

~ Nature of the Beast ~

by Cheyne Curry

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Disclaimer: This story should be considered a Xena Conqueror Uber. I felt by making the lead characters familiar ones, the actions of the Uber XC will hopefully prepare the reader for the traumatic events that unfold in the story. No money is being made off this story. No copyright infringement intended. Other than that, the characters and the story are mine.

Description: Caprice Gallagher has been a fan of singer Hannah Brishen for years. One night, she finally gets the attention she has always desired from the sultry, gorgeous woman. Maybe some fantasies should stay just that.

Content Warning: This story depicts a lesbian relationship. If you have no idea what that is, look it up. If it's not your cup of tea, please move on.

*****WARNING: This is a disturbing story about sexual violence. It was not written to titillate. If it helps raise awareness, then I guess there was a reason my muse made me go to the dark side.**

SERIOUSLY...

READ THE WARNING BEFORE YOU GO ANY FURTHER. This story may be too intense for some.

Her sobs echoed down the hallway and throughout the apartment. She hugged her arms tightly across her body as she rocked back and forth on the floor, in hopes that the motion would neutralize the emotional and physical pain. How could this have happened again? Why didn't anyone believe it was really happening to her at all?

Two Months Earlier...

Caprice Gallagher bent over at the waist and continued to blow-dry her hair. She loved the new, shorter length as it took much less time to fuss with after her shower. She scrunched her hand

through the light blonde locks while feeling the heat from the device remove the dampness quickly. Before she had thirteen inches cut off her hair, it took *forever* to dry; this was so much better. Not to mention that all of her friends kept reminding her how hot she looked with this new style.

She straightened up, turned the dryer off and observed her new look in the mirror. She thought she looked older, a little more sophisticated and...yeah, okay, she'd admit to hot. The thought made Caprice grin. Who knew a new hairstyle could make such a difference?

Her cell phone rang out the theme from her favorite television show, which let her know that her best friend, Kelly, was calling. Caprice had just finished putting earrings in and reached over to her bedside table to pick up her phone.

"Hey, Kel. What's going on?" Caprice asked, while she studied her reflection. Satisfied with what she saw, she walked into her living room.

"Just making sure we're still on," the voice on the other end of the line said.

"Absolutely. I wouldn't miss this for anything. You know I love when Hannah Brishen plays at Matrika's." It had been about seven or eight weeks since the last time the singer had performed in town.

"I know. We *all* know. Your crush on her is legendary and Jarita said you had red x-marks on your work calendar counting down the days," Kelly kidded.

Caprice laughed. "Well, come on, she's amazing. That voice of hers just streams right into my soul. And you all think she's gorgeous, too, it's not just me. Not one of you would turn her down if the opportunity ever came up."

"Too true, but you're the only one who keeps hoping it will really happen. It's interesting how when she comes to town, you're conveniently between girlfriends. Not that I would attribute that to anything other than coincidence." There was a smile in Kelly's voice.

"Between girlfriends? That's a joke and you know it. The women I've had, you can count on one hand." Caprice picked up the TV remote and changed the channel to the local news.

"Yeah, it's that hand that concerns me, you kinky wench," Kelly joked.

"Kinky wench? You must have mistaken me for my evil twin. Oh, that's right. I don't have one." Caprice's friendship with Kelly was a comfortable one and they had a lot in common, although Kelly was miles ahead of her when it came to lovers and being sexually adventurous. She often turned to Kelly when she had questions that she was usually too embarrassed to ask anyone else. She often heard the expression "she's like the older sister I never had" but with Kelly, it wasn't a cliché. Caprice felt she could count on Kelly for anything.

"You're too vanilla for your own good, Caprice. Must've been that sweet Goldilocks look you had before. You should find someone to spice up your love life a little. Maybe a groupie fuck with your idol would do you some good."

"Did you say group or groupie?"

"Whatever works for you," Kelly said and chuckled.

"Did you call just to pick on me or was there another purpose?" Caprice smirked.

"Yeah, I'm running late. I got stuck researching some facts for Rich who left early again."

She could hear the rustling of papers in the background and she knew Kelly was discouraged about her co-worker's recent slipshod behavior. "Again? Really? Isn't this like the fourth time in two weeks?"

"Sixth but who's counting?" Kelly's voice held traces of sarcasm.

"Why doesn't somebody higher up get on him and start making him responsible for carrying his own load?"

"No," Kelly said. "I think he wants to be fired so he can collect unemployment for a while and the way his attitude has been lately, most of us are hoping for that, too."

"He should hang onto the job he has. Things are so bad out there, he might not get another one after his unemployment runs out. So how late are you going to be? Because I was almost on my way out the door."

"Half-hour, forty-five minutes, maybe. The rest of the groupies, I mean gang, will be there on time but I didn't want you to think I wasn't going to show up."

"Tease me all you want but the day you'd miss a Hannah Brishen gig would be the day fish would need a bath."

Kelly sighed. "Never said I minded looking at her."

"I'll make sure to bring a bib to catch your drool." Caprice aimed her remote at the television and pressed the power button. The screen went dark. "In fact, I'll bring two because I'm not sharing."

"Damned sex-starved lesbians," Kelly said, "can't take us anywhere."

"Hey, I'm leaving now or I'm never going to get a place to park," Caprice said. She locked her front door behind her and walked toward her car. "I'll look for you within the hour."

"Okay. See you then."

Caprice paid her cover charge and stepped inside Matrika's, a small but popular lesbian nightclub that overlooked the Susquehanna River. The back deck, where the musicians usually performed, was built out over the water and was held up by thick poles anchored deeply into the sediment. During the day, natural sunlight brightened the terrace; at night, solar tiki torches created an intimately lit atmosphere.

