waiting will make having her even more enjoyable as a reward.”

* * * *

Shawna tried to be brave and remain in bed. But the sound of fierce thunder rocked the house, and lightning illuminated her bedroom. In her quest to feel in control and independent, she didn’t take the medicine the doctor gave her to sleep. She had asked him about it at the hospital after visiting Keith, and he had given her samples of stuff.

Instead she cuddled in the corner of the walk-in closet, door closed to block out the bolts of lightning and to feel the safety of the walls against her back and side. Every time she closed her eyes she thought about Mexico and pictured Cuadrone. Even though she knew he was dead, the way he taunted her and touched her flashed into her mind. She tried to think of better things, happy things that would destroy the images in her head and take away the chills running rampant through her body. She thought about the drive home from the hospital today and the way she fell asleep against Stitch. It was the best thirty minutes of rest she had since escaping Mexico. But she couldn't go to Stitch now and ask him to hold her. That would be succumbing to their control and letting down her guard that was the only protection he had left to hold on to.

More thunder rocked the house and she squeezed her eyes tight. In her head she saw the explosions at the compound in Mexico, heard the mumbled Spanish voices and then the sound of Cuadrone's voice.

He was touching her, caressing her breast and ripping the shirt from her body.

"No, no, please." She whimpered aloud. She wanted to run from the closet but where would she go? Who could she feel safe with?

When her five American soldiers popped into her head, all together, all standing side by side waiting for her, she gasped, covering her mouth.

I can't let my guard down. I can't depend on anyone but me.

She urged the desire to call to them or go to one of them away and she gripped the comforter tighter, holding it snug against her chest. She cried, and then she screamed when the closet door burst open.

* * * *

Lee and Stitch were in a panic as they searched Shawna's room and saw no sign of her. The national weather service issued a tornado warning for the nearby area. They needed to take precautions and head downstairs to the safety of the basement and an area they built as a tornado shelter. Tiek opened the door, and the sound of Shawna's screams drowned out the sound of the fierce thunder.

A bundle of white comforter, small and compact in the corner shook as cries came from underneath it.

"Shawna?" Tiek whispered her name as Mercury, Tex, and Stitch came running into the room.

"What's going on? Did you find her?" Mercury asked, gun in hand, just like Tex and Stitch. "We heard Shawna scream."

"Shawna?" Tiek got down on his knees and slowly crawled closer. He gently pulled the comforter away, and there was Shawna, lying in the fetal position, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Aw, baby, it's okay. Don't be scared. Come on now, I've got you." Tiek reached for her. She was a sight, wearing only a flimsy white tank top that barely covered her large breasts. She wore a pair of tight, tiny pink shorts that more resembled underwear than clothing. Her long, toned, tanned legs remained glued together. He reached out and caressed her hair away from her damp cheeks. Her eyes blinked open.

"Go away. Just let me get through this," she stated in a shaky voice. She was shivering and her expression looked so angry yet lost.

"Please let me help you. We need to go downstairs. Do you hear the sirens in the distance? There's a tornado warning," Tiek told her.

She eased her body up, the tank top stretched across her breasts, the mounds peeking out on either side. “Tornado warning?” she asked.

“Yes. Let Tiek carry you. We need to get downstairs,” Mercury ordered. His voice was firm, and by Shawna’s immediate reaction, she knew she had to go with them. She allowed him to lift her up into his arms, so Lee grabbed the comforter, carrying it along with them.

Tiek held her in his arms all the way through the house with the strikes of lightning and sounds of thunder getting closer and closer.

“Damn, can you hear that wind? It’s fierce,” Lee said as they entered the basement. The men began to light the lanterns. The electricity flashed on and off, and then there was a large noise and the place filled with darkness. They continued to light the lanterns that now cast a low glow of light throughout the room.

“Oh God.” Shawna cried out and pressed her face against Tiek’s neck, holding him tight. He caressed her and turned his face to lay kisses against her damp skin.

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“It’s okay, darling. It’s just a little storm. You know out here we get them now and again. Nothing ever really bad, just a lot of wind and a lot of noise,” he said, trying to reassure her.

“It should be over soon,” Mercury stated, caressing the hair from her cheek as Tiek sat down on the edge of the bed.

He held her on his lap. She was such a petite thing compared to him. He ran the palm of his hand along her thigh to her waist. Back and forth he tried to infuse his own heat into her skin to help her stop shivering.

She tried covering her chest with her arm, as if she realized just now how exposed she was to all of them. No bra, her abundant breasts poured from the V-neck and along her underarms.

He reached up and placed his palm against her cheek.

“You’re safe here with us. You know that right?” he asked her and she nodded her head and held his gaze. Tiek stared at her lips, moist, slightly parted, and when she poked her tongue out to lick the bottom lip as she held his gaze, he couldn’t resist taking a taste. He pulled her closer and he kissed her.

* * * *

Shawna couldn’t believe how turned on she felt in Tiek’s arms as he held her on his lap. The feel of steel beneath her ass and thighs made her pussy clench and her nipples swell with desire for affection. One touch, one lick again from Tiek’s tongue

and she would find relief for her aching cunt. The mumbled roars of thunder echoed above them, but it sounded so distant in the storm shelter. As Tiek kissed her deeply and pulled her closer, she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and kissed him back.

She could feel his palm move along her hip and up under her tank top. The feel of his large heated palm caressing her oversensitive flesh made her moan into his mouth and try to pull back a little. She felt so out of control, yet she yearned for more. He was so big, and she pressed herself snuggler against his muscular body. The feel of his masculinity and power eased her fears and erased the visions of violence from her earlier thoughts. When a thick, rough thumb caressed across her sensitive nipple, she pulled back, gasping as she held on to his shoulders.

She moaned softly as he used one large hand to cup a breast. Her core ached, and her pussy throbbed as she tried to move.

“You’re so responsive to my touch, Shawna. Can you come again for me, baby? Like the other night after the shower?” he asked, his dark eyes appearing so sensual and aroused.

“What are you talking about? You touched her and made her come?” Lee asked Tiek. Shawna felt her cheeks warm, and she went to lower her head and eyes, but Tiek wouldn’t allow it.

“Don’t, Shawna. Don’t be shy or embarrassed. Every man in this room wants to make you come, watch you explode in pleasure. Pleasure that we bring you.”

She shook her head.

Tiek lifted her so that she straddled his waist. He pressed his hands up her tank top and cupped her breasts, massaged them with his extra-large hands, making her push

against him so she could continue to feel the magnificent sensations.

“It’s too much,” she said aloud.

“Never too much,” Lee stated firmly. He approached them and reached out to caress her hair, letting it slide through his fingers. He reached for her hand and brought it up and against his jeans. She inhaled sharply at the feel of his hard, rigid cock against her palm

.

“Look at me,” he told her and she immediately did.

“You do this to me. You make me hard and aroused just from your natural beauty.”

She shook her head.

“You don’t believe me?” he asked and then ran her palm and fingers up and down against his shaft.

“Oh God, Lee,” she said. He released her hand, reached out to cup her cheeks between his hands, and he kissed her deeply. She was overcome with desire and lifted up only to feel Tiek maneuver his fingers under the waist of her shorts and straight to her very wet, oversensitive cunt.

“Tiek.” She moaned, pulling from Lee’s mouth, as she slid off Tiek’s lap, now standing between them as both men began to kiss, suck, and nibble her skin. She held on to Lee as he pulled her tank top up and over her head and tossed it to the side. “Fuck, she’s gorgeous,” Stitch said, joining them. Lee licked across her neck. Tiek caressed and licked her breasts. She held Stitch’s gaze as Tiek pressed his hands firmly against her body, over her belly, and pressed her shorts down to her ankles.

She was standing in front of five men completely naked.

Mercury stepped closer. He reached for her, touching her cheek as the others began to explore her body.

“You’re gorgeous,” Mercury whispered then kissed her lips as Tiek fingered her cunt, slowly pushing his fingers in and out of her pussy. Lee suckled one breast while Stitch suckled the other.

She felt Mercury move to the side, and there was Tex to take his place.

“You are stunning, darling. I’ve been waiting to kiss you.” He leaned forward and kissed her lips as Tiek pumped his fingers up into her cunt a little faster. She felt Lee pull on one nipple and Stitch suck and pull on the other and she exploded, nearly collapsing toward Tex and Lee.

“Easy, darling,” Tex whispered. She felt her shorts being pulled back up as Tiek gently pulled his fingers from her pussy. Lee lifted her up and laid her on the bed. She went to cover her bare breasts with her hands but they stopped her.

She cringed when Stitch moved her arms above her head and they stopped completely. She wanted to tell them not to, and that what they were doing felt so good, but then they seemed different.

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“Are you okay? How are your ribs?” Stitch asked her.

“I’m okay,” she said, sounding too firm for such a simple response. Lee raised one eyebrow at her tone. She felt her cheeks warm.

“I was cold before, but now I feel warm,” she told him. Tiek pulled her against his chest as they lay on the bed, her back to Tiek’s chest. Lee caressed his palm over her breasts and Tiek caressed his palm over her belly.

“We want to make love to you,” he whispered, applying pressure to her belly, maneuvering his hand under the waist of her shorts then back up again. He was teasing her. It was pure torture. So badly she wanted to say yes, and risk it all. But her fear was strong.

She looked around at the others as Tiek mumbled the word “yes” against her shoulder as he kissed her skin.

“We all do, Shawna. Will you let us love you?” Mercury asked.

She swallowed hard as tears filled her eyes. “I don’t know.”

Lee cupped her cheek. “What do you mean? Are you unsure about making love to five men or do you not feel what we’re feeling here?”

She felt the tears roll down her cheeks. Her heart ached with so many emotions. She wanted to believe that these men could love her. She wanted to feel the safety and security of their embrace and the touch of their hands on her, but she had closed off

her heart for so long. She feared being abandoned, being abused, or simply having her heart broken five times over. She struggled to build a wall around her heart for so many years. Just thinking about letting down those walls and letting one person in, never mind five, was causing instant fear and anxiety.

She looked at them. She felt Tiek snug against her, yet he was frozen in place, waiting for her words of acceptance. But she couldn't do it. She couldn't let down the damn walls.

"I'm sorry. I can't give you what you want. I can't take a chance like this. It hurts too much to feel and I'm so tired of feeling hurt, abandoned, and unloved. I can't do it." She closed her eyes and moved her hands up to protect her breasts from their further view.

* * * *

Lee knew she was hurting. God, he hadn't realized any of the pain and the disappointment she had gone through all her life. Like Stitch mentioned the abuse and neglect she grew up around, and then to be taken captive by that asshole terrorist. God knew what he did to her.

He ran the palm of his hand along her arm.

"I'm sure you're scared to take a chance. I'm not going to sit here and tell you all the reasons why you should let that guard down you've trained yourself to keep up no matter what. I'm not. I'm just going to tell you that I'm willing to wait."

"We're all willing to wait, Shawna," Tex added.

She opened her eyes and glanced at them. "I can't promise you anything right now. I've never let anyone this close before."

“You mean a boyfriend? This type of relationship isn’t like any other you’ve experienced before,” Tiek told her.

She swallowed hard. “I haven’t had any experience before.” She lowered her eyes.

Lee swallowed hard. Surely she couldn’t mean she was a virgin.

He cupped her chin, then looked at his brothers before looking back at Shawna. “You’ve never let a man touch you, make love to you?”

“Never.”

Tiek squeezed her tight and nuzzled against her neck. “You’re more than perfect.”

“We understand now. Just know that we’re taking a huge chance here, too. We’re soldiers. Trained not to feel, no matter what. You’ve changed that, Shawna. You make us want to feel and want so much more than the life we currently have,” Mercury said.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Tiek rolled her to her back, maneuvered half over her, and stared down into her eyes.

“It means we want a future with you, here on the ranch with the five of us. We want to provide for you, grow old with you, hell, we want to start a family with you. All of it.”

“But you hardly know me. How can you be sure that this is real, and not just sexual chemistry between us?”

“We know. I can’t explain it, but we know.”

“You’re also fighting what you feel and what under normal circumstances you would see as potential, because of how you got here. You were abducted, abused, terrified, and thought you were going to die. It’s going to take time to heal. We’ll help you,” Lee said.

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“Yeah, we’re not going anywhere, Shawna. We’re not leaving you,” Stitch told her.

“We’ve each been where you’re at. The fear of your experience, of not knowing if you were going to live or die, and then wondering how to trust again,” Tex added.

“But we’re a team. One that you’ve become part of, whether you want to acknowledge that right now or not. One team, one unit, one family, and we will be here with you always,” Mercury said.

Lee held her gaze as she looked at him and then the others then backed up toward Tiek. She looked so fragile and petite. Her breasts were wedged up against Tiek’s chest and she held his arms.

“I’m going to need some time. Time to get used to this, time to learn to trust each of you, and time to heal.”

Tiek smiled at her and Lee felt his heart rejoice that at least she wasn’t turning them down flat.

“Good, and while you’re thinking and processing, we’ll be exploring and convincing you that you’re our woman, and we adore you already.” He leaned down and kissed her, and when she reached up to wrap her arms around Tiek’s shoulders and straddle his waist, Lee knew that she was already theirs. They just needed to convince her to let them all inside completely.

A few nights had passed and Shawna just couldn't seem to stop the nightmares from happening. She lay in the closet, just like every night after one of the men came in to c

heck on her. She would sneak from the bed and cuddle up in the corner. But today had been an emotional day. Keith had a bad day, and the doctors talked about the possibility of him not making it. She cried, even now, thinking about how lost she would be without him. Instantly she thought about the men. Keith's team, who were caring for her, telling her they wanted her as their woman. She wasn't certain how that made her feel.

She never thought about having a relationship with one man, never mind multiple. She knew plenty of couples that did engage in ménage relationships, but she had always been so distrustful, she couldn't imagine herself in their shoes. Like Tiek, Tex, and Mercury had said, the attraction between the five of them was there. Meeting the way they did was circumstantial, yet she still felt like an obligation. Perhaps over time, as she got to know them more, she would be able to let them make love to her, and she could slowly let them into her heart. But tonight that heart was heavy. She couldn't stop shaking, and every time she closed her eyes, she saw Cuadrone.

She was exhausted but once again she would have a sleepless night because of her need for independence and to not rely on anyone.

"Shawna?"

She heard a male voice, but the closet door was closed. She knew she was busted, but tried not to panic. If she didn't respond, whoever it was would tear the house down to find her.

She didn't have to get up. The door opened and the large shadow appeared.

“Shawna, are you in here again?” Mercury, the man in charge, asked her.

She swallowed hard. “I’m fine. Please just go.”

“Have you been sleeping here every night? I thought you only slept in here the night of the big storm.” He knelt down on the floor. She could hardly make out his face it was so dark. Yet he spoke to her as if he had night vision. He was a Marine. Maybe he had special eyes. Marines were not like other soldiers.

She felt the shiver of awareness fill her gut. Mercury was a sexy, older man. Freud would have a field day with her.

“Come on with me.”

“No. I’m fine here. I’m safe here.”

“You’re safe with me.” He reached for her and started to pull the comforter when she snagged it back.

“I’m fine where I am. Please, Mercury, just leave me.”

“No. You’re scared, probably having nightmares, and you didn’t tell us. I’m upset with you, so move it now,” he demanded.

He was so commanding and lethal. Plus he was big, with lots of muscles and even a tattoo on his arm.

He also didn’t take no for an answer. He squatted down closer, lifted her and her bundle of comforter up into his arms, and carried her out of the closet.

As he placed her on the bed, she began to reprimand him and tell him that she would

only head back into the closet when he left, when instead, he tucked her under the covers and joined her.

“What are you doing?” she asked, breath shallow and shaky.

He reached under the sheets, pulled her close so that her back was against his chest, and then fixed the comforter above them. She felt his long, thick cock against her ass, and the powerful muscles in his thighs leaned against her calves and thighs. He was made of pure steel, solid yet warm instead of cold.

“Now close your eyes and sleep. I’ll protect you,” he whispered, wrapping his arm around her midsection before snuggling into the pillow.

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“You don’t have to do this.”