The deck was covered with a roll out canvas roof, clear plastic walls and warmed by heat lamps during the winter or inclement weather. When there was no live entertainment, music was provided by a digital jukebox that piped songs throughout the bar. Matrika's seemed to make the most money when they brought in local favorites like Hannah Brishen, a singer from Philadelphia. Hannah was immensely popular with a faithful following in the capital city area and Caprice and her friends weren't ones to pass up the chance to see her whenever they could. If Hannah performed more than one night, they made sure they were there for the duration of her schedule.

Caprice spotted her friends at a table on the deck. She wound her way through the crowded, inner bar and finally made it to the terrace where she joined her group. "Wow. How did you guys get a spot out here? And so close to the band?" Caprice seated herself and immediately looked for a barmaid.

"Damn, girl! I cannot get over how freakin' hot you look now!"

Caprice blushed at the compliment from her friend and co-worker, Jarita Johnson. "Aw, thanks but I think you're a little biased."

"Nuh uh," Jarita shook her head and looked around the table. "Am I wrong, ladies?"

A chorus of enthusiastic 'no's were heard and another woman, Didi, spoke up. "I'm telling you, that hair makes all the difference. If I wasn't with Maggie -" Didi squeezed the hand of the woman next to her "- I'd go after you myself." She then leaned over and kissed Maggie on the cheek.

Maggie smiled and rolled her eyes at Didi, then looked at Caprice. "And if I wasn't with this hound dog here, I'd be looking you up, too."

Caprice laughed and looked genuinely bashful. "Stop or you'll have me glowing so bright they won't need any other lights." She then caught the attention of a server and signaled her over. "Is everybody good on drinks?" Caprice asked.

"I'll have another," Maggie said and pointed to her bottle.

Their server approached the table and smiled at the group, then her eyes locked into Caprice's. "Ready for another round?"

"Hey, Shelly, I didn't know you were working here," Caprice said, pleasantly to the attractive barmaid.

"Started two weeks ago. The tips are amazing on nights like this so drink up!" Shelly urged.

"We're not ready for a round just yet but Maggie will have another Rolling Rock and I'll have the house shiraz," Caprice told her.

Shelly nodded and wrote it down. She looked around the table for confirmation that no one else needed a refill. She settled her gaze back on Caprice and smiled. "Looking good, Caprice." She winked and walked away.

"Thanks, Shelly," Caprice called after her as the women at the table hooted and laughed. "Shush," Caprice told them, good-naturedly.

"Didn't you two go out a few times?" Cynthia asked as she nodded her head toward the departing server. Cynthia was the only member of that group of friends Caprice didn't care for. She found Cynthia to be a negative drain if she wasn't having as good a time as the rest of her friends. She was usually difficult to be around if more attention was paid to other members of the group. Cynthia was quite high maintenance and Caprice didn't think anyone else should be responsible for Cynthia's fun and wished Didi didn't always invite her along. Caprice then silently admonished herself, knowing if Cynthia didn't socialize with them, she'd never go out at all and she felt sorry for that aspect of Cynthia's life.

"We did but other than this club, we have nothing in common. She broke it off but there were no hard feelings." Caprice said.

"Bet she regrets it now," Jarita said. "If there's no interest there, do you mind if I ask her out? I always thought she was a cutie."

"No, be my guest. She's really nice and she adores reality television so you two might get along great."

"Her lips are too big," Cynthia looked in Shelly's direction and said, snidely. "In fact, they're so big she can probably whisper in her own ear."

Oh, God Cynthia, don't start. "Come on, Cynthia, she can't help genetics and, you know, they kind of work for her in an Angelina Jolie sort of way," Caprice said and smiled fondly at the memory of kissing those full, soft lips. There may not have been enough spark between them to become a relationship but the woman could definitely kiss.

"I will kindly ask you to stop talking shit about my future wife," Jarita said, with humor in her voice. She winked at Caprice and then changed the subject.

Thirty minutes later, Kelly joined the group of friends and just as she sat, the lights dimmed on the deck and the band took the stage. There were five musicians who backed up Hannah Brishen's vocals: three guitarists, a keyboard player and a drummer. Interestingly enough, Hannah's back up band were all straight men. Caprice's friends guessed that Hannah probably didn't want the competition for all that female attention she got when she played there.

The chords of the first song were struck and the noise dwindled to near-silence. The low alto of Hannah's honeyed voice echoed out over the river as she started to move toward the band from the back of the bar. The drumbeat thundered out the pulsing beat and the spotlight hit Hannah who now growled out the lyrics with perfect pitch and control.

Caprice, as usual, was mesmerized. She was always rendered weak when she watched Hannah move and heard her sing. She felt like a teenage girl experiencing her first crush. Caprice didn't know what it was about Hannah that electrified her to such a ridiculous point; all she knew was that she constantly fantasized about being with the enigmatic singer and it drove her mad that she was so close, yet, apparently, so far from making that dream a reality.

As many times as Caprice had come to Matrika's to see Hannah perform, she'd never had the guts to approach her to try and get to know her. She just had never felt confident enough not to be rebuffed. There were so many women with whom she would have to compete, she felt it just wasn't worth the effort only to be humiliated in the end.

She watched the tall, sexy singer move in time with the beat of the song and wondered what that rhythmic gorgeous body would feel like, writhing over her in passion.

Oh well. Maybe some fantasies should remain just that.