“I want to. Now close your eyes and sleep,” he said. Which was nearly impossible to do. She wore a light tank top again, and this time only panties, too intimate for a man to be snuggled up against.

“You’re like a little heater. You’re so hot,” he whispered. She wondered what he meant, but then he pulled from her a moment, pulled off his shirt, and tossed it. Bare skin to bare skin, how was she going to fall asleep like this?

“Stop worrying. Nothing is going to happen. At least not anything you don’t initiate or want. Rest up.”

She closed her eyes and absorbed the feel of his embrace. Just one night, maybe it would help her.

* * * *

Tex stood by the computer looking at the information that his buddy Sully “Sandman” Sandstone sent him early this morning. He was an investigator and federal agent working on special cases for the government. He knew what happened to Keith and his sister, and was keeping Tex abreast of the search for Chavez.

“I got the e-mail up now. Looks like they think he’s out of the country,” Tex stated over the cell phone.

“That’s a definite. The agents aren’t sure where, but through informants it appears

Chavez had an associate, a business partner who resides in Brazil. But this guy has homes all over the place. He's a wealthy man."

"Brazil? That came up before in regards to the terrorists who wanted the documents to create that missile. I don't like the sound of this. Are the feds still being aggressive in the search for Chavez?" Tex asked.

"To be honest, my contacts say no. They got the missile, the thumb drives, Montoya, and the other terrorists, so it's a done deal," Sandman stated.

"Shit. I would feel a hell of a lot better knowing that asshole was captured or six feet under."

"I hear ya. Listen, the guys and everyone at Casper's are praying for Keith. Any news on his condition?"

Tex ran his fingers through his hair. "Not a thing has changed. Tell everyone we appreciate the prayers. Keith sure can use them."

"And how is Shawna? I can't believe he had a sister and none of you knew that."

"Well, Lee did, but was sworn to secrecy. Keith wanted to keep her safe. They had a tough life."

"Is she feeling better and recovering from her injuries?"

"She's doing a lot better. The last two weeks have been good. The bruises on her face are fading and the ones on her ribs are looking better. She's a tough one."

"She's a very attractive young woman. The five of you have been really taking good care of her. I'm certain Keith will appreciate that when he is finally up and about

again.”

“She’s amazing. She deserves a lot better than what’s been dished out to her. That’s for sure.”

Tex was quiet as he thought about how much better things seemed to be getting. She was talking to them more, but still holding back.

“She does, and I hope the five of you are in this for the long haul,” Sandman said.

“I’d say you don’t need to worry, but it’s Shawna that needs the convincing.”

Sandman chuckled. “I totally understand. Believe me, it wasn’t easy to earn Grace’s trust, but we were all honest with her, and that seemed to slowly ease her mind. Good luck, and I’ll keep on top of this.”

“Please do, Sandman. I don’t want any surprises. Like I said, Shawna’s been through enough.”

“Enough said. Talk to you soon.”

Tex hung up the phone and leaned back in his chair. He had a few more hours of work before he could head home. He missed Shawna. He couldn’t wait to see her. He stared at the computer screen. He’d feel a hell of a lot better if Chavez was behind bars. He just didn’t like the feeling he had.

* * * *

Mercury watched Shawna as she jerked awake for the third time since they left the hospital. She was exhausted. She seemed intimidated by him and wouldn’t lean on him to rest. Which was crazy since a few nights ago they slept together in her bed. He

couldn't believe she was sleeping in the closet out of fear. It bothered him and he would need to confront her about it. It was a bit of a ride back to the ranch, so he tried convincing her to rest against him.

“Darlin’, I don’t bite. Come on over here and rest on my shoulder.”

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She glanced at him. He could see the circles under her eyes and it concerned him. While she was with Keith, Mercury asked the doctor if there was anything she could take to maybe help her sleep peacefully. He explained that he already gave her stuff, but thought she may have not taken them yet.

“I’m okay.”

“No, you’re not. You’re exhausted. Have you been sleeping at night? Are you still hiding in that closet?” he inquired.

She gave him a look and then turned away from him and clasped her hands on her lap. He wasn’t sure if he should push her for answers, which was a first for him. He usually didn’t give a shit what people thought or how they felt. If he wanted answers, he got answers.

“Are you taking the sleeping pills the doctor gave you?”

She swung her head to look at him and he could see her anxiety. She was damn sexy even fired up. “Talking about me behind my back?” she snapped.

“Worrying about you and wondering what you’re hiding. Why haven’t you taken the pills?”

“I don’t need them. I stopped all the other stuff so I don’t need the sleeping pills. I’m just tired, Mercury. It’s emotional hanging out at the hospital and not getting any news, good or bad, about Keith’s condition.”

He reached over and covered her hands with his. "I know that, honey. I didn't mean to sound uncaring. I'm just worried about you. I want you feeling better. Maybe we should set up that meeting with Spock. He's a really nice guy, easy to talk to."

"No. I don't want to talk to some therapist. I just want to deal with it myself. I'm fine, Mercury."

"Well, I think otherwise."

She swung her head toward him. "I'm not one of your soldiers. You can't order me around or make me do something I don't want to do. I'm fine, so just butt out." She crossed her arms in front of her chest and stared out the window.

Mercury was pissed off. Never had anyone spoken to him like this, and he didn't know how to handle it. He cared for Shawna and he would do anything to help her heal. He turned the SUV off onto the shoulder, threw it in park, and reached for her.

"You have got the worse damn temper for such a petite little thing. I care about you, damn it. I want you to trust me and the others. You're making this difficult and I'm starting to get pissed off."

"Oh really, well who cares if the gunnery sergeant gets pissed off?" she replied, pressing closer. He held her gaze, saw the fire in her blue eyes, and he lost it. It had taken the patience and willpower of a saint not to sink his cock into her virgin folds the other night when he held her in bed. But now was a different story. Reaching up under her hair and neck, he pulled her toward him and kissed her deeply. At first she gripped his forearms and tried pulling back, but then she eased closer and somehow wound up straddling his waist.

Thank the Lord for tinted windows, or he would be in a hell of a lot of trouble right now.

He stroked his tongue deeper, heard her soft moans, and then felt her hands maneuver under his shirt and against his pectoral muscles. He explored her, too, caressing his hands up her thighs under the skirt she wore and straight to her hips. He gave them a squeeze and she gasped. She pulled back, holding his shoulders, blue sparkling eyes and breasts overflowing from her top, and he knew he was done for.

“What the hell just happened?” she asked him.

He used his thumbs to caress against her mound while still holding her hips. “You just earned yourself a spanking, darling. Nobody denies an order from me. Never.”

He pulled her closer, caressing over her ass cheeks as she lifted up and kissed him. He trailed a finger down the crack of her ass and pressed another finger under her panties to her cunt. She moaned and shook, coming in his arms before he squeezed her to him.

“When I get you home, you’d better be ready for that punishment, ya hear?” he asked her, his own voice shaking with anticipation.

She pulled back, breathing shallow, lips moist from their kissing, and held his gaze. “You have to catch me first.”

* * * *

Lee and Stitch heard the screaming and laughter and then the door slam.

“You can run, darling, but you can’t hide!” Mercury called out. Lee and Stitch saw Shawna running up the stairs and there was Mercury, pulling off his shirt as he headed up after her.

“What’s going on?” Stitch asked.

“Our woman is getting her first spanking,” Mercury stated firmly and headed up the stairs taking two steps at a time.

Lee looked at Stitch.

“You don’t think he’ll actually do it?” Stitch asked and Lee raised one eyebrow at Stitch. They knew their gunnery sergeant pretty well and if the man was going to dish out a punishment, it was called for and he was going to do it. “I’ve got to see this.” Stitch headed up first and Lee followed.

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Shawna couldn't believe how aroused she felt. She had no idea why she reacted to Mercury's questioning in such a defensive manner, but now that the man was all riled up, she couldn't help but feel excited. She should be freaking out right now about being spanked by him. First of all, she wasn't a child. Secondly, the fantasies running through her mind should send her to confession for the next ten years straight. She was wet. Her panties were soaked, her breasts full and sensitive as she twirled around the hallway trying to find a place to hide. She could hear Mercury coming so she hid behind a nearby door. Her mouth went dry when he took off his shirt. The man was a gorgeous work of art. Large, wide shoulders, intricate colorful tattoos along his arms and chest, and, damn, a dusting of hair that led straight down to his cock. Holy shit.

Turning, she caught sight of a gorgeous bed. It was huge, and she wondered who slept in here. She shivered and stepped away from the door.

She looked for another place to hide, but as she snuck toward the closet, another door opened and there stood Mercury.

She gasped.

He smirked.

"Did you really think you could hide from me?"

She nodded her head. He chuckled. "Fat chance, sweetie. You're mine. Now get over here," he ordered.

She straightened her shoulders, felt her legs shaking, but held her ground. "I will

not.”

His eyes widened and she saw Stitch and Lee walk into the room, arms crossed and fierce expressions on their faces. Her pussy leaked.

“Now,” Mercury repeated.

She couldn’t move. She was overly aroused.

Mercury stomped toward her, grabbed her arms, and pressed her body against his as he covered her mouth and kissed her.

She was lost in that kiss and in Mercury’s powerful control of her. She wasn’t scared. She was on fire with anticipation. She wanted whatever he was willing to give her. She wanted to feel. Just feel everything from him, from them.

Mercury lifted her dress and pulled it up and over her head.

Her breasts bounced and she gasped. She hadn’t worn a bra with the dress, which was sexy and tight fitting, another choice of garment from whomever shopped for clothing for her.

He cupped her breasts and leaned down to take a taste.

“These are mine. All of you belongs to me,” he told her and then stepped back, pulling her along with him, still suckling her breasts, before he sat on the edge of the bed.

In a flash he lifted her up and placed her over his lap.

“Mercury!” She screamed his name and then felt the warm, large palm over her ass

cheek.

“Holy fuck, she’s got a great ass,” Stitch stated.

She felt a second hand caress her ass cheek and then her back.

“Love these tiny little thong panties,” Lee added, and she felt him lift the thin material from the crack of her ass. It gave her the chills. She wiggled and then felt the large hand keep her steady.

“Easy now, baby. You take your spanking like a good girl,” Mercury said, and she wiggled again.

“I won’t. I don’t deserve a spanking. You’re on a trip, mister. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“What did she do?” Lee asked, and Mercury explained.

Stitch bent down and caressed her hair from her cheeks. “You should have taken the sleeping pills. Does this mean you haven’t been sleeping well at night?” he asked.

“I’m fine.”

“Why didn’t you come to one of us? We could have helped you or stayed with you so you could rest better,” Stitch said.

“Are you kidding me?” she asked.

Smack.

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“Oh!” she exclaimed as the first slap hit her ass cheek, burning her skin yet sending waves of fire to her pussy.

“You care to change your answer?” Mercury asked.

“No,” she stated quickly.

Smack.

“Oh, God.” She felt the cream drip between her thighs. She wiggled her ass and Mercury smacked her ass again then caressed the burn away.

“Are you going to come to us when you can’t sleep tonight?” Mercury asked her.

“No.”

Smack.

“Oh God, Mercury, please,” she begged.

“Please what? Are you going to come to us?”

“Oh God.”

Smack.

She felt the sting and then his caress, and when he maneuvered a finger between her

thighs and straight to her wet pussy, she moaned.

“Sweet mother, she is sopping wet,” Lee announced. She felt a second set of hands caress her ass.

Stitch gripped her face between his hands.

She locked gazes with brown eyes and he looked hungry. “You are a very naughty girl. You need to accept our commitment to you and our desire to make you all ours.” He covered her mouth and kissed her as Mercury stroked his finger up into her cunt. In and out he pumped his finger then stroked the wet cream up over her anus.

She jerked upward only for Mercury to lift her up and onto his lap. He used his thighs to spread her thighs wider and then lie back on the bed.

Her ass and pussy were now on display for Stitch and Lee.

She glanced over her shoulder as both men knelt down on the rug, each caressing a palm up her thighs and straight to her cunt. She closed her eyes and moaned aloud. Mercury chuckled. “You love how it feels to be touched by all of us. Wait until Tex and Tiek get here. They’re going to want to taste you, too.”

“Yes.” She moaned as he cupped her breasts.

Stitch and Lee were kissing her back and her shoulders as they alternated finger-fucking her cunt. Then she felt one of them stroke a finger over her anus and push against the tight bud.

“Oh God, I never. Oh, it burns.” She panted.

“Easy, baby, let us explore this luscious body, and get it ready for cock. We want

you, Shawna. Will you let us make love to you?” Mercury asked, holding her face between his hands with her breasts pressed against his solid pectoral muscles.

“Yes. Oh God, I want to. I want you.”

He leaned forward and kissed her as both Stitch and Lee stroked fingers into her cunt and anus. She pulled from Mercury’s mouth and screamed her release.

* * * *

Mercury winked at Stitch and Lee over her shoulder. Both men smiled wide and then pulled from her body.

“Let’s get ready, baby. I can’t hold out. I want that pretty, wet, virgin pussy of yours,” Mercury said. They rolled her to her back. Stitch spread her thighs and then licked her pussy. She grabbed his head and Lee watched. She was a gorgeous sight. Full, round breasts and hard, little nipples just waiting to be tasted stared back at him.

Mercury was discarding his clothing and putting on a condom. Stitch was slurping and tasting Shawna, bringing her more and more pleasure.

“I’m ready, baby,” Mercury said.

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Stitch licked her one more time and then smiled at her. He leaned up and kissed her mouth then pulled back.

“Don’t you taste so fucking sweet, baby?”

She panted, her eyes wide in shock. Their delicate little virgin was going to have a lot to learn.

Lee smiled as Stitch lifted her up and placed her onto Mercury. She straddled his hips and stared down at his cock. Mercury reached up and cupped her cheek.

“Take me inside of you. Make me yours, baby.”

She caressed her hands along his chest as she lifted up.

“You’re so big, Merc. I don’t know if you’ll fit. I’ve never had sex before,” she whispered.

Stitch caressed her back and Mercury smiled. “I’ll fit because we’re meant to be one. Come on now, baby. Make me all yours.”

* * * *

Mercury was overwhelmed with love and desire for Shawna. As she slowly eased her pussy down over his shaft, he thought he might explode. He held tight, wanting her first time to be amazing, and yet he felt almost undeserving of such an honor.

He was a hard man. One who never gave his heart to a woman before, not until now.

She gasped and moaned as she eased lower. Behind her Stitch began to play with her ass again as Lee kissed her thigh and played with her breasts.

“Oh God, it hurts. I feel you stretching me.”

“It’s all good, baby. How do you like the way this feels?” Stitch asked as he pressed her back lower so she was chest to chest with Mercury. Mercury felt his cock ease the rest of the way into her channel until he was fully inside of her.

“Sweet Jesus, you’re damn tight.”

“How about this? You like this?” Stitch asked her, and Mercury didn’t know what Stitch was doing but Shawna was getting wetter and his cock was sliding deeper.

“Oh hell, that feels great. What are you doing?” Mercury asked.

“Tell Mercury what I’m doing, baby.”

“Oh God, more. I want more.” She moaned and she started shaking with a small orgasm.

“Holy shit,” Lee said. Mercury began to pull down and then thrust back up. Shawna was moaning and counterthrusting.

“That’s it, baby. Holy shit, you’re going to love getting fucked by five guys aren’t you, honey?” Lee asked her and she moaned aloud again.

“That’s going to be a sight. One cock in your pussy, one in your mouth, and another in your ass.” Mercury countered and then thrust upward again.

“Yes. Oh God, yes.” She moaned.

“Then just when you think you can’t take any more, another cock will be waiting to fill you up all over again,” Stitch teased as he thrust his fingers into her ass.

“Do it. I want it.” She moaned.

Lee got up on the bed and held his cock in his hand.

“You sure, darling? You want to try it?” he asked. Mercury held her gaze.

“Yes. I want all three of you. If I’m going to do this, I want to do it right,” she said. Mercury smiled. That was Shawna. The woman didn’t fear much at all.

“You take it easy on her,” Mercury commanded.

“Yes, sir,” Stitch said as he eased his finger out of her ass.