Hannah finished the last song of her next-to-final set to rousing applause and appreciative vocalizations from the standing-room-only crowd. "Thank you so much," she said, graciously. "We'll be back after a quick break. Don't forget to tip your bartenders and waitresses."

She leaned over and said something to her keyboard player that made him smile and then she strolled to the deck bar, where she was, once again, quickly surrounded by women in lust. The bartender poured Hannah a shot of tequila. She downed it without the aid of salt or lime and clearly reveled in the attention she received from her fans. While she talked and toyed with a few of the women, she scanned the deck and her eyes locked onto a pair of expressive eyes that belonged to a lovely, short-haired blonde. Hannah instantly stopped speaking. Her lips pursed and then widened into a flirtatious smile as she raised her empty shot glass in the direction of the table.

"Oh, God, is she looking at you, Caprice?" Jarita asked. She leaned in toward the middle of the table.

"Either Kelly or me," Caprice said, trying not make her lips move.

Kelly looked over at the bar, then at Caprice. The connection was obvious. She patted Caprice on the hand. "Oh, no, honey, she only has eyes for you."

Caprice slightly nodded in acknowledgement of the raised glass. Hannah Brishen nodded back and turned to have her glass refilled. When her shot glass was full, she returned her attention to the women who surrounded her.

"Well...that was fleeting," Kelly said. She squeezed Caprice's forearm and released it.

"Hey, I'm not knocking it; for five seconds I was the only woman in her world," Caprice said, although the disappointment in her voice was audible. She had felt the vibration of Hannah's look run through her entire body.

"Five seconds is more than most women get, I bet," Maggie said.

"Or five seconds of a little somethin' somethin'," Jarita said, with a smirk.

"How can someone be that fucking hot? She's like a fire that lights itself," Kelly commented to no one in particular.

Didi finally found her voice and looked at Caprice. "Yeah, but did you *see* the look she gave you?"

"You mean like she was starving and Caprice was the blue plate special?" Cynthia asked. "Yeah. You couldn't miss it." Her tone wavered between impressed and jealous.

"I didn't just see it, I felt it," Caprice admitted. "It was like I could feel it in my soul."

"Or at least in your libido," Kelly kidded.

"It's the hair," Jarita said. "We've come to see her every time she's been here in the last two years and we're not even a blip on her radar and suddenly, tonight, she zeroes in right on you. It's got to be the hair."

"That was such an interesting moment," Didi said. "If that had been a scene in a movie, it would have been represented by the sun shining into a prism factory or something."

Caprice blushed at the memory of the look. "It was a very nice moment."

Kelly was about to say something regarding the telling blush that crawled up Caprice's face when Shelly approached the table with a tray full of drinks. "Well, ladies, somebody over here impressed Hannah. She just bought you all a round of drinks."

As Shelly distributed the correct beverage to each woman, she heard a chorus of "It was Caprice." After the tray was empty, Shelly winked at Caprice and said, "No surprise there."

Jarita watched Shelly walk back to the bar then looked at Caprice. "Girlfriend, you need to stop bewitching my future wife."

"I'm telling you, she was over me before she was into me. She's just a really nice person," Caprice said.

"Looks to me like you've made the leap from nice person to bad girl," Maggie said and gestured the round of drinks.

"Clearly she's just being nice, too. What makes you think she a 'bad girl'?" Caprice asked.

Everyone at the table laughed. "Are you watching the same woman perform that we are?" Jarita asked.

Caprice chuckled at her own statement. "Fine. But I haven't made any leap to anything because it's a round of drinks, that's all. It wasn't just a drink for me, she bought one for us all."

"Uh huh," Jarita said and took a sip of her vodka tonic.

Caprice looked around for Hannah but didn't see her. She focused back on her table of friends. She raised her glass. "To Hannah Brishen." Everyone clinked her drinks together.

Hannah left the band break room after she finished a quick, sexual encounter with a fan, a woman who didn't want to take No for an answer. It wasn't that Hannah minded but she would have rather been flirting with that pretty blonde she had just spotted. All wasn't lost, however, there was still the last set.

She was on her way back to the small, raised platform she and her band used as a stage, when she made a deliberate detour to Caprice's table.

"Good evening, ladies. I hope you're all enjoying the show."

"Yes, very much. Thank you for the drinks," Kelly said.

"You're welcome, ladies. It was my pleasure." Hannah broke into her sexiest smile as her eyes gravitated to Caprice. "Any requests we might be able to play for you?"

Everyone at the table looked at Caprice, whose only focal point was Hannah. "Um...I really like the way you sing, um, 'Mission of Mercy'," Caprice managed to get out.

"It's one of my favorites, too," Hannah said. "So...who do I dedicate it to?"

At least four voices chimed in with "Caprice!"

Hannah nodded and took a step back. "Caprice? What a beautiful name. It fits you." She broke her mesmerizing gaze with Caprice and her stunning, crystal blue eyes swept the rest of the women at the table. "Ladies, have a great rest of the evening."

The table of six was speechless as they watched Hannah take the stage. The first song she did was an original, written by the drummer. The next song, a cover of The Motels' 'Mission of Mercy' was dedicated to Caprice.

No one at the table spoke during the final set, mostly because the level of music was too loud to shout over. No one had the chance to speak immediately after because the crowd was too noisy. The bar lights came on full force and the bellow of "last call!" was heard over the din.

While Maggie and Cynthia deliberated about having one more drink, Kelly slung her arm over Caprice's shoulder. "This is a night you won't soon forget."