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Shawna moaned. “What are—”

“Getting some lube, baby. We don’t want to hurt you,” Mercury said then pulled her down for a kiss. She lifted back up and Mercury watched her take Lee’s cock between her lips.

“Ever suck cock before, Shawna?” Lee asked as he gripped her head. She shook her head and he smiled.

“We’re doing all the firsts right now, ain’t we?” Stitch asked.

Mercury felt her body twitch and knew that Stitch was preparing her ass.

“You’re so gorgeous, Shawna. Life is never going to be the same again. We’re going to be one forever,” Lee whispered. Mercury was glad he spoke because Mercury was too far gone to even formulate words. She lifted up and down on his cock while she sucked Lee’s cock and then she paused.

“Relax those muscles, darling, I have a big, thick cock just ready to de-virginize this ass.” He gave her ass a smack. The sound aroused them all as moans filled the room.

“Fuck, she is tight,” Stitch whispered. Mercury cupped her breasts and thrust his hips upward. He could feel when Stitch’s cock breached her anus as suddenly it became too difficult to move. The sensations burned his body as he tried to counterthrust against Stitch’s strokes.

“Holy shit. I’ve never felt like this. Never, Shawna,” Stitch stated aloud as all three

men began to stroke into her together. She was moaning. Mercury could feel her losing her ability to remain upright just as he shot his seed into her pussy. Lee came next, gripping her hair then holding himself in her mouth as she swallowed profusely, trying to get it all. When she pulled back, releasing his cock, her lips were swollen and wet, and she looked so desirable he grabbed her and kissed her deeply.

Behind her Stitch thrust again and again until he found his release and exploded inside of her.

They kissed her everywhere their lips could reach. Stitch eased out of her ass as Lee stepped from the bed and returned a moment later with a washcloth for Shawna. She rolled off of Mercury and onto her back as the men cared for her together. Lee and Mercury leaned down and licked her nipples then kissed her breasts. They chuckled and she moaned.

“Oh God, I wish I had tried that sooner. That was incredible,” she said. Stitch pinched her nipple.

“Hey,” she scolded. He held her gaze as he pressed between her thighs and leaned over her.

“I’m glad we were your firsts, and that no man had ever gone where we went before.”

“What the hell is going on in here?” Tiek asked as he entered the room. They all chuckled.

“We’re making love to our woman. Care to join?” Stitch said and Tiek smiled.

“Really, Shawna?” he asked, sounding so sincere and concerned for her well-being. When Shawna smiled, Mercury felt his heart racing.

“Yes. So come over here and hug me,” she said. Lee and Stitch stepped aside and Tiek took their place, pulling her up into his arms.

“How about a nice hot shower?” he asked.

“Only if you’ll join me,” she said, and he smiled.

“That was the plan, darling.”

Mercury watched them exit the room, and right before they passed the threshold, Shawna looked back at him, Lee, and Stitch and smiled.

“I’m in love,” Lee stated.

“Join the club,” Stitch added.

“Duh,” Mercury said. Lee and Stitch chuckled as they all started to get dressed.

* * * *

Tiek started the shower after he gently set Shawna down on the vanity. He walked back to her and eyed her body. He licked his lips and she reached up and caressed her fingers along his arm.

“What does it mean?” she asked him about his tattoo.

He looked at it, knowing it was part of his heritage.

“It’s Polynesian. I was born and raised in Kauai, in a little town called Ha’ena.” He placed his hands on her hips and lifted her up to carry her to the shower.

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As they stood under the spray of water, he cupped her breasts and stared down into her eyes.

“My family lived there for many generations, and part of our tribal traditions was this family pattern and design. It is unique and only part of my family history.”

She touched it again and then released an uneasy breath.

“What’s wrong? Are you feeling okay? They weren’t too rough with you?” he asked her. He would do anything to protect Shawna. His feelings were deep for her already.

“No, of course not. You don’t even want to know how it all got started.” She chuckled as she lowered her eyes. He reached under her chin to grip it and tilt it back up toward him. The water cascaded over them and between them.

“Sure I do. I want to know what made you finally trust us enough to give in to our desires.” He reached for the soap and began to lather it up and caress her skin.

She closed her eyes and tilted her head back. “Mercury threatened to spank me.”

He paused and felt his heart racing. When he entered the bedroom in search of the sounds he heard from the hallway, he knew Shawna was aroused and coming. She let them make love to her, and he couldn’t be happier.

He continued to caress her skin, minus the soap he placed back onto the shelf. He turned her around and caressed his palms over her ass.

“And did he give you that spanking?” he asked, pressing his cock against her ass as he massaged it.

“Yes.” She pressed her palms against the wall and pushed back against Tiek. He ran his palm along her waist and over her belly, straight to her cunt.

“And did you enjoy it?”

“Definitely.”

He lowered his mouth to her shoulder

and suckled the skin there and then against her neck. She moaned.

Tiek pressed his fingers up into her pussy, playing with her labia, stroking her lips.

“You feel hot, baby.” He rubbed his cock and hips against her ass and thighs. She was so curvy and sexy. He loved the sight of her body, her full breasts and round ass.

“How did it feel? To have three cocks inside of you together?” he asked her and she moaned, tilted her head back, and thrust lightly back against his fingers.

“Naughty,” she whispered.

He chuckled against her neck as he continued to stroke her cunt. “It seems you like being naughty, Shawna. You had to do something crazy to get Mercury that fired up.”

“It wasn’t a big deal. I can take care of myself. I don’t need a babysitter in bed at night.”

He softly pulled his fingers from her, turned her around, and lifted her up into his

arms. She straddled his waist and he pressed her back against the wall. Looking over her breasts then her eyes, he held her gaze.

“Seems you do.”

Shawna ran her fingers along Tiek’s muscular arms and held his gaze.

“It took a lot for me to let Mercury hold me in bed a few nights ago. It took even more to let him, Lee, and Stitch make love to me. It’s hard for me, Tiek. To give up control when remaining in control is all I’ve ever known how to do.”

He cupped her cheek and pressed his lips to hers. When he released them, he smiled softly.

“All that is going to change now, Shawna. You’re not alone anymore. You don’t need to keep fighting. We’re not the enemy. We’re your men.”

She kissed his lips and then hugged him. “It’s not easy, though. To let go. I’m still afraid.”

He felt terribly for her as he caressed her back and ass and then kissed her neck. “Lucky for you, the rest of us have more patience than Mercury and Tex.”

She pulled back. “Is Tex going to be upset for not being here?”

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Tiek shook his head. “He’ll be thrilled to make love to you, just like I am right now.”

She smiled. “I want you to.”

“I need to grab a condom.”

She shook her head. “No need to. I’m on the pill. Mercury didn’t give me the chance to tell him.” She shrugged her shoulders and Tiek smiled.

“A first for me then, huh, darling.”

“Yep.”

He reached down and maneuvered his cock to her cunt as he kissed her lips.

“It’s only going to get better from here on out. I promise to always be here for you.” He held her gaze as she held on to his shoulders while he pressed into her channel. Slowly, inch by inch, her tight little cunt sucked him in as he kissed her breathless and they made love in the shower.

* * * *

Shawna met Tiek thrust for thrust. He was just as big as the others, yet her body accommodated his girth and took him as deeply as she could handle. As he stroked her pussy, he explored her mouth and she got to run her hands along his taut, hard muscles she had observed and admired from afar. Each man was exquisite, and Tiek had an air of charm about him. She could imagine him in Hawaii, on the beach,

sporting his tan.

She moaned as he thrust deeper and lowered his body to penetrate her more fully. He suckled along her neck and then her breast.

“Oh, Tiek, that feels so good. You feel amazing.”

He pulled back and thrust back in harder, faster. She held on to his shoulders, and when she looked into his eyes, she could see him straining to hold back. Her body erupted at the sight of his masculinity and sexual appetite. The vein by the side of his eye was pulsating, his lips firm and tight.

“Fuck, baby, you’re too damn tight, I can’t take it. I’m coming.”

“Harder, Tiek. I need more.” She cheered him on, and her own orgasm hit her just as Tiek’s hit him.

They were panting for air and then kissing one another before ending it all with a hug. She squeezed him best she could knowing that in his arms she was definitely safer, and would surely sleep well tonight.

* * * *

Tex arrived just as the others were eating dinner. He spotted Stitch leaning into Shawna and kissing her neck. She was smiling, and he wondered what was going on.

“Hey, you made it. Long day, huh?” Lee asked, standing up to grab Tex a beer.

He nodded his head as he placed his white Stetson down on the side table and walked over to the sink. He washed his hands, and when he turned to look at everyone, they all seemed happy. He walked to Shawna and she pulled her bottom lip between her

teeth.

“How’s my girl?” he asked. Her cheeks turned a nice shade of red as he reached out, cupped her cheek and neck, and drew her closer for a kiss. When she caressed his arm and shoulder, he felt aroused and excited. She wasn’t pulling away. He smiled at her. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too,” she replied. He took the seat next to her that Lee vacated and he added food to his plate.

“So, what’s new around here?” he asked. No one said a word and Mercury locked gazes with him.

He lowered his fork. “Is everything okay?”

Shawna covered his arm with her hand. “Everything is fine, Tex. Almost perfect.”

“Almost? How so?” he asked, picking up his fork again and taking a bite of chicken.

“We had a little situation here at the house today. Shawna needed a bit of reprimanding,” Lee teased and they all chuckled. Shawna lowered her eyes and shook her head.

“Cool it, Lee,” she whispered.

“What happened?” Tex asked.

“Let’s just say that Shawna earned herself a spanking,” Mercury stated.

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Tex dropped his fork, swallowed his food, and stared at Mercury and then looked at Shawna.

“Shawna?”

She locked gazes with him. “I waited all evening for you to come home,” she told him.

He reached out and caressed her hair then noticed the red marks against her neck. A closer look and he knew they were love bites. Had Shawna finally let her guard down and let them make love to her?

“Baby, care to explain where these came from?”

She reached up and caressed her own neck. She held his gaze, looked him over, and licked her lips.

“I can tell you for sure they didn’t come from you.”

He felt the fire in his chest. His cock hardened against his dress pants and he leaned back and played it cool. Picking up his fork, he took a bite of food as the others chuckled.

“Well then, seems you and I have some things to discuss after dinner, huh, Shawna?”

“You think so?”

He put his fork down. His desire to make love to her as his brothers obviously did today consumed his every thought. He pushed away from the table, leaned down, and lifted Shawna up into his arms. She straddled his waist and he held her gaze.

“I want you, too. Will you let me make love to you?”

“It’s what I’ve been waiting all night for.” She hugged his neck as he carried her out of the room while his team, his brothers, cheered him on. The feel of her lips against his neck sent goose bumps along his skin. He climbed the steps quickly, getting to his room fast.

Setting her down on her feet, he stepped back and pulled her dress up over her head.

“Damn, baby, I’ve waited far too long for this night. Far too long.” He wrapped his arms around her and began kissing her everywhere he could. The feel of Shawna’s hands divesting him of his clothing fed his hunger. In no time at all they were both naked and he was lifting her up and placing her onto his bed.

“Protection?”

“Don’t need any.” He smiled wide as he absorbed the sight of her.

He had one knee and leg on the bed between her thighs. He reached down and stroked a finger along each breast, absorbing her sexy body.

“You are gorgeous, baby. This body is amazing,” he said. She reached for his wrist and held it as he maneuvered along her body.

“Open for me,” he told her.

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“Oh God,” she whispered and he smiled.

* * * *

Shawna never felt so empowered and brazen. From the time Tex walked into the kitchen dressed in his US Marshal attire, dress shirt, dress pants, badge, and Stetson, she lost her ability to be suave and nonchalant. She felt spunky and wild with desire, and nothing was holding back her words.

Now, lying here and staring at this gorgeous man before her, she knew she was done. She would never be able to be with any man other than her five soldiers ever again.

“Come on now, sugar, you show me what’s mine,” he said, caressing her thighs wider. She felt the cool air collide against her wet folds, and she lifted her pelvis.

“Now isn’t that the prettiest sight? I think I need a taste.” He lowered down to his shoulders, pulling her to the edge of the bed so he had full access to her pussy and her anus. He stroked a finger over her pussy lips and labia. “You like that, baby?” he asked, and she nodded her head.

He pressed the thick, hard digit up into her cunt slowly and then pulled it out. “You are nice and wet. Did all my brothers get to fuck this pussy?”

She shook her head.

“No?” he asked, sounding disappointed. But then his eyes looked darker and he had a wild expression on his face.

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“How about this ass?” he asked, pressing a finger to her anus and pushing right in. It was as if her body knew and accepted how she would and could be loved by five men.

He caressed a finger over her cunt with his other hand and then brought the wet digit up to her lips.

“Did one of them fuck this pretty little mouth, too?”

“Yes,” she whispered and he pressed his finger to her mouth. She of course sucked it in, the scent of her own arousal penetrating her body and arousing her. She moaned and he grunted.

“Fuck, you are filled with surprises. I can’t take it, baby. You’re too fucking hot.”

He pulled his finger from her mouth and aligned his cock with her pussy. In one deep stroke he entered her and began a series of thrusts as she held on to him.

He was thick and solid muscle. He crushed her to the bed and she loved every second of it. Every hard, deep stroke of his cock as he rocked the bed.

He grabbed her face and held her tight. “You’re amazing.” He kissed her deeply.

She felt so aroused and ready for another orgasm. He positioned her just on the edge of the bed where he could stroke deeply, penetrating her to her womb as he played with her ass. She felt the digit push through the tight rings, and she screamed his name as she exploded against him. Tex began to stroke faster, deeper, making the bed

rock and her body quake and moan.

“Oh God, Tex. You’re so big. It feels so tight.”

“You’re mine now, baby. You’re part of all of us.” He thrust two more times and ejaculated into her womb.

He gripped her damp cheeks and kissed her again. Trailing kisses along her neck and to her breasts, he rolled her to his side and hugged her tight.

Caressing her damp hair from her cheeks, he held her gaze. “So tell me, what did you do to earn a spanking from Mercury?”

She chuckled and then hugged Tex tightly. “I’ll tell you later.” She cuddled in his arms, feeling safe and content, a sensation she thought she would never feel.

* * * *

Tex heard the scream and then he felt the hands hitting him before pushing him away. Shawna tumbled from the bed, and just as he got his bearings, the hallway light turned on. Mercury was standing there.

“What the hell is going on?” he asked. Shawna covered her mouth and was trying to catch her breath.

“Shawna, are you okay?” Tex asked, crawling over the side of the bed as Mercury walked deeper into the room.

She glanced at him and then Mercury. “I’m fine. I’m sorry I woke you both up.” She pulled the pillow in front of her naked body. Tex ran his hands through his hair. Her scream, the way she fought him wasn’t so easily dismissed.

“Were you having a bad dream?” he asked her.

“Shawna?” Mercury said.

She looked at him and then back to Tex. She got up off the rug. “I’m fine. I must have fallen off the bed.”

“You hit me. You were striking me with your hands and fists before you leaped from the bed,” Tex told her, kneeling over her as she lay back down.

“I’m fine. I didn’t mean to do that to you. I’m sorry.” She caressed her palm against his arm and shoulder. Tex looked at Mercury, who now joined them on the bed.

Tex leaned back and Mercury placed his hand over Shawna’s waist as he leaned over her.

“You didn’t take the sleeping pills?”

“What sleeping pills?”

Shawna didn’t answer.

“What sleeping pills?” he asked her.

“I don’t want them. I don’t need them. Just leave it alone,” she whispered, teeth clenched.

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“No. You do need them. Didn’t you learn anything from your punishment?” he asked. She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth. Her eyes filled with tears.

“You spanked her because she wouldn’t take sleeping pills?” Tex asked.

“I spanked her because she defied a direct order. She refused to do the right thing to take care of herself, and she’s been sleeping in the closet in her room out of fear since her first night here.”

“What? Shawna, why? You could have come to any of us and we would have stayed with you.”

“Please, Tex, I don’t need the pills and I don’t need coddling.”

Mercury swallowed hard. “It’s not coddling. It’s care and loving. Why won’t you take the pills?”