Caprice finished her last sip of wine. "I'd say I'd drink to that but I'm already probably more buzzed than I should be." Her arm hairs suddenly stood up as though she'd had an electrical surge bolt through her body by and she felt the presence of someone behind her.

"Excuse me," a recognizable, dulcet voice said.

Kelly and Caprice whirled to face Hannah. "Yes?" Kelly asked.

"I'm sorry...are you two together?" Hannah asked, politely. She refused to take her eyes off Caprice.

"Nope," Kelly said. She removed her arm from Caprice's shoulder. "She's as single as a one dollar bill."

Hannah smiled, her relief evident. "Could I talk to you for a moment?" She nodded her head to the right. "Over there?"

Caprice looked in the direction of Hannah's nod. It was the door to the hallway that led to the band break room. "Sure." Her heart began to pound.

"No worries, ladies, I'll bring her right back," Hannah said and grinned. She placed her hand lightly on Caprice's arm and escorted her away from her friends.

"Yes?" Caprice said, deferentially, as she gazed into Hannah's impossibly beguiling blue eyes.

"I don't want to be presumptuous but...would you come back tomorrow night as my guest?"

When Caprice found her voice, she asked, "Why would that be presumptuous?"

"I don't want to insult you by insinuating that a beautiful woman such as you would not already have plans."

Caprice knew that if she had the ability to melt, she would be a puddle at Hannah's feet. "You are so sweet. Really, I have no plans and I would love to be your guest tomorrow night."

Hannah grinned at what appeared to be Caprice's authentically coy demeanor. "I'm not going to get beat up by your girlfriend?"

"Like my friend, Kelly, said, I don't have a girlfriend. I am quite single."

"What's the difference between single and quite single?"

"Absolutely no love life as opposed to dating?"

Hannah shook her head in disbelief. "What is wrong with the women in this town?"

Caprice smiled at Hannah's charm. "Right now, I am very glad to be quite single."

"So am I," Hannah told her. "I would say I could pick you up and bring you here but I didn't drive this time. Could you meet me here at the band entrance in back at eight? We can chat a little before the show starts and maybe we could grab something to eat afterwards?"

Caprice looked at her watch and said, with surprise, "At one-forty-five in the morning? That's when you eat?"

Hannah shrugged. "You don't have to eat if you don't want to but I'm usually starving by then. I would be honored if you joined me and the guys."

"Are you sure I'm not going to get beat up by *your* girlfriend?" Caprice asked.

Hannah revealed a dazzling smile, then looked up and rubbed her chin. "Hmmm...which one?"

Caprice laughed. "Oh, great."

"Actually, I am single -"

"Are we going back to the band house or what?" a female voice interrupted them.

Hannah closed her eyes, and took a deep breath. She opened her eyes and smiled at Caprice. "Would you excuse me a second? Please don't go anywhere."

"I'll stay right here," Caprice said. She looked at the woman who had broken into their conversation and watched as Hannah linked her arm with the woman's and walked her to the

other side of the bar. She appeared to be speaking firmly to the woman but at the end of the conversation, the woman had a hopeful expression on her face. The woman jumped into a hug with a startled Hannah and then left. Hannah then walked back to Caprice with a distinct twinkle in her eye.

"Sorry about that. Some women, you just say hi to them and they think you're engaged or something. Nature of the beast, I guess."

"She's not one of your girlfriends?" Caprice asked with an amused lilt to her voice.

"Maybe in her eyes but certainly not mine. Come be my guest tomorrow night and I will tell you all my war stories."

"War stories, huh?" Caprice arched an eyebrow.

Hannah grinned. "Seriously. Will you meet me? Please?"

Caprice couldn't believe Hannah Brishen was politely begging her to spend time with her. Somehow, the world must have tilted on its axis. "Yes. I would love to be your guest tomorrow night."

"Great." Hannah took Caprice's hand and kissed the back of it, then released it. "See you tomorrow." Hannah disappeared through the door to the break room.

Caprice related the conversation she had with Hannah to her friends as they left the club.

"You're going to be her date, huh?" Cynthia asked. "Is that one of many? What about that woman who came up to her while you were talking?"

"I don't know what the situation was between her and that woman, Cynthia. It's none of my business, really. All I know is that I am going to be her guest tomorrow night and I'm not about to say no to that."

"She smelled like sex, you know," Cynthia said, as she unlocked her car. "When she was standing behind me before the last set, when she was salivating over you, she smelled like sex."

"Maybe she just oozes it," Kelly said. "You know how some people smell like garlic all the time? Maybe she always smells like sex."

"She smelled like fresh sex," Cynthia said. She leaned against her car door and folded her arms. "Betcha she had sex with that woman who interrupted you two, probably during the last break."

The idea of that scenario disappointed Caprice and even though she silently suspected that Cynthia was right, she said, "Even if that's true, it's still none of my business. She didn't ask me to marry her, she asked me to be her guest...in this venue, that's almost like a prelude to a date."

"I'm sure she has all kind of women throwing themselves at her, I mean, look at her," Jarita interjected. "If I had her life, I'd be doing women for breakfast, lunch and dinner. As long as it's safe sex, who are we to judge?"

"I wasn't judging!" Cynthia snapped, "I was just making a statement."

"A statement to try your best to put a damper on Caprice's excitement," Jarita said.

"Fuck you, Jarita," Cynthia said, got in her car, slammed the door and drove away.

"Why do they always bring her?" Jarita asked. "She sits at the table like a prune and everything out of her mouth is negative."

"I know," Caprice said and sighed. "I think they feel sorry for her."

"They should feel sorry for *us* and stop asking. She's so toxic." Kelly said.

"Enough about her. I'm going to ride on the coattails of your good fortune and wait for my future wife to leave work and ask her out," Jarita said.

"If you need me to put in a good word for you, let me know," Caprice called after Jarita.

Jarita turned around and walked backwards as she spoke. "If she turns me down, I'll be calling."

Kelly walked Caprice to her car. "Where are you parked?"

"Across the street. This lot was packed when I got here."

"Want a ride?"

"Nah. Just keep an eye on me until I get to my car." She pointed toward a tree. "See? It's right there."

"Okay."

Kelly hugged Caprice. "I am so happy for you. I know this is like your dream come true. She is just so gorgeous and sultry. Do you think you'll sleep with her?"

Caprice smiled and playfully pushed Kelly away. "I don't even know if I'm going to like her, aren't you jumping the gun a little bit?"

Kelly looked at Caprice and waited.

"Of course, I'll sleep with her - if she wants to. Good Lord, Kel, she could make a Bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window to get a second look. Who, in her right mind, wouldn't sleep with her?"

Saturday was shopping day for Caprice. Except for essentials, Caprice went to the market every two weeks and replenished her food supply or to the mall for anything else she needed. Once that task was done and the groceries or purchases were put away, she sat down to reconcile her bills and balance her checkbook. The afternoons were usually spent with friends, doing something recreational or hanging out, watching college sports.

This particular Saturday, Caprice couldn't keep her mind on anything but what awaited her at eight o'clock. She had tried on nearly every article of clothing in her closet and wasn't satisfied with how any outfit looked on her. She finally called Kelly who accompanied Caprice to Hot Topic, where they finally agreed on one ensemble: a sleeveless black leather vest, straight-legged black denim slacks and black studded slingbacks with a four-inch stiletto heel.

"You're one of the only dykes I know who not only looks fabulous in heels, you can walk in them, too," Kelly told her. She and Caprice left the mall and headed toward the parking garage. "If that woman isn't all over you tonight, there's something wrong with her."

"It really looks that good?" Caprice asked, sincerely.

"Are you kidding? No one is going to know who to look at more - you or her." They walked to Kelly's car. On approach, Kelly pressed her key fob; the car beeped once and the doors automatically unlocked. "Anyone who blew you off before is sure as hell going to regret it tonight."

Caprice placed her bags in the trunk. "I don't care about anyone else." She got in the passenger side and closed the door.

"You've got it bad," Kelly said, stating the obvious. "You want to grab something to eat? Or are you going to wait until the wee hours of the morning?"

"I don't think I can eat anything right now except maybe my own fingernails."

Kelly started the car. "I bet you won't be saying that later..." Her tone was sing-song and lecherous.

Caprice playfully slapped her. "Is that all you think about is sex?"

"Yup. And once you start having it again, that's all you'll ever think about, too. Especially if you start having it with Hannah Brishen."

Hannah was outside the bar, drinking a mug of beer when Caprice pulled up in her car. The singer was laughing with one of the other band members when Caprice got out of the car.

"Holy shit," the guitarist said, followed by a low whistle, when he saw Caprice.

Hannah nearly choked on her beer when her eyes flickered over to the woman in black who was to be her date for the evening. "Wow," was all Hannah could get out.

Caprice blushed under the scrutiny. "Is this okay?"

Hannah walked over to her and gave her a blatant once-over. "It's better than okay."

Just then, their focus was pulled to a clattering noise behind them. It was the rest of the band members who had rushed outside at the guitarists urging to get a look at Hannah's date.

"God, I hate you, Hannah," the keyboardist said in mock disgust. "You get all the hot women." He shook his head and went back inside and was joined by his fellow musicians.

"Aha, so you do get all the hot women," Caprice said, in teasing accusation.

Hannah shrugged. "It happens."

"So I'm just one in a line of many?" Caprice asked, taunting her. Her expression told Hannah that she wasn't serious.

Hannah's response, however, was serious. She took a step closer to Caprice and lifted her chin as their eyes met. "Oh, I certainly hope not."

Caprice's heartbeat sped up and she closed her eyes when Hannah kissed her forehead. She cleared her throat and looked down at the ground while Hannah took a step back.

"How high are those heels? Last night you seemed about a half-foot shorter."

"Four inches. If you like shorter women, I'll take them off," Caprice offered.

"No. I like you just the way you are," Hannah said. She reached down and wrapped her fingers around Caprice's. "Come on in. I'll introduce you to the guys, get you something to drink and get you settled so that we can talk until I have to go on."

If Hannah noticed that Caprice's palm was sweating, she didn't mention it. She allowed Hannah to lead her inside, down a short corridor and into a room with a table, instrument cases, music paraphernalia and clutter. One of the band members had a twelve-string acoustic guitar and was strumming it, working on a song when they entered.

"Guys, this is Caprice. Caprice, this is Joey, Brendan, Dobie, Dylan and Flip. It's really Phillip no one calls him that except his mother."

All the guys looked at Flip and goadingly chorused, "Phil-lip!"

"Shut up, you douchebags," Flip mumbled. Then he looked at Caprice. "Oh, sorry."

"What for? Do you think I'm a douchebag?" Caprice said with a straight-face.

"No, no, not at all, I just didn't mean to be -"

"She's teasing you, Flip," Hannah informed him.

Flip looked at Hannah and then at Caprice, questioningly.

"Yeah, I was," Caprice admitted.

Flip frowned, then smirked. "Christ, Hannah, she's perfect for you."