She rolled to her side, turning her back toward him as she hugged the pillow.

Tex looked at Mercury and could see his concern. Mercury caressed his hand along her thigh to her rear and Shawna quickly glanced at Mercury.

“Are you going to spank me again?” she asked. He continued to rub along her thigh and ass.

“Only if you lie to me, to us. Why won’t you take the pills?”

She looked at Tex, the tear fell from her eye. “Because if I can’t make myself wake up then he’ll succeed in hurting me.”

What she said sunk in quickly.

“Aw, Shawna, damn, baby, you should have told me.” Mercury leaned down and kissed her lips. He kissed away her tears and Tex felt his chest tighten. The poor woman kept suffering and really did have trust issues still, despite sharing her body with them.

“I should really go get those pills and make you take one,” Mercury said.

“No, please, Merc, please don’t make me.”

“I think tomorrow we should call Spocko. He could help you get through this,” Mercury suggested.

“No. I don’t need that. I’ll be just fine,” she countered, being stubborn.

“What should we do then? How can we help you to sleep through the night and not have any nightmares?”

She looked at him and then at Tex. “Both of you stay with me.” She lowered her eyes.

He cupped her chin.

“How will that help?” he asked.

“If I’m in the middle, between the both of you, then he can’t get to me.”

Tex felt the anger consume his body. The fucker who hurt her must have really messed with her head, and perhaps even her body. He maneuvered down to lie in front of her and pulled the pillow from her grip.

“No barriers, just you, me, and Mercury.” Tex leaned forward to kiss her. That kiss grew deeper, and soon Mercury was cupping her breast as he pressed against her from behind.

“How do you feel when one of us is inside of you?” Mercury asked as he kissed along her neck and slid his hand down her thigh and over to her cunt.

“Complete, and safe.”

“Good,” Tex said, pulling her up. She straddled his waist as Mercury rose from the bed. Tex scooted down to the edge and Shawna lifted up, immediately taking his cock up into her pussy. She closed her eyes and moaned.

“We’re going to make love to you together, and then we’re gonna hold you in our arms and make sure that fucker can never hurt you again.”

She leaned down and kissed his lips.

“Tell me where you want my cock, baby,” Mercury said.

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Tex watched as Shawna leaned forward, reached back, and spread her ass cheeks.

“Everywhere,” she whispered.

Tex thrust up and Mercury began to lick her ass and anus, readying it for his cock. She moaned and thrust, the feel of her pussy leaking cream encouraging Mercury’s penetration. Slowly, he pushed into her ass. Tex knew immediately when Mercury breached her ass. The tightness, the full feeling hit all three of them at once, making them all moan.

Tex wasn’t the only one to get so lost inside of Shawna, and the way her body gripped them tight. They thrust into her together, stroking, panting, sucking her skin wherever they could reach with their tongues. Then they heard Shawna moan, and felt her shaking between them. Tex felt her lips against his chest, his neck, and it was all too much. Both Tex and Mercury followed, holding their cocks deep within her as they came, calling her name, waiting for the wild sensations to pass.

He locked gazes with Mercury over Shawna’s shoulder. He had never seen his gunnery sergeant, his commander and friend, so intense and in tune to another human being. They were all going to keep Shawna safe and happy. They finally found their destiny, the woman of their dreams.

* * * *

Tex heard someone walking down the hallway. He opened his eyes, instantly feeling Shawna wedged up against his chest. Her mouth was on his neck and one of her arms was over his waist. Mercury was pressed up behind her, his hand over her breast.

He looked up toward the doorway and saw Lee standing there, holding a cup of coffee.

“Are you taking today off?” he asked with a sly smile.

Tex turned to look at the clock and cursed. “Fuck, I’m going to be late.” He slowly dislodged himself from Shawna. She moaned then reached out to him. Mercury pulled her into his arms and covered her with his body like a shield of armor.

Tex shook his head.

“I should have known he was wide awake.”

Mercury kept a straight face and Shawna cuddled into his warmth, appearing so feminine and petite compared to Mercury.

“Something go down last night?” Lee asked as Tex walked with him out of the bedroom.

“Yeah, she had a nightmare or something. Apparently she’s been having them and has been sleeping in the closet in her room.”

“What? Shit, is that how the argument between her and Mercury started?”

“I believe so. Damn, Lee, she was so fucking scared. She was hitting me and punching me and then she slid off the bed to the floor.”

Lee followed Tex toward the bathroom. He closed the door and Lee waited while Tex did his business. “Maybe she needs some sleeping pills?”

Tex pushed the door open while brushing his teeth. He rinsed his mouth and looked at

Lee. “She did have them, but hasn’t been taking them. She’s been suffering all this time.”

“Shit, maybe we need to call Spocko and have him come by today. She was planning on going to the hospital later anyway.”

“Better check with Mercury. That’s what got the argument started early yesterday morning.”

“Ah, so did you find out why she hadn’t wanted to take the pills, or did you two just have your wicked way with her?” Lee teased.

“We talked about Spocko and she declined. Said she didn’t take the sleeping pills because...Well, she said when her attacker strikes then she might not wake up to stop him from continuing to hurt her.”

“Fuck.” Lee ran his fingers through his hair.

“Needless to say, she will not be sleeping alone anymore. We’ll work out a schedule.”

“We may not have to. She ran to the room when Mercury chased her down to deliver that spanking.”

Tex stopped what he was doing and widened his eyes. “Really?” Tex was shocked. They had an extra room in the house. It was the largest when they built it. As the team talked about finding a woman to love and share, they started to make more concrete plans in case they met her. That room, with a custom-made bed wide enough to fit all five of them plus their woman in the center, was the room she ran to. Coincidence, or fate?

“Well, what do we do about the nightmares and about Spock?” Lee asked.

“Let Mercury decide what to do. I’m certain he’ll have a long talk with Shawna this morning. I’d better get going. I have to sneak in there now to grab my clothes.”

“Yeah, and you might want your gun and holster. We locked it up in the front safe last night when you left with Shawna in the middle of dinner.”

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Lee smiled and Tex chuckled.

“No wonder I’m so damn hungry.”

“Don’t worry, it won’t be the last time you choose making love over food. Her body is fucking fantastic.”

Tex smiled wide and headed back to his room. He hoped he could resist jumping back in bed with her.

As he tiptoed inside, he saw her sound asleep against Mercury. Tex grabbed his clothes and stared at her a moment. He was worried about her last night, and he would continue to worry about her as long as she felt fearful. There had to be a way to help her. Maybe Mercury would get her to come around.

Chapter 13

“I don’t need to see anyone. Look at the last few nights. As long as two of you are snuggled against me, I’m fine.” She held Lee’s hand while Tiek leaned against the porch railing.

“Well, he’ll be here any minute, so can you just give it a try for us?” Stitch asked.

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever.” She attempted to pull away but Lee pulled her back and against his chest.

“Watch it,” he scolded as he caressed a hand against her ass and squeezed.

She in return gave his chest a light slap. Tiek and Stitch chuckled.

“I’ll go check on lunch,” Tiek stated.

“I’ll come, too, I need to go online and check out a few things,” Stitch said, and both men gave Shawna a kiss before they headed inside.

Shawna leaned back in the chair and let the sunlight hit her face.

“It’s beautiful out here,” she whispered.

“It sure is. You look perfect sitting there, Shawna,” Lee whispered.

She turned to look at him and smiled. His heart soared. She had come a long way in a matter of weeks. He hoped that Keith pulled through. If he didn’t make it, it would surely set her back. He held her hand as he sat next to her and they looked out at the open land.

The sound of laughter and footsteps alerted them to their guest’s arrival. Lee hoped that Shawna received Spocko well. He had been a good friend for years and helped out a lot of men and women in the community. A retired Marine himself, the man knew hard core, and how to live as a survivor.

* * * *

Shawna felt her heart racing. She didn’t want to talk to anyone, especially not some shrink. Who was this guy anyway, some local guru? The men didn’t give her much information, but he sounded like some needle-nose, four-eyed wimp who sat behind a desk and told people things they should already know, like how to handle what life dealt out. This was absurd.

She looked toward the doorway. Mercury was there first and then the man in question, Spocko, was behind him. Her eyes widened in shock and they chuckled, obviously the man was used to shocking his new patients. He was very attractive. Almost as big as Mercury, not as tall or built as Tiek, and he had a soft, gentle smile and big blue eyes.

“Shawna, I’m Spocko. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

She shook his hand. “I can’t say the same about you,” she said with attitude and gave a look toward Mercury. He raised one eyebrow with his arms crossed in front of his chest and for some reason her ass cheeks ached. She pulled her bottom lip in and waited to see what happened next.

* * * *

They were all gathered around the kitchen table after enjoying lunch. She realized that Mercury had known Spocko the longest, and that they had gone through basic training together.

She avoided his questions when he directed any toward her, and even now, she stayed away from the table and cleaned up from lunch. As she washed a few glasses in the sink, she thought about why Mercury and the others felt she needed to meet this guy and talk to him. She closed her eyes and thought about last night, and how safe and secure she felt wedged between Mercury and Tex. They were better than any medication or sleep aids.

Maybe this was the way the guys were trying to tell her that one of them couldn’t always hold her in their arms while she slept. Maybe this was how the whole ménage thing worked? She wasn’t certain but the idea of sleeping alone again brought on a surge of anxiety. Could she do that? She didn’t want to. She felt the tears reach her eyes. She was becoming too dependent on them. She was losing her ability to handle

things alone.

This was what she was afraid of. Cuadrone's words to her at night, the way he caressed her hair while she fought against exhaustion and pain all came rushing back to her. There were moments when she was so exhausted she wondered if Cuadrone had touched her. She hoped that she would have awoken from the strange sensations but she wasn't positive. That alone gave her nightmares and anxiety. She tried to bring her mind back to the present, she tried pulling from Mercury's voice as he spoke to Stitch. But then she saw Cuadrone, and practically felt his touch. She couldn't sleep alone anymore. She needed Tex, Mercury, Lee, Stitch, and Tiek.

When she felt the hands on her waist, she dropped the glass, shattering it in the sink.

"I didn't mean to sneak up on you, Shawna. Are you okay?" Lee asked as he caressed her arms and looked her over.

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She was shaking. “I’m fine. Just clumsy.”

“I said your name twice.”

“I was daydreaming. What’s going on?” she asked, avoiding looking toward the table and Mercury, especially that Spocko guy.

“I was going to show Spocko the gardens. He hasn’t been here since last spring.”

“Okay. I’ll just make some coffee.”

?? She went to turn the other way, but Lee stopped her. He took her hand and brought it to his lips. He kissed the top.

Holding her gaze, she knew he wanted her to come along.

“Come with us. It’s beautiful outside.”

She was hit with a mix of emotions. She felt angry, confused, scared, and yet flashes of other thoughts went through her mind as she walked outside with Lee and Spocko. She didn’t want to think about anything that happened. Since getting out of the compound, her main focus was Keith, and of course her attraction to Lee, Mercury, Stitch, Tex, and Tiek. Her heart soared with a love for them already. That frightened her, too. She was in love with five men. A woman like her who swore to lock her heart away forever.

The sun was gorgeous and warm against her skin. Lee talked to Spocko about the

new trees they planted this spring and how they were building a special area, fenced off from the rest of the flower garden.

“What are you putting in there?” Spocko asked as he leaned against a fence and inhaled the fresh clean air.

“A vegetable garden. Different than the one Tiek started last year. That wasn’t big enough.”

Spocko chuckled. “That was a great garden. I loved the tomatoes and the cucumbers he dropped off.”

“Yeah, he kind of has the magic touch with that,” Lee said.

Shawna listened to the conversation, happy to learn something else about Tiek and Lee, and of course their home. She was cautious as she evaluated Spocko. He seemed sincere. He really was a very attractive man, and maybe she was being too hard. But her heart, her gut was so well trained in being on guard and protecting her, she stepped farther away from him and even Lee. She walked toward the small sitting area. It was gorgeous there, and decorated with wood furniture and cushions in a semicircle around what appeared to be a large fire pit. She could imagine sitting by it at night listening to the sounds of peacefulness. That was what their ranch made her feel. At peace.

She ran her hand along the custom bar made of a combination of wood and stone.

“You like this setup?” Lee asked her, drawing her attention back toward him and Spocko. Spocko took a seat on one of the cushioned chairs. She looked at Lee.

“I do. It’s beautiful. I’ve never seen anything like it before.” She admired their ability to decorate their home both inside and outside. It was obvious that they had money

and an ability to buy whatever they wanted, or needed, in life. She was envious of that.

“Shawna, did you know that Lee, Tiek, Stitch, Tex, and Mercury built all of this themselves?” Spocko asked.

She turned to look at him, surprised by his words. She glanced at Lee, who ran a hand along the wall of stone.

“Really? This is impressive, Lee. It must have taken you a long time.” She sat down on one of the chairs where Spocko was.

“It did take us a long time, but every stone, every ounce of sweat we poured into this house, this patio and garden, helped us to heal.”

“To heal?” she asked, feeling her chest tighten.

Lee turned to her and smiled softly. “We had all finally retired from the service after more than fifteen years. It was one of our last missions that did us all in. We didn’t think we’d make it out alive.” He turned away a moment as if remembering the mission. Her belly tightened. He turned back toward them and smiled.

“But, we did. Thanks to Keith and freaking Tiek. That crazy bastard came barreling into a sea of fire and bullets flying, like a goddamn superhero.” He chuckled.

Then he walked over and took a seat next to Shawna. “Your brother helped save his team that day. He wanted to catch Montoya so badly. When he got away, your brother vowed revenge. But the rest of us were just so damn lucky to get out alive. We figured the feds, the government would continue to try and catch him. It wasn’t our problem anymore. Our mission had been a success.”

“Keith wanted revenge on Montoya, the man who was helping to create that missile?” she asked. Her heart began to race. She didn’t want to think about the compound, about being abducted, held hostage, and assaulted.

“I think that’s what got him involved with the undercover job. That and of course Chavez’s pull to set Keith up. What a fucking mess. Keith must have known that Chavez found out about you.” Lee ran his fingers through his hair.

She was silent a few seconds, remembering that day Keith came to her.

“I knew something was wrong the moment Keith showed up. He looked tired, on edge, you know. He warned me that men might come.” She stopped talking, bit her lips, and looked away from them.

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“You must have been scared then, and worried about your brother?” Spocko asked her. She didn’t look at him, or at Lee.

She lowered her eyes to her hands. “Keith would never place me in danger on purpose.” She felt her throat clog up. She was getting emotional, letting her guard down, and thinking about those men who grabbed her.

“Of course he wouldn’t. That’s why he came to see you and warn you,” Lee told her.

“Weeks passed before anything happened. Before that night after work,” she began to say.

“Is that when Chavez’s men grabbed you? On your way home from work?” Spocko asked.

She didn’t want to speak or the tears would flow or maybe she would sound scared and shaky. She couldn’t show weakness.

Don’t show any weakness.

“Shawna?” Spocko whispered. She swung her head to look at him.

“Don’t. Don’t sit here and try to force me to do something I don’t want to do.”

“That’s not what we’re trying to do to you. We’re simply talking. Just relaxing out here, by a beautiful sitting area that Lee and his brothers all built, all to get over their own bad memories and experiences from their service,” Spocko said. She looked at

Lee and he stared at her straight-faced.

“We were a mess, Shawna. We were always on edge, always ready to attack.”

“I’m not attacking anyone.” She stood up.

Lee grabbed her hand. “Baby, if you talk about it, about what happened, it could help you heal and to sleep at night. Believe me, I know what it’s like to have nightmares, to suffer from PTSD. It’s a process.”

She pulled away from him. “I don’t need your help. I don’t need to relive it all. I just need to focus on Keith. Keith is most important.” She crossed her arms in front of her chest. She felt her body shaking. She didn’t want to go on.

“Of course Keith is important. I’m certain he’ll pull through, and the two of you can talk about things and make some changes in your lives.”

She glanced at Spock. “That’s the plan. Nothing else matters,” she snapped at him.