Dobie, the drummer, stood up, tsk-tsked, and said in an almost disgusted tone. "Aren't they all?" He bumped Hannah's shoulder when he left the room, then he turned around. "You need to stop, Hannah. You need to stop or you'll be looking for another drummer." He walked down the corridor and back outside.

"What's that about?" Caprice asked Hannah, who was still looking out the door. The other band members stared at anything other than their singer.

"Don't mind him," Hannah said, finally. She turned back to Caprice. "He's just jealous that I'm with such a hot woman. He's the only one who doesn't like playing here. He's kind of a redneck. He thinks all a lesbian needs is a man to help her get over her gay 'phase'." Hannah gently took Caprice's hand again. "Come on, let's go out to the deck bar. I'll get you a wine."

"Won't you get mobbed?" Caprice asked.

"No, it will be fine. The rowdy crowd never seems to show up until after the second or third set."

True to Hannah's word, many in the crowd stared at Hannah and Caprice at the bar but no one approached the singer and her date. Hannah ordered herself another beer and a glass of shiraz for Caprice. Hands still clasped, Hannah walked them over to the band table. They set their drinks down and sat by the soundboard.

"You look amazing," Hannah said. "How is it you don't have a girlfriend?"

"Or several, like you?" Caprice asked, teasing.

Hannah smiled. "Doing this kind of thing is kind of like having amnesia; you don't know anybody but they know you." She studied the woman seated next to her. "You have the most extraordinary green eyes."

"Says the woman with the most extraordinary blue ones."

"Tell me about yourself," Hannah asked. She leaned her cheek on her hand and gave her full attention to Caprice.

"Hmmm...where to start...well, I was born in Pittsburgh but my family moved to Cumberland Valley when I was three. When I was six, my folks split up and my mom and I went to live with my grandparents in Perry County. Then when I was eight, my mom and dad got back together again and have been married ever since. We moved back to Dauphin County and I graduated from high school and then went right to work at the Combat College in their records department."

"No higher education for you?"

"Are you kidding? My dad insisted I didn't need college, I just needed to find a husband to take care of me and give him grandkids. That was one of the reasons he got me a job at the Combat College, hoping I'd meet me an officer, fall madly in love and get married."

"And, obviously, that didn't happen."

"I've met a few officers - not men - fell madly in lust but, of course, no marriages. Daddy was not pleased," Caprice said, with a small chuckle.

"When did you come out to them?"

"Officially, I never have. They found out when they stopped by my apartment unexpectedly a few years back and I answered the door in my bathrobe. I was expecting a pizza delivery. I might have been able to pass it off as not feeling well if they had left right away but my mother insisted on coming in just as the woman I was seeing, walked out of the bedroom, wrapped in a towel."

"That must have been awkward."

"Awkward? It was one of the worst days of my life. My father didn't speak to me for nearly a year and ordered my mother not to, either, but she would sneak phone calls to me whenever she would go out without him."

"So she was okay with it?"

"Not really but I'm the only child so she weighed that against what I did in the privacy of my own home. They don't exactly condemn me, at least not openly, but we just don't talk about it. It is a non-subject whenever we're together."

"That's going to suck when you meet, you know, 'The One'."

"They'll just have to make a choice, I guess." She took a long swallow of wine and studied her companion. The lights shadowed Hannah's face just right and the vision caused Caprice's heart to

pound. How could anyone be so beautiful and so talented and not be famous or at least more than regionally known? She watched as Hannah peeled the label off her beer bottle piece by piece and roll the small segments into little balls between her thumb and forefinger. Caprice was shocked that Hannah seemed actually nervous about their date and she found it rather beguiling. "What about you?"

"Me? I've lived and worked all over the country, been on my own since about the time I reached seventeen."

"Where were you born?" Caprice asked.

"New York. My mom used to be a singer/dancer on Broadway. She was in the chorus, usually. She kept me until I was two and she and my father went their separate ways. She sent me to live with a great aunt in Connecticut and I was raised by her. We butted heads all the time. When I was seventeen, I went to New York to meet my mom, who I hadn't seen since she gave me up, and she wouldn't see me."

"Why?" Caprice noticed that Hannah's voice and facial expression were devoid of any emotion.

"She had a man there with her. The only thing I can think of was that she didn't want him to know she had any kids, especially not a kid as old as I was."

Caprice placed her hand over Hannah's. "I'm so sorry. That must have been devastating."

"I got over it. Then I thought, since I was there, I might as well look up my father. That didn't go much better. He was high and he was a real dick. He denied he was my father so I thought to hell with them both. I didn't go back to Connecticut; I headed to Florida, lied about my age and got a job as a bar back in this lesbian nightclub in Miami. I hooked up with a woman who could really sing the blues. She was incredible. We were together for about a year, until I auditioned for a band and got in. Then she saw me as competition and dumped me. It broke my heart but don't all first loves?" Hannah didn't wait for a response. "Anyway, I criss-crossed the country with different bands and a few years ago when I was in Philly, I hooked up with these guys and we clicked. And that's my boring life in a nutshell."

Caprice squeezed Hannah's hand. "Have you always known that you were a lesbian?"

"Yes. I did date guys in high school but only because I thought I was supposed to. They never really did anything for me and I always suspected I might be gay, anyway. The first time I was kissed by a woman, I knew then. I knew, because it just felt so right." She brought Caprice's hand to her lips again. "When did you know?"

"I knew early in high school. I had an abnormally wicked crush on my art teacher."

"Did you sleep with her?"

"No. She was very straight, very married and very Christian. She probably would have turned me in to the morals police if she ever found out." Caprice grinned at the memory.

Hannah checked her watch. "It's almost time for us to go on so I need to get back there with the guys. You'll be okay out here by yourself for a few minutes?"

"Of course," Caprice answered.

Hannah stood up, released Caprice's hand and walked back to the break room. Caprice still could not believe she was with Hannah Brishen at last. She didn't know what she had done to be rewarded with such good fortune but she wasn't about to question it. She found Hannah to be engaging, curious and, surprisingly, down-to-earth for someone who constantly got so much attention.

Their chemistry was undeniable and if the evening continued in the same vein, she had no doubt the night would end with more than just a goodnight kiss. Caprice shook with anticipation.

The five, forty-minute sets, the band played seemed to fly by for Caprice. She remained at the table by the soundboard; that gave her easy access to Hannah during the breaks and a different view from how she usually watched the band. Even though Hannah was quite attentive, the more crowded the bar became, the more they were interrupted during their together time.

When the bar was cleared of all patrons and the staff began to clean up and restock the bar, Hannah walked Caprice out to her car. Once outside, Caprice stood by the car door with Hannah very close to her.

Caprice's heart plummeted. As Hannah had done whenever she got the chance, she tightly held Caprice's hand all the way from the table to the car but because of Hannah's aloof manner, Caprice felt the date was going to end there in the parking lot. Although she was disappointed, she wasn't about to convey that to the woman who stood in front of her.

"I had a great time, Hannah, thank you for asking me to do this."

"Are you sure? I would think it would be kind of boring."

"No. Being your date is anything but boring." Caprice's eyes twinkled.

"I'm hoping you weren't planning to go out to eat with us after all because Joey just informed me that as soon as we break down, he has to get back to Philly and he's my ride."

"No, that's okay. I wouldn't be able to eat this late, anyway," Caprice said.

"I'm really interested in you, Caprice," Hannah said. "Could we get together next time I'm in town?"

Caprice was surprised. "Yes, I'd...I'd really like that."

"Good. Good, me, too." Hannah's smile was relieved and seemed genuine. There was an awkward silence between the two women. Hannah finally said, "I really want to kiss you."

Caprice exhaled an excited breath. "Then, um, why aren't you?"

"Good question."

Hannah leaned in and softly kissed Caprice. It was an introduction that held a promise of much more. Hannah took a step closer and their bodies connected. Her arms slipped around Caprice and held her securely. The kiss deepened, tongues met and the women moaned as a tingling bolted through both of them. They leaned up against the car and made out as time seemed to stand still for them. Hannah was the first to reluctantly break away. "I need to get back inside because if I don't do that right now, I'm going to do something totally inappropriate."

Caprice looked at her, curiously. "Like...what?"

Hannah put her mouth right next to Caprice's ear and whispered, "Like make love to you."

Caprice was breathless as a shiver ran down her spine. "I don't find that inappropriate at all."

Hannah nibbled on Caprice's earlobe. "But we just met last night."

"We may have just met officially last night but I've been coming to see you sing every time you're in town, for the last two years. It just feels like a very long courtship to me."

Hannah captured Caprice's lips again in another explosive kiss. "So, if I go home with you tonight, I get to spend the night?"

"Absolutely," Caprice responded, softly.

Hannah stopped, mid-kiss, and held Caprice at arms-length. "You should play harder to get."

Caprice blinked at Hannah in confusion. She knew that Hannah was just as aroused as she was. "I am hard to get."

"A little stuck on ourself, are we?" Hannah smirked, with a sarcastic lift of an eyebrow.

Caprice was not sure when or if their conversation had taken a turn toward the weird. She tried not to sound defensive. "No, um, what I mean is that I don't have a lot of relationships or girlfriends, remember? I'm picky."

Hannah's smile turned suggestive. "You should be." She pulled Caprice to her again, claimed her lips once more and broke the long kiss only to breathe. "Listen, I'm playing in Hagerstown next

weekend. Think you can come down? I loved being with you tonight. I'd really like to get to know you better. Would that be okay?"

"Oh, Hannah, I would love to. Let me give you my cell number and email address so you can send me the details or call me."

"Well...did you do the deed?" Kelly asked Caprice.

Caprice smiled as she cradled her phone between her shoulder and her ear. "No, we did not." She finished buttering her toast and then took a sip of her coffee. It was not exactly morning but Caprice had just awakened and craved breakfast.

"What? What happened?"

"Nothing happened." Caprice sat at her kitchen table.

"I know that but why did nothing happen?" Kelly persisted.

"No, nothing happened to make the night go wrong," Caprice clarified. "She did kiss me and oh, Lord, can that woman kiss."

"You know what they say about kissing..."

"That it's a good indication of how they are in bed?"

"Uh huh." Kelly paused. "So, really, why no nookie?"

"I don't know. She's playing next weekend in Hagerstown and she asked me to meet her there, so she's definitely interested. Maybe she's courting me?"

"Wow, courting...that's an interesting concept."

"Isn't it, though? She was kind of romantic last night. Maybe she's not the dog we all think she is," Caprice said.

"Please. Someone that desirable who has women throwing themselves at her? You're the one person I know who is the least amount of hound dog and tell me you wouldn't be a slut in her circumstances."

"Do you think I'd be a fool to get involved with her?"

"I think you'd be a fool not to experience her. You've had the hots for her for so long, I think you'd kick yourself if you didn't at least sleep with her."

"You're right, I would like to experience her but, I don't know, I don't want to feel used and like I'm just one of the masses."

"Yeah, yeah, you want to be special," Kelly said, with a chuckle.