“That’s not true. Your feelings matter. The fear you had, the fear you still have that’s stopping you from moving on, is just as important as Keith’s recovery,” Spock said.

“Listen, there’s no need to go over it all. No need to remember the fear and the pain I felt from the moment those three men attacked me, grabbed me off the street, and knocked me out. I failed. It’s what led to the rest of it all.” She shook her head and looked out toward the grass. She wanted to disappear. She wanted to walk away but her feet felt as if they were planted in the ground.

“You didn’t fail. What makes you say that, Shawna?” Lee asked her. If Spock had asked her, she would tell him to go to hell. But it was Lee. Dark-blond hair, his hazel eyes, and superb martial-artist body aroused her and made her feel safe. He had

protected her from the time he burst through the door in the compound until now. She clung to him, had a need to keep him close to her for protection. He was why she didn't run right now.

"Shawna?" Spock said her name.

"I failed because Keith warned me to be careful. He left me a backpack, filled with money, a passport, and things I would need to escape and stay undetected."

"That was a lot of pressure to put on you. To ask you to change your life for something you knew no details about," Lee said.

She mumbled under her breath. "You think I'm weak? You think if those men hadn't knocked me out after I broke one of their noses and took out the knee cap of another that I wouldn't be capable of going into hiding? You don't know me, Lee. You don't know what Keith and I went through, what my life was like until that night."

"So tell me," Lee challenged her. She took a deep breath, feeling the anger at the memories invade her body.

"What do you want to know, Lee? About my fucked-up childhood? About being abused by my parents and hiding out in a cubbyhole to stay unharmed? Or maybe you want to know how capable I can be when pushed to the limit?" She raised her voice.

"Calm down, Shawna, we're just talking," Lee said.

"No, you calm down. You stop trying to force the issue. Stop trying to make me heal or confess all I've done wrong. I know I fucked up. I know I shouldn't have let them grab me off the street. I should have followed my gut and took off before they could grab me. I could have fought harder."

“It was out of your control. These men were professionals. Three against one? Come on, Shawna,” Lee stated.

“I should have made them kill me. I should have fought them and ran faster, and made them kill me so I never would have wound up in Mexico.”

“Baby, you fought as hard as you could.”

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“No, I didn’t. I didn’t fight when I was dragged crossing the border. I didn’t fight when Cuadrone touched me, tortured me while I sat there tied to the chair.” She turned away and closed her eyes. “He played with my emotions. He whispered things to me when I was too exhausted to block his words or the touch of his hands. He made it seem like I would never get out alive, or be the same person again.”

“Is he who you see at night, while you’re sleeping? This Cuadrone?” Spocko asked.

She closed her eyes and sat down on the seat. “I can feel him. It’s so real. His fingers trailing down my arms, over my breasts, across my thighs. I feel it, I can smell him, the cigars, the sweat, the food odor on his uniform. I never hated anyone so much in my life. Even my parents who hurt me physically and emotionally, I never wished death upon them. But him, his touch, his ability to hurt me in ways no other human being

had done before brought me to the breaking point.”

“To the breaking point?” Spocko asked.

She looked at him. “I stared into his eyes. I felt the anger. The hatred consumed me beyond control and even though I pulled that trigger and took his life, he still has power over me. Power I’m just not capable of destroying.” She stood up and started walking away.

“Shawna, wait, don’t go,” Lee said.

“Leave me alone. Just please, leave me alone. That’s what I’m used to. That’s all I’ve

ever known.”

* * * *

“Goddamn it, Spocko. Is this the way it’s supposed to go? Now she’s angry with me, with all of us.”

“Lee, from that conversation you got more information than you realize about what’s hurting her and holding her back. She’s always been alone. Alone as a child handling abuse even though she had Keith, he did leave her for the military. She’s lived her life afraid to open up her heart and trust anyone. Keith gave you the power, the ability to instantly gain Shawna’s trust the moment he gave you that password. Tiek told me about how things went down over there at the compound. She was abducted and beaten and then had to kill the man who taunted her and placed fear in her, all so that she wouldn’t die. She was held hostage for six days, and she may never share what these men did to her while she was there. She also watched her brother get shot trying to save her, and now he lies in a hospital bed and no one knows if he’ll make it. That’s a lot to handle.”

“Then there’s us. I can’t speak for the others, although I’m certain they’ll agree, but I’ve fallen in love with her.”

Spocko chuckled.

“Yeah, kind of had that feeling since Mercury called me weeks ago. She’s strong, and she’s special. That should be obvious by how mellow Mercury acts when she’s around. No one would know that man was the hardest, meanest gunnery sergeant in the Corps.”

Lee chuckled. He looked to where Shawna walked off to. “I want to help her. How can I help her to realize that she’s not alone?”

“By being there for her, and talking to her, building that trust she already seems to have with you.”

Lee raised his eyebrows. “Trust me? How can you think that when she just stormed off angry at me for pushing her to talk?”

Spocko smiled. “If she didn’t care about you and trust you, then she wouldn’t have you to lash out at. You have to remember, it was you and Tiek she first saw. You and Tiek who gave the password, who brought her and Keith to safety under fire. She cares about you, but she’s fighting herself and what she’s conditioned her life to be. Lonely, and with no one to count on but her.”

Lee shook his head and then smirked at Spocko. “You have a natural knack for this, you know that?”

“I do recall one soldier throwing a right hook my way for calling out his obsession with not feeling vulnerable.”

They both stood up. Lee laughed and placed his arm over Spocko’s shoulder. “You move fast for a six-foot-three old man.”

“Old man? Look who’s talking.”

They headed in the direction Shawna left, back toward the house.

Lee said good-bye and thanked Spocko for coming, and then Lee and Stitch went looking for Shawna.

* * * *

Shawna didn’t know where she was going, just that she needed to let off some steam.

She nearly lost it in front of Lee and Spock. To show such vulnerability was a death sentence. She needed to gain control of the nightmares and the feelings of fear toward a ghost. Cuadrone was dead.

She circled around the house and followed the pathway that led to the back patio and pool. There were big oval lounge couches that could fit three people at least on them, with rattan awnings to block out the sun. They looked so inviting, so she walked closer, slipped off her sandals, and sat on one. The sun felt good on her body, so she lifted her dress a little higher to expose her legs to the sun. So many times when she worked and went to school on days when the sun was warm and inviting, she wished she could ditch it all and just lay out and relax. She never bothered imagining herself on a beach somewhere. That was just never a possibility. Not with bills to pay and a degree to get. She released a sigh, closing her eyes and leaning back. She was really tired. Crying and getting emotional wasn't worth it when there were things to get done. It was easier to not feel at all, than to have these emotions.

She thought about the conversation with Lee and Spock. So they had some tough times when they returned from serving. Did they mean that building everything around the house helped to ease their fears, their PTSD? She couldn't imagine men as big, strong, and superior as Mercury, Tiek, Stitch, Tex, or Lee needing someone like Spock to help them. But at least they had him.

She thought about Keith, and then came thoughts about Mexico. It was a vicious cycle. And even though the men claimed to want to care for her and make her their woman, there was still the deeply embedded fear in her heart causing her to not let go. She wasn't sure how long she sat there, but she was so tired, and this place, this lounge chair so relaxing.

"I can take you, play with you, anytime I want to," Cuadrone whispered. She felt his finger caress down her arm, over her breast, then to her chin. She was shivering, so scared that he would do more. Each night he'd come to her, start off talking nicely,

running his fingers through her hair, but the last two nights he went further.

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She felt the heaviness of his body, as he pressed between her legs. She couldn't push away from him, her hands were tied up and behind her head on some sort of chain in the wall. He looked at her, licked his lips, and began to caress her legs from ankles to thighs.

“Don't. Please don't hurt me,” she begged of him. He paused then reached further, under her shorts.

“When this is done, if he doesn't want you, then I'll take you. You will serve me well.”

The feel of his hands pushing higher, all the way to her groin nauseated her. His nails, dirty and sharp, scratched against her feminine skin. He was too close to where no man had gone before. Her virginity was hers to give to someone special, not to have taken from her, or ripped from her brutally, violently. His smell, cologne, cigars, sweat, and food, made her want to vomit. The shaking was fierce. When his fingers touched her mound, she screamed, kicked, and carried on.

* * * *

Lee and Stitch found Shawna lying on a lounge chair in the pool area. Her dress was pushed up her thighs and she was moaning, crying in her sleep.

“Damn it!” Lee exclaimed, running to her. The moment he and Stitch touched her, tried to calm her down, she began fighting them, then snapped out of it, gasping for air.

“You’re okay,” Lee told her. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and squeezed him hard.

“I’m not okay. I’ll never be okay. Make it stop, Lee, please make it stop.”

Lee looked at Stitch, who had a scowl on his face. He reached out and caressed Shawna’s back.

She climbed up Lee’s body, wrapped her legs around his waist, and held him tight.

“I’ve got you, baby. He can’t hurt you anymore,” Lee said and swallowed hard.

Shawna was shaking in his arms as he lifted her up and carried her into the house.

They made it to the living room where he sat down with her still straddling his hips. He caressed her hair from her cheeks and looked into her red, watery eyes.

“You need to talk about what happened. You need to let us in so we can all help you.”

She shook her head and tried to pull away, but he grabbed her hips and held her tight.

“No, Shawna. You need to face the fact that we all care about you and you’re not alone anymore. Why do you keep pushing us away? Why are you holding back and fighting our help?”

She stared at him, an expression filled with emotions.

Stitch caressed her arm.

She glanced at him and then at Lee. “I don’t know how to. I can’t let go, I can’t take

the chance.” She sounded so defeated. It killed him inside to see her like this. It broke his heart.

Stitch caressed her cheek so she would look at him. “Honey, you need to take the chance on us. We won’t hurt you, not ever. In fact, we’d do anything to keep you safe and happy. Don’t you feel safe and happy with us?”

She nodded her head as tears rolled down her cheeks. She covered her chest, above where her heart was. “But it hurts here.”

Lee reached up and cupped her breast as he placed his palm over her chest where her heart was. She covered his hand and entwined their fingers.

“I’ve conditioned myself to not let anyone inside. I’m so used to being alone. It’s where my strength is but it’s not enough to fight this. I thought I would be fine. If I just concentrated on Keith, I would be fine. But I’m not. I need you. I need all of you because in your arms is where I’m safest.”

He gently squeezed her breast as Stitch caressed her hair. “We’re here, baby.”

She shook her head. “I can’t let my guard down. I can’t open up and let you in.”

“Why?” Stitch asked just as Mercury and Tiek walked into the room and then Tex arrived.

“What if you hurt me, too?”

“Baby, we’re not going to hurt you. We want to love you. In fact, I know I already love you, and want you by my side forever,” Lee confessed.

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She covered her mouth with her hand and tried to restrain the cry.

“We’re all taking chances, darling. The five of us have trusted only each other for most of our lives. We’d give our lives for one another, and we’d give our lives for you,” Mercury told her. Tiek and Tex moved around her now, too. She sat there and looked at them.

“You’re all stronger than I am, and more capable of handling things like this,” she whispered, holding Mercury’s gaze. He reached out and touched her chin, holding it between his fingers as he used his thumb to stroke her lower lip.

“You’re a survivor, honey, just like we are. It takes time, and we all dealt with our experiences in different ways, but we also worked it out with one another. That’s how close we are, and that’s what you’re part of now. Our team, our family, you’re the love we’ve searched for, thought we could never find, but now we hold here together.” He placed his hand over his heart and Lee smiled.

“Now, darling, you’d better take what our commander says seriously, ’cause none of us have ever seen him so gentle, or suave with words of emotions and love,” Lee said.

They all chuckled.

“Cool it, Lee,” Mercury said. Shawna looked up at Mercury then at Lee.

“Do you think Spockko will come back?”

Lee swallowed hard. “Baby, he’ll come back every day if it will help you like he helped us.”

She nodded her head and took a deep breath then released it. “I can try, Lee. That’s all I can do right now.”

“That’s a start.”

“We’re right here for you, Shawna,” Tiek added, pressing a hand on her shoulder. Then Tex did the same, covering her other shoulder. Stitch caressed his palm under her dress and against her thigh, Lee held her by her hips as she straddled him, and Mercury leaned down and whispered against her lips before he kissed her.

“You’re ours, and we’re never gonna fail you or let you go.”

* * * *

Shawna was overwhelmed with emotion. She practically felt the walls she had built up over the years finally seemed to weaken. The deeper Mercury stroked her mouth with his tongue the needier she became for more of them. She felt their hands upon her. Her five American soldiers with their masculine hands of steel touched her so gently and passionately. She felt Stitch’s hand move up her thigh to her panties. Tiek and Tex started lifting her dress up over her head. She raised her arms up and pulled back from Mercury’s kisses to discard her dress.

With a hand to her breast, Tiek stroked her nipple then leaned down and licked across it. On her left Stitch caressed her skin from belly to breast. “Oh God, that feels so good,” she told them. Then Stitch licked her breast as Tiek lifted her up so she was kneeling over Lee. She locked gazes with him and reached for his pants to undo the button and zipper.

Lee reached up and caressed her hair from her cheeks as the others continued to arouse her body.

“You’re so beautiful,” Lee whispered.

“I want to taste you,” she told him and his eyes darkened as the feel of fingers stroking over her cunt and her anus started at once.

She closed her eyes and pushed back when suddenly her panties were torn from her body.

A quick glance over her shoulder and she saw Mercury and Tex smirking.

“You don’t need them,” Mercury stated.

“But I liked them.” She found herself challenging Mercury, which wasn’t the best idea.

He reached out and stroked a finger along her lips. “Maybe I’ll never buy you a pair again so your pussy is always accessible to us.” He pressed his thumb between her lips. She lifted up and opened her mouth to suck his digit as if it were his cock.

“Damn, Shawna,” Tex whispered.

“Down here, sweetness.” She looked toward Lee and there he was, cock in his hand, stroking, waiting for her to take a taste. Mercury began to pull his thumb from her mouth, but she applied a little pressure with her teeth and lips, showing him she wanted him to keep it there. She reached down and stroked Lee’s cock between her hands. All the while Tex massaged her ass cheeks, and Stitch and Tiek played with her breasts. She was on fire.

“You said you wanted to taste Lee, now do it,” Mercury ordered firmly. She let his finger slide from her mouth. He trailed it down her chin, over her throat, between her breasts, and to her cunt. He stroked her pussy lips and she moaned until she felt Lee give her hips a little tug.

Shawna looked down at him and slowly, as seductively as possible, slid down Lee’s legs, widening her thighs until her ass and pussy stuck out and she could reach Lee’s cock with her mouth.

Mercury gently gripped her hair, pulling the abundant locks to one side of her shoulder as she sucked more of Lee into her mouth. Lower and lower, she took him deeper until she almost gagged from his thickness. She felt chills from the way Mercury so dominantly held her hair and head as he directed her strokes.

“Easy, darling. I think Lee likes you sucking his cock,” Mercury said.

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“Oh yeah. Fucking incredible.” Lee closed his eyes and thrust gently upward.

“Tex, you got the lube, get that sexy ass ready for cock.” Mercury continued to give orders. Her belly tightened and spasmed. She felt her pussy leak from his commanding tone.

“Yes, sir,” Tex said. She felt the cool liquid hit her anus, then Tex’s thick, hard fingers pressed past the tight bud and into her anus. Her muscles burned from the sensation, but the lube helped to ease the ache and soon she was thrusting back with every upward and downward motion of her mouth on Lee.

“Fuck, she really wants a cock in her ass. How about your pussy, too, baby? You need a cock in there, too?” Stitch asked.

She felt his fingers spread her pussy lips then push slowly up into her. “Oh!” She moaned aloud, releasing Lee’s cock. The men seemed to lose their patience.

“Fuck,” Lee blurted out. He grabbed her hips, Stitch pulled his fingers from her cunt and Lee aligned his cock with her pussy and pressed upward.

“Oh, Lee. Oh God.” She fell forward, feeling full between Lee’s cock in her pussy and Tex’s thick hard fingers thrusting into her ass. She moved her hips and felt the pinch of fingers as Stitch and Tiek pinched and played with her nipples. Mercury still held her hair, and then he cleared his throat, grabbing her attention. She turned to look at him just as Lee thrust upward. Mercury had his pants off and his cock in his hand. “Come on, baby, I need to feel your mouth on me, too.” He got into a better position, half leaning on the couch, so she could move to the right and lower to suck

on his cock. She licked the tip and then felt the smack to her ass.

“Hey,” she responded.

“Hey yourself, you’re going too slow.” Tiek moved to the side to give Mercury better room. She lowered her mouth over his thick muscle and Mercury pushed deeper into her mouth. With his hand gripping her hair, Lee thrusting upward as he held her hips in place, and then Stitch sucking on her breasts, she didn’t think she could handle anything else. But then Tex pulled his fingers from her ass and just as she was about to complain she felt the tip of his cock there to replace them.

“Fuck, her mouth is torture,” Mercury said.

“I know, and her pussy is damn tight,” Lee said.

“Her ass is, too. Here I come, baby,” Tex said in that deep, sexual voice that immediately lubricated her pussy.

“Oh yeah!” Stitch exclaimed, pinching and pulling on her nipple.

Tex slowly pushed into her ass. He grunted and gripped her ass cheeks, spreading them and making her anus and pussy weep with desire. She focused on sucking strokes over Mercury’s cock when suddenly he grabbed her hair and ejaculated into her mouth. She suckled hard, making him moan and curse then pull from her mouth and pant.

“What’s wrong? Did I do something wrong?”

Lee grabbed her neck and shoulder, pulling her down to his mouth. “You’re perfect.”

He kissed her deeply and then both men pounded into her one after the other. She felt

Tex harden and grow thicker and she gasped for air as he came inside of her. Lee followed next and squeezed her to him, making her stick her ass out further behind her. The smack came from the left and she knew it was Stitch. His hands caressed the globes of her ass and then she felt the lube pressing into her anus.

“Oh God, I can’t take it. My legs are shaking.”

“Two more lovers to go, baby. Then it’s a nice hot bath for you and a lot of cuddling,” Tiek said as Lee smiled.

“I’m going to slide out and let Tiek in here okay?”

She nodded her head and smiled until Stitch thrust into her ass as he pulled her back against his chest. Lee spread her thighs wide as he maneuvered off the couch causing cool air to collide against her hot pussy. She moaned and closed her eyes until Tiek jumped into position. He was huge, and so damn sexy naked, covered with those Polynesian tattoos. She gripped his shoulders and then Tiek carefully aligned his cock with her pussy.

“I need you, baby, so bad. I need to be inside of you.”

“Yes,” she replied and slowly sank down onto Tiek’s cock.

She reached up to caress her fingers through Tiek’s hair while Stitch grabbed her hips and thrust into her ass. They began a series of strokes countering one another and she was lost in the sensations. She opened her eyes and saw Mercury, Lee, and Tex standing there watching her.

“That ass is mine next,” Tex announced as he stroked his cock in his hand, making it grow bigger and thicker. She moaned, a gush of cream lubricated her cunt, and both Tiek and Stitch exploded inside of her. Shawna moaned, feeling the tightness in her

belly and beyond. She was so overly aroused, but she had yet to totally reach her peak.

“You don’t come until I’m inside you, baby. You got it?” Mercury commanded. She nodded as she gasped for air, trying to catch her breath. Her entire body was so sensitive. She felt so damn tight like she could snap in two.

Stitch moved out of the way and Tiek pulled from her body as Shawna moaned.

Then in a flash Mercury was behind her, and he lifted her up placed her over the arm of the sofa, pulled her hips back, and thrust into her in one deep stroke. Shawna screamed as her body began to release tiny spasms as she moaned and rocked her hips. In and out Mercury thrust into her pussy from behind. Over and over again he stroked her relentlessly and then he pressed a finger over her clit, rubbing her cream around, eliciting a pleasure so deep she thought she would lose focus. “Oh God, Merc, please, more, more.”

He lay over her, the weight of his body, the vision of his sexy muscles and tattoos consumed her mind and turned her on. He thrust and thrust, rubbed her clit over and over again and she knew she was about to come.

The feel of his thick, hard thighs pressing over her smaller ones, enticed something submissive yet primal in her.

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He lightly nibbled her earlobe. “Come for me, woman. Now,” he ordered in that damn tone of his, and she did just that. It was like her body knew and was already conditioned to be responsive and trusting to her commander, the one in charge. That she accepted him in such a way made her realize that she finally did feel like part of their team, part of her five Marines. She rocked and thrust back as wave upon wave of pleasure burst the flood gates open. She was nothing but a pile of exhausted mush as hands and lips kissed and caressed her everywhere. Their soft words of affection consumed her heart as tears filled her eyes and pleasure, peacefulness like nothing ever before, consumed her. Mercury slowly pulled from her body. No, stay inside of me. I love how close we are and how protected I feel.

Tiek lifted her up into his arms. “I love you, baby.”

She smiled and reached up to caress his cheek, and kept her head against his shoulder. “I love you, too.”

Chapter 14

“I have men in place. I am just waiting for the opportunity to grab her without making too much of a scene,” Emoy told Chavez over the phone.

“Very good. I don’t want this to get screwed up. You grab her and do whatever you need to do to get her here. The jet can be ready in twenty minutes from the time you call it in. That’s your window.”

“I know. But I’m going to ask you one last time. Are you sure you want her? That you want to have a woman like her?”

“Of course. We’ve been over this before. Why are you asking me again?”

Emoy was silent. He wasn’t sure how to put this new information. “Well, my men have brought forward some interesting news. The five soldiers from Keith’s team, well, she’s involved with all of them. Romantically that is.”

Chavez didn’t respond at first and Emoy could hear him breathing.

“Then use that to get her to cooperate. Tell her that her brother and her five lovers will die if she doesn’t go willingly with you. Tell her you have men in place to take them out, sniper style. Then she’ll know you can be successful because her lovers won’t have a clue. When she gets here, I’ll work on cleansing her. We both will, because this means she can take two men at once and we won’t need to coddle her. Call me when you have her in your possession and are touching ground in Brazil.”

* * * *

Shawna was thrilled. Keith seemed to be making some progress and the doctors were going to remove his breathing tube. She stood to the side as Mercury kept his hands on her shoulders.

“He’s going to make it. He’s a fighter, and there’s nothing that can keep that stubborn man down,” Mercury whispered to her.

When the doctor and nurses were done, Shawna approached the bed and smiled. She caressed her brother’s cheek, the absence of the breathing tube making her believe that Keith was almost out of the woods. “I love you, Keith. Keep fighting. We’re all here.”

She watched Keith for hours, letting every movement or sound he made increase her positive attitude that he would pull through. The men came and went, taking turns

staying with her, and talking to Keith just in case he could hear them. When Lee whispered that he was in love with Shawna, she smiled and felt her heart soar with the same love for him. They were slowly breaking down her wall of fear and loving her every day and night. They had yet to take her all together as they did a week ago. She felt as if Mercury thought it was too much for her to handle because of her petite size. As he sat beside her now, just the two of them, she took his hand into hers and played with his long, thick fingers. One leg was tucked under her bottom, and looking over at him, she felt so loved and complete.

“Do you think I’m fragile or weak, physically?” she whispered.

Mercury moved his other arm over her shoulder and leaned close to her, his face near her shoulder. She held his gaze, those piercing blue eyes sending her body in arousal turmoil. She wanted to jump onto his lap and feel his hands, his mouth everywhere on her body. But she also felt that twinge of superiority from Mercury that made her remember that he was in charge. He was the gunnery sergeant to his men, the leader of their team, their family, and she accepted him as the alpha male he was.

She continued to hold his hand in hers and stroke the digits.

“Shawna, I love you, baby. My job is to protect you, keep you safe and unharmed.”

“What does that have to do with what happened last week? About the love we all made together?”

He smiled then leaned closer and kissed her temple. “Last week was beautiful just like our first time making love, and every time we’ve made love. But we are five very big men. You’ve never been in a relationship like this. Hell, you never even had sex before and suddenly five men want you. We just want to protect you and keep this body unharmed and well loved.”

She folded his fingers, lifted his knuckles to her lips, and kissed them. “I can be well loved perfectly by my five men together.”

She locked gazes with his smoldering blue ones as her lips touched his knuckles.

Mercury’s expression firmed. “When you walked from the bed so slowly, I thought you were trying to be quiet, but then I heard the bath running, listened at the door as you moaned getting into the tub, and it concerned me.”

She reached up, releasing his hand to cup his cheek as she tilted closer to his lips.

“You’re right, you are five very large men in all aspects. Of course I would be sore or feeling tender in places only you and the guys have gone before, but it’s how I want you, each of you. I want to feel you all around me, inside me, imprinting your souls into mine so we’re one. In your arms is where I’m safest and feel most secure. I know I may still seem emotionally fragile from my past and from Mexico, but you’re all helping me through this. Don’t coddle me, just love me in every way you all can, separately, together, whatever, just know I need you all to stay close.”

He leaned forward and kissed her softly.

“I’ll always do what’s best for you, Shawna, to protect you,” he said firmly, holding her cheeks.

Her heart soared with adoration for this man, he was always on guard, in charge, and ready to take control and prevail. She admired him.

“

I know. And I will always protect each of you, too.” She smiled when he raised one eyebrow at her in challenge.

They heard a moan, and when they looked toward the bed, they could see Keith moving around as if he were going to wake up.

Shawna hurried toward the bed and Mercury went to grab the nurse.

She held his hand and stared at Keith. “You’re okay, Keith. I’m right here.”

The nurse, Mercury, and the doctor walked into the room just as Keith blinked open his eyes. He cringed in pain, but Shawna’s eyes welled up with tears. Then a small, low sound of relief escaped from her lips as Mercury pressed against her from behind, his presence, his strength an added bonus to the relief she felt.

“He’s going to be okay, Shawna. He’s going to make it,” Mercury whispered and she smiled, knowing life was only going to get better and nothing would break this family apart ever again. Not if she had anything to say about it.

* * * *

Tex was the first one to see Shawna as Mercury opened the front door. She looked tired, but happy, and the moment her eyes locked onto his she hurried to him.

He lifted her up into the air and she straddled his waist. With her arms wrapped

around his shoulders she kissed him. “You heard?” she asked, pulling back.

He ran his hands along her ass and thighs. “I heard, baby. I’m thrilled, and can’t wait to see Keith. This is what we’ve been waiting for.”

Her big blue eyes sparkled and her smile lit up his heart.

“I love you, baby. I love you so much.”

“And I love you.” She kissed him again before hugging him and laying her head on his shoulder.

Tex smiled and winked at Mercury as Stitch, Lee, and Tiek entered the room. Tex remained holding her as Stitch, Lee, then Tiek each kissed her and said they loved her.

“You both must be starving from staying at the hospital so late,” Stitch asked.

“We are,” Mercury replied and then headed to wash up. Tex carried Shawna to the kitchen and set her down by the sink. She washed her hands and then Tex wrapped his arm around her waist and smiled.

“What did the doctors say?” he asked, as Lee and Stitch heated up some leftover chicken from dinner.

“Well, he said Keith’s vitals look good and strong. That it seems he’s taken to the surgery and healing well. They’re going to run some tests the next few days. I’m feeling really good about this. He’ll make it. I’m going to make sure he makes it, by talking to him, whispering in his ear, and getting his ass moving to full recovery.”

Tex chuckled. “There’s not a doubt in my mind you will accomplish that, Shawna.”

She turned in his arms and hugged him again.

He caressed her back and held her close. But he couldn't wait until this was all over and they could stay safe and secure here on the ranch and they could move on with their lives together, and maybe start working on that family they all wanted.

* * * *

Stitch sat on the couch in the living room with Shawna. She had her head on his lap and was wrapped in a cream-colored blanket. He was stroking his fingers through her hair. He stared at her, absorbing her beauty from the chocolate locks that cascaded down her back to her shapely figure. His cock hardened beneath her and she stirred.

The floor creaked, and Stitch saw Tex standing there sipping a glass of ice tea. He gave a small smile and Stitch smiled back. He glanced around the room at the others. Mercury had his feet up on the coffee table, his hand over Shawna's body above the blanket. Tiek was watching the television, something about a chain store potentially coming to the area and the hype over it, and Lee was watching Stitch caress Shawna's hair.

It was all so normal, and like nothing he ever could have wished for or even thought to wish for. Stitch spent the majority of his adulthood in the Marine Corps. He didn't have a family, lost both parents to a car accident when he was sixteen. He raised himself with help from the Corps and that was where he met these four men around him. Tiek, with his deep voice and Polynesian background, had been his first good friend to make in the Corps. They served together and went through boot camp together, where they met Lee.

Later, after a mission where a few special teams were called into assist, Stitch, Lee, and Tiek got to work with Mercury and Tex. Mercury had gained his own leadership position and could pull together a team of men he wanted. They were chosen. That

was when Lee introduced them all to Keith, the youngest of the team, but the kid fit right in. From there, they had one another's backs and never parted. Each of them had their own personal stories of life struggles, no families, just good friends from the Corps, and their bond formed. They were more than a team. They were brothers. Now, here they were, living together, sharing Shawna, a woman who came out of nowhere, but snagged their attention immediately. When Stitch thought about Keith's notes to Lee in case he died, he wondered if Keith intended, or perhaps hoped that the rest of the team would fall in love with his sister. Keith was like that. Quiet, but he always had a backup plan.

If it were true, and Keith did plan this, and hope that his team would love and cherish his sister, then Stitch owed him everything. More than what he could ever pay him back. Shawna was a blessing.

So he leaned back and looked around at everyone, absorbed the feelings of contentedness, and knew that life didn't get any better than this. As he thought the words, he felt a slight twinge in his gut. It was enough to lessen the power of the happiness he was feeling momentarily. He couldn't help but to squeeze her tight.

"Stitch? You okay?" Lee asked him.

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He looked at him and the others looked at Stitch, too.

“I was just thinking how perfect this is, and how normal it is with the five of us here together.” He looked down at Shawna to be sure he didn’t wake her.

“It is perfect. I never thought it would feel like this,” Lee said and then walked over, knelt down on the floor next to the couch, and caressed Shawna’s cheek.

“I know, but as I sat here thinking that, I suddenly had a bad feeling in my gut. I didn’t like it,” Stitch admitted to his brothers.

“That’s understandable. Especially after all that’s happened. But we’re here now. We’re not leaving her,” Mercury stated firmly.

“He’s right. We’ll probably have that overprotective feeling for quite some time. It will work out fine,” Tiek added.

Stitch caressed Shawna’s hair. “I hope so. I love her so much, and I don’t want her to feel any more sadness and pain, only love.”

“That’s why we’re here. We’ll do it. We’ll love her and protect her always,” Tex said, and Stitch smiled softly, but that feeling was still tingling deep in his gut.

God, please watch over her. Without Shawna, life just wouldn’t be the same.

Chapter 15

Shawna had been so tired last night after coming home from the hospital. She ate, showered, and then lay on the couch with Stitch and Tiek. They were so loving and caring. Even as Stitch carried her to bed, they knew she was exhausted and as much as she wanted to make love, she was spent. Her energy level all gone. Now, here she lay between Stitch and Tiek, and all she could think about was loving them. She slowly ran her hand up and down Stitch's chest. She continued to caress him, and for some reason he didn't respond. Then she felt the hand on her back move over her hip bone and pull her back against Tiek's body. His cock pressed between her ass and thighs and she moaned softly.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to the corner of Stitch's lips, but he played possum.

Feeling aroused and aggressive, she slowly pressed kisses against his skin from lips to chin, to neck, to chest, to torso, and then opened to take his thick, hard cock into her mouth. Tiek made room for her but joined her in foreplay by stroking a finger in her pussy from behind her.

She moaned against Stitch's cock that came to life, growing thicker with every stroke of her tongue. She felt aroused and needy and then Stitch caressed his fingers through her hair. It was exactly like he did last night. It was how he put her to sleep, and made her relax. But now, as he caressed her hair and gripped the locks, she was anything but tired or ready for sleep, instead she wanted more. She wanted them inside of her, bringing her pleasure.

The feel of Tiek's large hand holding her hip while his thick, hard digits pressed in and out of her pussy made her belly tighten, and tiny spasms of cream released from her cunt.

In a flash the sheets and comforter were tossed to the side, her hips were lifted, and Tiek took position behind her.

She used her hands to spread Stitch's thighs. He now lay on his back watching her suck his cock. She looked at him, holding his gaze, feeling the blaze of fire she saw in his eyes reciprocate through her veins.

Up and down she moved on him while Tiek spread her thighs and continued to stroke her pussy. His fingers dug deeper, felt like they curled up inside of her and scratched against a spot that made her orgasm and gasp. Greedily she reached for Stitch's cock. She dropped and licked him again, taking him hungrily into her mouth and stroking as her own arousal grew.

"You're so fucking gorgeous, baby. I love watching you suck Stitch's cock. You're a naughty little thing aren't you?" Tiek's hands roamed over her ass cheeks, squeezing, arousing her cunt, and she thrust back at his fingers and hands in response.

Smack.

Tiek smacked her ass just as the sound of Tex's voice filled the room.

"I thought I heard something interesting going on in here." He climbed onto the bed, his cock in hand, and watched her sucking Stitch.

Behind her Tiek stroked into her pussy, making her moan and close her eyes at his invasion. Over and over again he thrust into her pussy, and then Tex caressed a finger down the crack of her ass to her anus. Her heart raced. She wanted this. Sh

e needed this. She needed them to fuck her, claim her in every hole. What she first thought was wild weeks ago, she now craved whenever her men were around her.

Stitch was moaning as he grabbed her cheeks and held her gaze. She could see the veins by his eyes bulging as if he were trying to stop himself from losing control.

“We need you. I need inside you now.” Tiek pulled out of her pussy, leaned down, and licked her cunt and anus. Over and over again he stroked her back there until she felt so wet and aroused she was digging her nails into Stitch’s chest.

“She’s ready,” Tex stated firmly.

Tex lifted her as if she weighed nothing at all and she straddled Stitch. They were lowered on the bed, his legs off of the edge, and Tex was stroking her hair from her cheeks.

“I need to feel that mouth of yours, baby. Right now.”

She leaned over as Stitch pressed upward to thrust his cock up into her cunt. She opened her mouth, ready to taste Tex as she moaned from the invasion. She felt the fingers in her anus as Tex gripped her hair and stroked into her mouth. Where she was once in control of the lovemaking moments ago, she now relinquished control to her three men who began a sequence of thrusts. Just as she got used to Stitch’s thrusts and Tex’s strokes, Tiek pulled his fingers from her ass and replaced them with his cock. She felt the sting of pressure as he stretched her anal muscles, but she relaxed just as they taught her to do. A moment later moans of relief went through the room as Tiek thrust his cock all the way into her ass. She was now full in all three holes, moving, rocking, swaying to their thrusts.

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That out-of-control feeling consumed her and she came, hard, quickly and they all rocked into her. She licked and swallowed Tex's cum, the salty, tangy taste now something she craved and enjoyed. She knew it gave each of her men pleasure to let them come in her mouth and have her swallow.

Stitch came next, thrusting upward simultaneously with Tiek, and she felt her body erupt again. This time she moaned aloud. Tiek gripped her hips and shoved into her ass three more times before he exploded inside of her. She fell to Stitch's chest. He wrapped his arms around her as Tiek pulled slowly from her anus. His hands smoothed over her tender skin, caressing, squeezing then stroking a finger over her crack and anus. She moaned and he chuckled. Tex came over with a warm washcloth and took care of her as Stitch rolled her to her back, pulling from her body and making her moan again.

She looked at them as they cared for her. "I love you guys."

Tex leaned down and kissed her inner thigh where he'd just caressed the washcloth. "I love you, too."

He moved out of the way and Tiek moved up beside her, cupping one breast as Stitch cupped the other. "We love you, too," Tiek said. Both men leaned lower to suckle her breast.

She rolled to the side to cuddle against Stitch and closed her eyes. She drifted off to sleep, hearing mumbled words from the men and felt the covers being pulled over her body. A cocoon of warmth that nothing could ever penetrate instantly surrounded her. She smiled and prayed that she would be with her men forever.

* * * *

“What are we going to do when Keith heals up? Shawna is going to want him to stay here with us,” Lee said to Mercury.

“Well, that was the plan anyway. We’ve been working on the small cottage on the property. He’ll be fine there,” Mercury replied as they headed upstairs.

“No, I mean with Shawna and us being involved. Do you think he’ll feel uncomfortable?”

“It’s a bit late, don’t you think? Besides, maybe in a way Keith wanted us to meet Shawna, and he thought we would be perfect for her. Considering he always shied away from the ménage thing and also stayed on working when the rest of us retired.”

“Yeah, well, he is younger.”

“Let’s not talk age.” Lee chuckled.

“Feeling like an old man next to our young, sexy woman?”

Mercury gave him a look.

“Hey, Mercury, she loves you, man. She hasn’t even asked any of our ages. If you think about it, we were in the Corps, out of college, and doing crazy shit while she was in elementary school.”

“Great. Just what I want to fucking imagine.” They walked into the bedroom chuckling, meeting Tex on the way out. His hair was wet.

“Morning. Where’s our girl?” Mercury asked.

“She just stepped into the shower. Tiek is in the other room showering and Stitch just finished up, too.”

Stitch walked out, pulling a shirt over his wet hair. He smiled wide. “You two have great timing. She’s in the shower.”

“How is she doing? Did she get enough rest?” Mercury asked.

“As much as she wanted,” Stitch replied.

They chuckled.

“She was exhausted. Slept through the night then woke up ready to play,” Stitch added.

“Ready to play, huh?” Lee asked as he pulled off his shirt and tossed it onto the chair.

“Oh yeah. The four of us had some quality time together,” Tex said and then left the room.

“Well, Mercury, I’m going to see if my girl needs some help.” Lee smiled and headed into the bathroom, pulling off the rest of his clothes along the way.

Stitch looked at Mercury and Mercury sat down on the edge of the bed. “What’s going on? Is everything all right?” Stitch asked him.

“Just thinking about Keith. Lee wondered what we were going to do when he’s up and about and ready to leave the hospital. Will Keith mind being here with all of us?”

“That’s what the cottage is for. We can help him during recovery, but he won’t feel awkward about our relationship with his baby sister.”

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“Don’t say baby sister like that. Please.”

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“It makes me feel like I’m robbing the fucking cradle.”

“Shit, Mercury, we’re all robbing the fucking cradle with her, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t right and meant to be. We need her and she needs us. The chemistry, the love and attraction are there for all five of us. I don’t give a shit about a freaking number. I look at the emotions, the energy and power of the love we share. Shit this fucking perfect doesn’t happen too often at all. You don’t need to be a brain surgeon to figure that out.”

Mercury laughed. “You got a point, Stitch. We all love her and she loves us. What could go wrong?”

“It’s scary isn’t it?”

“What?”

“This whole thing. Finding Shawna, feeling this strongly about her, and taking a chance. Fear used to feed my ego, my decisions, and my life. I lived for fear. Now, I sit here and look at Shawna, her beautiful body, her perfect personality, and both her inner and outer beauty, and it scares the hell out of me to think I could lose her, or she could leave us.”

“I’m glad you said that because I’m feeling on edge. I’ve been uptight, antsy even for

the last day or so.”

“It’s normal. We’ll get through this.”

Mercury smiled as Stitch left the room. He walked toward the bedroom window and out over the land. This was their home now, and they would raise a family here, be safe and secure here, forever.

He heard Lee calling his name and then Shawna laughing. Smiling, Mercury pulled off his shirt and tossed it onto the bed. Making love to Shawna would ease all his worries and hopefully even that antsy feeling trying to rain on his parade.

* * * *

Lee had Shawna pinned against the shower wall, his cock deep inside her. She was caressing his shoulders and neck, and he was thrusting slowly into her.

“I love how big and muscular you all are, and the tattoos.”

“Is that what turns you on the most about us?” he asked her as he nibbled her neck, making more cream gush from her pussy. He could feel her pussy ease a little, letting his cock stroke smoothly in and out of her cunt.

“Well, I love lots of things about each of you, but especially your maturity, experience, and knowledge. You’re all so smart and charismatic. That comes with age and experience.”

??

“So you don’t mind that we’re a lot older than you?”

She smiled. “Mind? Why would I? Not with the power of the attraction we all feel. In your arms, in any of your arms, I feel safe and secure. It’s a sign of the perfection we share.”

“Mercury. Come in here,” he called out.

She scrunched up her eyebrows. “What’s wrong?”

Lee leaned forward and kissed her lips. He pulled back and smiled as he gave her hips a squeeze. “You’re prefect. Nothing’s wrong. It’s just that Mercury was feeling a bit down before and old.”

“No,” she replied as Mercury walked into the bathroom. He was discarding his clothes, and she stared at all the deep ridges of muscles and tattoos that emerged. She licked her lips.

“Hey, baby,” Mercury whispered.

She leaned forward, wrapped her arms around Mercury’s neck, and kissed him deeply. When she pulled back, she smiled. “I missed you. I feel extra safe with my older, sexy Marine here to guard me.”

His eyes smoldered with hunger. Lee knew the feeling and then as Mercury cupped Shawna’s breasts, he gave Lee a dirty look.

“You have such a big mouth. Isn’t anything we discuss in private sacred to you?”

“Sure it is. Want me to name a few times we discussed things privately that I haven’t said aloud?”

“No. Just leave it alone.”

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Shawna cupped his cheeks and smiled. “I love you, and I love that you’re older, in charge, and so sexy and dominant. It makes me horny.”

Mercury’s eyes widened and Lee’s cock seemed to instantly grow an inch or so.

“Is that right, sweetness?” Mercury asked, holding her gaze. She nodded her head. “Then I guess you need another cock in you, don’t ya, love?”

“Definitely.”

He kissed her mouth.

Lee turned around and leaned against the back of the large shower. He caressed his finger down her spine and ass until he found the puckered hole.

“Oh, Lee, please. I need you to move faster,” she told him.

“You’re in charge, baby. Come on and ride me,” he said, and she did. She began to thrust up and down on his shaft, so he leaned back against the wall of the shower. Behind her Mercury lowered to one knee and began to play with her ass.

“Oh!” She moaned aloud as water dripped over her mouth, down her chin and breasts. She looked so sexy.

“What is Mercury doing to you?” he asked her.

“He’s licking and fingering my...Oh!” She moaned and then Mercury stood up. She

pushed forward, sending Lee back against the wall and slightly lifting her ass toward Mercury.

“Here we go, baby. Just the three of us,” Mercury said, and a moment later she felt the thick mushroom tip press firmly against her puckered hole. Shawna lifted up and then back down, increasing her speed as Mercury breached her anus. The men moaned, holding themselves inside of her a moment as they caught their breath.

“Sweet Jesus, your ass is tight, baby,” Mercury said. She moaned and thrust backward. In a flash both men were counterthrusting one another’s strokes, and she was holding on for dear life. In and out, up and down, they made love to her in the shower. She called their names, panted and moaned, then screamed her release just as Lee and Mercury found theirs.

“That was amazing,” Lee whispered, kissing her cheeks and shoulder.

“I love you, baby. You are perfect,” Mercury told her as he kissed along her shoulder and neck.

Lee smiled wide and Shawna hugged him tight.

“It doesn’t get any better than this, Mercury, don’t you think?” he asked over her shoulder. Mercury caressed his palms down Shawna’s back and ass cheeks.

“It sure as shit doesn’t. Plus, making love in the shower makes me think of all the other places I want to make love to Shawna.”

“Really? Like where?” she asked.

He caressed up her ass cheeks and squeezed them then kissed her shoulder.

“Like that big pool outside, and on every lounge chair, whether under the glorious, smoldering sun or in the midst of the moonlight. I want you everywhere, all the time.”

She leaned forward and kissed him over Lee’s shoulders. “Maybe we’ll try the pool tomorrow. If you’re lucky,” she teased, easing down out of Lee’s arms.

“Lucky?” they both asked, and she giggled.

“Yep, ’cause I’ve got some fantasies of my own and we may be too busy filling them to have time to fulfill yours.”

Mercury grabbed her around the waist and hauled her up and against his chest. “We’ll make the time, because making love to you is more important and satisfying than anything else in this world.”

They kissed and Shawna hugged them both until the water began to get cool and they were forced to leave the shower.

He could start every day like this. In the arms of his perfect lover and under the safety and security of his team, his family.

* * * *

Lee was holding her hand as they walked back into the hospital room. He was planning to leave for about twenty minutes to go fill up the gas tank before they headed back home in a few hours. She was full from lunch and feeling positive about Keith’s condition. He woke up momentarily and then closed his eyes and fell back to sleep. She hoped he saw her and knew she was safe.

The doctor wanted them to be careful because he was still at risk, even for infection.

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She swallowed hard as she caressed Keith's hand with Lee standing behind her, holding her around the waist. His support, his masculinity brought her such relief and made her feel strong and secure.

"He's going to keep getting better and better. When he wakes up, he's going to be hell to deal with, you know?" Lee whispered against her ear and neck. She loved the scent of his cologne, the feel of his muscular arms keeping her safe.

"I know. But I have the five of you to help me keep him in his place and of course his gunnery sergeant who will lay down the law."

Lee chuckled. "That you do."

He pulled back and held her hands.

"Will you be okay while I leave to get gas in the SUV and call the guys to let them know how Keith is doing?"

"Of course. I would go with you, but I want to be right here in case he wakes up momentarily again."

"Okay." He leaned forward and kissed her.

She smiled.

* * * *

Tex was working at the office when he got a call from Sandman.

“Hey, Sandman, what’s going on?” Tex asked. He glanced at the clock. He would head home a little early today. It was Friday and he and his brothers planned on taking Shawna out to Casper’s for dinner and drinks. They wanted her to meet their friends. He wondered if Sandman was going to be there, too.

“I got some news. Just caught wind of a little chatter from an arrest someone made a few hours ago.”

“On Chavez?”

“Even better, his associate, Emoy Roman. Seems that these Hispanic men were looking for some people to play a little interference with the police. Something about a package being taken and then shipped off, and that these men needed decoys.”

“Okay, I’m not getting it. What does this have to do with Chavez?”

“I’m not a hundred percent sure aside from the fact that these men are part of a gang. That gang has members who are key associates to Emoy. They came in overnight, and the feds got some information on some sort of drug deal or, like I mentioned, a package being taken from one point to another. It could be another missile and the government isn’t taking any chances.”

“Damn. So they have people on top of it?”

“They do. I’ll keep you posted, but perhaps if the feds catch these guys with this package or follow it so they can bust their development facility, then maybe it will lead to Chavez’s location.”

“It very well could. I don’t know why they would talk to some local guys about being

decoys. Aren't they afraid that the locals will rat them out just like this guy did?"

"He saved his own ass. Had a pound of cocaine in his car, and baggies of heroine."

"It sounds like this might be about drugs, not terrorist activity and missiles."

"Well, they're not taking a chance. I'll call you soon with an update."

"Great. Thanks."

Tex hung up the phone and leaned back into his chair. He thought about Shawna and had that feeling in his gut. He called Lee.

"Hey, how's our girl?"

"She's good. I just left her to go fuel up the SUV. I was going to call you. Dragging her away from Keith is going to be like pulling out nails with my fingernails. Since Keith woke up for like half a second, she's afraid to leave his side."

"That's understandable. Are you headed back to the hospital now?"

"Yep. Just finished up. We'll call when we're on our way back to the ranch."

"Okay. I'm leaving soon, too. Bye, oh and give her a kiss for me."

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“My pleasure.” Tex chuckled as he disconnected the call. He worried about her being alone for only a second, then reminded himself that they were in Texas, not Mexico, and that she wasn’t in any danger. But he also wondered what package was being delivered and shipped out. Could the feds catch Chavez’s partner and would it lead to Chavez? Tex sure hoped so. He wanted this to be completely over, and until Chavez was captured or killed, he wasn’t going to let his guard down.

* * * *

Shawna stood up to stretch. She walked toward the window, looking out at the sunny day slowly coming to an end. It was going to be a warm night, and the guys had plans for her to meet their friends. She felt nervous despite the fact that some of those friends were in ménage relationships, too. But she wasn’t outgoing unless it was at work to get tips. This was different. She didn’t want to answer questions about her life, or her experience. She just wanted to be with Tiek, Lee, Stitch, Tex, and Mercury. Maybe she would remain between Mercury and Tiek. They

were the least conversational of the bunch and they would make her feel safe and secure. She smiled just thinking about them. She loved them. Heck, she loved making love with them. They were all so passionate, yet for big men, gentle and compassionate.

She adjusted her knee-length beige skirt and pulled down the soft, pink T-shirt she had worn with it. She had to admit that she was surprised at Mercury’s ability to pick out such nice clothing. Most men seemed to hate shopping, never mind having to dress a woman and find interesting things. But somehow, from panties and bras to lingerie, sleepwear to everyday wear, he was successful in choosing gorgeous things.

By the names on the tags they were high quality and expensive.

She chuckled. Since complimenting Mercury, Lee and Stitch got in on buying her things, and this morning she found red-and-black lace lingerie, with thigh-high stockings, garters, and panties that were missing the crotch. She felt her cheeks warm. Maybe she'd wear it for them one night when they least expected it.

Chuckling, she heard the door to the room open and thought it would be Lee. He should have been back by now.

Her heart raced and she covered her mouth. Standing in front of the closed door was one of the Hispanic men who'd nabbed her off the streets on her way home from work that night.

"What are you doing here?" she asked and then looked toward the bed at Keith. She stepped closer and the man smiled.

"If you want your brother to live, and the Marine who is here with you, then you'd better cooperate." He opened his light jacket and revealed a gun with a silencer.

She shook her head. "Don't hurt him. What do you want?" she asked.

"You. It's time to go. Move now, cooperate, and don't make a scene or the man I have watching Lee will kill him at the gas station."

She knew he was telling the truth. There had to be someone watching Lee.

She glanced at Keith and the Hispanic man raised the gun, pointing it at Keith.

"No. Please don't kill him. Please. I'll go. I'll do whatever you want. Just don't hurt them."

“Then move it.” He reached his hand out, and she glanced over her shoulder at Keith. She prayed that he would be safe.

“They’ll kill them all. He has men watching the others, too.”

“No. Please. Don’t hurt them.”

He held her gaze. “Just know that I can, and that you better cooperate or they’ll all die.” He shot the gun, making her jump. She turned and saw the bullet in the pillow directly next to Keith’s head. A half an inch closer and he would have killed him right there. She was shaking in fear, wondering why this was happening. The man took her hand and walked with her down the empty hallway.

Shawna wondered where all the nurses and people walking around were. All other days the floor was kind of busy. Minutes didn’t pass without a soul walking by. Just as they got to the staircase, she saw the nurse. She was heading inside to check on Keith. Shawna hoped that she saw the bullet hole. Looking up at the cameras on the wall, she wondered if someone were watching. “Help me,” she stated and then felt the smack to the back of her head. She gasped, and the man gripped her neck.

“Not too smart. One call and the boyfriend at the gas station will blow up.”

She couldn’t let that happen. She loved them all too much. She had to cooperate.

Chapter 16

Lee didn’t like the way the sports car with the dark-tinted windows seemed to be following him. He picked up on the sports car as he left the gas station and headed back the block over to the hospital. As Lee pulled into the parking spot, the car stopped on the side of the road. He debated about what to do when the phone rang.

“Lee, tell me that you have Shawna?” Tex asked, sounding frantic.

“No. She’s inside the hospital. I just got back.”

“Fuck!”

“What? What is it?”

“Someone who works for Chavez is in the area. The hospital called the police. There was a bullet hole in Keith’s pillow and Shawna is missing. I was hoping she was with you.”

“Oh fuck. What do I do?”

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“I don’t know. I’m on my way. The police should be arriving.” Just as Tex said that, Lee heard the sirens and saw the police. The sports car quickly headed back onto the main road.

“Tex, I won’t be at the hospital. There was a car I thought was following me. I’m going to follow it now.”

“Be careful, Lee, and call me for backup. Sandman is involved now, too. Shit!” Tex exclaimed.

* * * *

“What the fuck do you mean someone took her? Who was it? Chavez’s men?” Mercury asked Tex over the phone. Stitch and Tiek were standing there looking shocked and angry.

“I’ve got men in the hospital now going over the surveillance tapes. We got a license plate on the vehicle and Lee is following a car that he believes was tailing him. They shot a bullet into Keith’s pillow, Mercury.”

“That’s probably how the bastards got her to go without a fight. What are we going to do? Where should we meet you?” Mercury asked.

“Head this way, toward the hospital, and I’ll call you if anything changes or if we get a lead on her. I should have seen this coming. I should have known that something was up when I had that feeling in my gut,” Tex told him.

“You weren’t the only one who had that feeling. It was more than just us falling in love and feeling vulnerable. It was that instinct that kept us alive when we were in the field facing danger. You do whatever you need to do to find Shawna. We’ll be there soon.”

Mercury explained to Tiek and Stitch about what was going on. Tiek slammed his fist down on the island in the kitchen.

“Fuck. He’ll kill her. She’ll go through hell again, and then the fucker will kill her to get back at Keith, at all of us.”

“Calm down. I’m not going to let that happen. You two grab the gear and the guns,” Mercury told them.

“Why?” Stitch asked.

“Just do it,” Mercury said, and as they left the room, he ran toward his bedroom to grab some things he needed. He called Calico, their ex-commander.

“Calico, Chavez and his men have Shawna. I need your help. I won’t let them destroy the only family I’ve ever had. I need to do something. You have to help me.”

* * * *

Lee wasn’t surprised when the black sports car veered off the highway and onto the exit for the private airport. Of course they were going to join the assholes that took Shawna. But he had to be sure he didn’t just go on some wild-goose chase. He needed proof.

He parked along the perimeter of the building adjacent to where the sports car parked. Two Hispanic men got out of the car, pulled small travel bags from the trunk, and

then locked the car up. Lee texted the license plate to Tex. He carefully made his way around the building, pissed that all he had was a small firearm on his ankle. He pulled it out and carefully moved closer. The moment his eyes locked on the dark sedan, he saw Shawna being pulled from the vehicle and he lost it. He texted his location to Tex, and told him to hurry.

Just as the two men approached the three men with Shawna, he saw Shawna shaking her head and planting her feet into the ground as they pulled her along. A second later she started swinging.

“Fuck.”

Lee pointed the gun and aimed at the tall guy with his revolver out. If he took him out now, that would almost even the odds. He took the shot, the guy went down, everyone turned, and Shawna ran.

Lee bolted away from the wall and headed toward them, running at full speed. A few shots whizzed by his head, and he ducked and rolled then saw the one with the gun shooting. He took another shot, pissed that he didn't carry his Glock.

As he headed toward Shawna, men grabbed her and stopped her from running. Someone turned and shot at him. Shawna saw him and screamed out his name just as another shot went off and hit him. He fell to the ground then quickly got up. He grabbed his arm. A flesh wound. In the distance he could hear the sirens blaring, and he looked up in time to see Shaw

na fighting off the other men. One hit her with something. She faltered and fell to the ground. She looked enraged, and as the guy pointed the gun right at her, Lee yelled out her name just as she kicked the gun from the man's hand. She fell to the ground and grabbed the gun as Lee got himself up despite the pain in his arm and headed toward her. He couldn't use his gun. He was helpless, but the need to get to her was

intense.

She continued to fight the two men. One guy grabbed her by her hair and started pulling her toward the car again. She swung at him and then Lee heard tires squeal. Police cars and unmarked cars pulled onto the scene just as Shawna punched the guy and a gunshot went off. Shawna fell backward, hit the car, and slunk to the ground.

“No! Shawna, oh God, no!” he cried out. He made it to her as the police grabbed the other guys, including the one that shot her. She was bleeding from her shoulder. He placed his hand against her cheek as Tex and Stitch fell to their knees beside them both.

“Oh God, baby, are you okay? Shit, she’s hit, Stitch, and so is Lee,” Tex stated, pulling Lee over to sit beside Shawna.

“I’m fine. It hurts really bad, but I’m fine. I thought they shot you. I was so angry,” she told Lee. He leaned over and kissed her. She cringed and was crying.

“Rest. Let’s apply some pressure to the wound. Tex, you apply some to Lee’s wound.”

“I’m fine. It grazed the skin, I think. I just can’t really move it. Take care of Shawna,” Lee said.

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The ambulance arrived on the scene and Shawna looked white as a ghost.

“She’s going into shock!” Stitch yelled to the paramedics. “Stay still and relax, Shawna. Everything is going to be okay,” he told her.

“Where are Mercury and Tiek?” she asked. Lee could see her eyes beginning to roll. The adrenaline rush was leaving her body. The shock of being shot was beginning to take control.

Lee looked at Tex and Stitch as they looked back toward Shawna.

“Mercury and Tiek are fine. They’re making sure nothing like this will ever happen again,” Tex said.

Lee felt that tightness in his chest, that feeling that the danger wasn’t over, not by a long shot.

* * * *

Tiek and Mercury were side by side as they joined the military police in Brazil, prepared to enter Chavez and Roman’s estate and private facility. The sons of bitches were building missiles in their own backyards. Mercury and Tiek wanted to be sure to put this entire ordeal to rest. On their way to the military base, after being prepped on the mission, they got word that both Shawna and Lee were shot. Lee’s was a flesh wound, but Shawna needed surgery to remove the bullet. Mercury wanted to be there for them, but he knew he vowed to protect his family and put this fear, this monster to rest once and for all. As Calico looked into Emoy Roman, the flight and chatter about

the package being delivered from the US to Brazil, he figured out that Shawna was part of that package, along with some illegal weapons being delivered to people in the US to cover Chavez's tracks. That was how they found out about the terrorist missiles and plans on attacking civilians on US soil. Chavez had gotten a copy of the thumb drive and the one with specific details on how to build the missiles from scratch.

The government was now involved because the Brazilian government informed about them about acts of potential terrorism. They conceded to the need for infiltration by both the US government and the Brazilian government.

Calico pulled some strings to get Tiek and Mercury in on the mission. As they held their positions, Mercury looked at Tiek. "Be smart, we want to make it back to our family."

"You got it, Commander. They're why we're here. Chavez and Roman need to go down, permanently."

As they got the signal to move in, the sounds of gunfire and echoes of smoke bombs surrounded the facility. People were running and scrambling in an attempt to escape.

Mercury heard the words "Chavez and men escaping right side of house," so he and Tiek abruptly turned around in time to see them fleeing.

"Stop!" they yelled out. Chavez turned around and shoved another man in front of him so he wouldn't get hit. Mercury fired, hitting the ground around Chavez. The other man yelled out and then turned to shoot at Mercury and Tiek. Both Mercury and Tiek fired their weapons and watched Roman and Chavez fall to the ground.

More gunfire erupted behind them and they heard the gunfire slow down. Finally there was a call on their ear mics confirming that they had control of the estate.

Mercury looked at Tiek as they stared at the two bodies lying on the ground.

“I would have loved to taken him alive. Both of them. Maybe even give them some of the treatment they gave Keith and Shawna,” Tiek stated.

“It doesn’t matter. They can’t hurt Keith or Shawna anymore. Our family is safe now. That’s exactly what I wanted in coming here.”

Tiek nodded as the chaos continued around them. There were police everywhere and information being yelled out from person to person within earshot. They found completed missiles, and an arsenal of weapons and plans to develop a huge bomb.

“Let’s go home, Merc.”

Mercury chuckled. “I love when Shawna calls me that.”

“I know you do.” Tiek smiled.

“But that doesn’t mean you can do it, too.”

“Sure it does. We’re family now, remember?”

Mercury smiled as they made their way back to the vehicles to wait for the opportunity to head out of there. Their job was done. One last mission, one final challenge to ensure that their woman would be safe forever.

Chapter 17

Shawna placed her hand against Keith’s cheek as he smiled. He was sitting up in the hospital bed. Shawna still had her arm in a sling, and her shoulder wrapped.

“I’m so glad the doctor said he’s going to release you in a few days.”

“Me, too, sis. I have a lot to do. I have to look for a place to live. I need a new civilian job.”

“Hey, you’re staying on the ranch with us,” she stated.

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Mercury smiled then looked at Lee, Tex, Stitch, and Tiek.

“About that, I think it’s best if I’m not living on the same ranch as you six lovebirds. I don’t want to be in the way.”

“Be in the way? Are you kidding me? I couldn’t wait for you to wake up and move out there with us. There’s plenty of room, and you’ll have your own house, a cottage and all.”

“Shawna, come here,” Keith told her. She leaned closer and he pressed his hands against her cheeks and smiled. “This is how I imagined it would be. My team, my brothers would meet you, fall in love with you, and you in return would bring them everything they always wished for. You all deserve happiness and love, and now you have it. I’ll need to find love, too, one day, and living on a ranch with my little sister and her five huge-ass soldier boyfriends is not going to help me in that department. So, no worries. I’ll stay there for a little bit and until I find a place of my own. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Keith.”

* * * *

Shawna sat on the front porch swing with Tiek on one side of her and Mercury on the other side. They’d finally explained to her how they made certain Chavez and his men could never come after her or Keith again. They risked their lives for her, for Keith, Tex, Lee, and Stitch.

“What you did was extremely dangerous. You left the country to go on another military mission to break into an area that had missiles on it with terrorists and bad guys. All while I slept in a hospital and had surgery. Why did you do it? Why couldn’t you just let the other soldiers get them, and go on that mission?” she asked.

Mercury lifted her up and placed her on his lap. She straddled his waist and he stared up into her eyes then at his brothers, his team. He looked back at Shawna.

“I promised that I wasn’t going to ever let that man get his hands on you or hurt my family ever again. We’re a family now, Shawna. You’re all my responsibility to love and to protect, so we can live happily ever after,” he teased her.

She smiled and placed her hands against his cheeks as the tears filled her eyes.

“Well, the five of you are my happily ever after, and nothing else matters. But it was still a dangerous thing to do,” she whispered. Then she ran the palm of her hand down his shirt and over his chest. She lifted up slightly and then lowered onto him. “However, lucky for you, it totally turns me on.”

“Oh really? What exactly turns you on about this?” Tiek asked, caressing his hand up her thigh as Mercury cupped her breast.

“Having my very own older, experienced, muscular, and sexy American soldiers to have my way with whenever I want to.”

They all chuckled.

Mercury lifted her up and ran his hands along her ass cheeks.

“Well, you turn us on, and make us want everything we ever dreamed of having, including a family, and kids of our own.”

She smiled wide and ran her finger along the bridge of his nose.

“Well, as soon as I’m healed up, maybe we should start working on that, huh, gunnery sergeant?” she teased.

“Hell, baby, I’m ready to do what it takes to make that a reality.”

She laughed.

“They say it takes a lot of practice and making love all the time,” Tiek teased.

“There are some really different positions we can try that help seal the deal.” Stitch caressed a finger along her breast.

“Really? Different positions, huh?” she flirted.

“Oh yeah, and different locations are important, too. Inside the house, outside of the house,” Lee teased.

“In the truck,” Tex said.

“On top of the truck,” Mercury added.

She closed her eyes and moaned softly. “Or on the porch swing with the sun beginning to set, and the creaking sound of wood about to break as we make passionate love right here, right now.”

“Woman, you are full of surprises.”

She rose up i

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n her knees and began to unzip Mercury's pants. "Shawna, what are you doing?"

"I'm giving my gunnery sergeant an order. Make love to me here and now or else."

"Or else what?" Tiek asked.

"You don't want to find out." She kissed Mercury and squeezed him tight, loving the safety and security she felt in his arms and being completely surrounded by her men. As Mercury let her have her way with him now, she knew ultimately that he was in charge, and she loved that about him, about all of her men. They would protect her always, and she would protect them, too. But most importantly they would love one another equally and with all their hearts so they never felt abandoned, alone, or empty ever again.

THE END