"Yes, I guess I do." Caprice was serious and was a little put off by Kelly's casual attitude.

Kelly noticed the difference in Caprice's voice. "Seriously?"

"Why not? I mean, why not me? Clearly she wants something else with me. I would have been willing to have sex with her last night and she knew it but *she* put the brakes on."

"That is rather curious."

"Or not. We don't know her."

"No, *we* don't but it looks like you're going to." There was a smile in Kelly's voice.

The week passed slowly and every agonizing hour felt like twenty-four. Hannah called once but Caprice was not available to answer the phone and when Caprice returned the call, Hannah never picked up.

The voice message Hannah left was sweet and almost shy. She told Caprice that she hoped Caprice could make it and that she was looking forward to seeing her that weekend. Hannah provided the address of the club, the time the gig started and the address of the motel where the band was scheduled to stay.

The only email Caprice received from Hannah was a message that read 'If you can be here by seven, meet me at Posey's for dinner on Franklin, 40 near 11' with a smiley face.

When Friday rolled around, Caprice left work, drove home, showered, dressed, grabbed a pre-packed overnight bag and headed out toward Hagerstown, Maryland. With Friday night traffic, it took her approximately ninety minutes to reach her destination. She pulled into Posey's Country Café at 6:45. She parked the car and entered the restaurant.

Posey's was a romantically cozy eating establishment. There were small wagon wheel light fixtures over every booth and candles on each table. The interior was wood and there was sawdust and peanut shells on the floor. The restaurant possessed a warm, informal atmosphere and Caprice felt comfortable immediately.

"Hi. One for dinner?" the hostess asked Caprice.

"No, actually I'm meeting someone so it will be two."

"Could your dinner companion already be here? Are you Caprice?"

"Yes."

"Right this way, please."

Caprice followed the hostess to a secluded booth in the corner. When she sat down, she was greeted by Hannah's welcoming smile. Caprice's breath caught. Hannah seemed even more beautiful than she remembered her from last week.

"Scott will be your server. He will be right over to take your drink orders." The hostess placed their menus in front of them and left.

Hannah reached over and took Caprice's hands in her own. "Does it sound corny to say I really missed you?"

Caprice shook her head. "No." She smiled, brightly. "I feel the same way."

"Scott has already been over to take our drink orders. I ordered you a shiraz but I told him not to bring it over until you got here."

"Thank you." Caprice saw a young man approach the table with a tray and released Hannah's hands.

"A glass of Shiraz and a Yuengling," The server named Scott said as he positioned the drinks in front of the proper owner. "A few more minutes with the menus?"

"Yes, please," Hannah said, not taking her eyes off Caprice.

Scott nodded and left them alone.

"Why did you let go of my hands?" Hannah asked, as she reached over and reclaimed Caprice's hands again.

"Habit. I'd rather not have my food or drink spit in by someone who might disapprove. We're not exactly in San Francisco, you know?"

Hannah once again freed her hands from Caprice's. "You have a good point. I just can't stop myself from wanting to touch you."

Caprice directed her attention to her glass of wine, fingering the stem. She looked back up at Hannah. Her voice was low and encouraging. "I understand. I hope you never stop wanting to touch me."

Hannah drew a deep breath. "Really? Never?" Her eyes intently focused on Caprice's.

It took every ounce of inner strength she had to break the gaze. "What are you looking for, Hannah? What are you looking for in me?"

Hannah shrugged. "I don't know. Something...different."

"Is that why you didn't want to sleep with me last weekend? Didn't want me to be just another -?"

"Fuck?" Hannah finished for her.

"To put it politely," Caprice said and smiled.

"I do want you. I just don't want you to be like everybody else," Hannah confessed. Her expression bordered on sad.

"I'm not like everybody else," Caprice assured her.

Hannah squeezed her hand and released it again. She picked up her menu and began to scan it. "Let's eat."

The dinner conversation was a lot lighter as the discussion revolved around Caprice's high school escapades and Hannah's adventures with her different bands.

Hannah paid for dinner and when they left the café to go back to the motel, Hannah asked if she could drive Caprice's car.

"Do you drive? Do you have a license?" Caprice asked, as Hannah held Caprice's arms behind her, reaching for the keys. Three glasses of wine had relaxed her and made her a little giddy.

Hannah's body leaned into Caprice's. "I don't want you getting pulled over." She kissed Caprice's forehead. "I have plans for you later."

Caprice nuzzled Hannah's neck. "And I have plans for you but I'm not impaired. I can drive." She lifted her face to accept a kiss. "I can't believe we're standing in the middle of a public parking lot like this."

Hannah kissed her again. "Then give me the keys and let me drive because, like this, we're just a hate crime waiting to happen."

The keys were dropped in Hannah's palm. "Brat. Is this a control thing?"

Hannah unlocked the passenger door and opened it. She gestured Caprice inside. "Sort of. I do like to be in control." She got into the driver's side of the car and started it.

Caprice shut the door and put on her seatbelt. "Do you like control everywhere?" she asked, suggestively.

Before Hannah put the car in drive, she shot a smoldering glance at the woman who was about to become her lover. "Would that bother you?"

"Not in the least."

The silver, sporty Mazda RX8 zoomed into a space in the parking lot behind the club where Hannah's band was to play. The back door was open and the canned music blared outside. Hannah checked the dashboard clock before she shut off the ignition.

"Ten minutes until we need to go inside. Any ideas of how we might be able to kill some time?" Hannah handed the keys back to Caprice.

Caprice pursed her lips. "Just ten minutes?"

"That would be long enough to warm you up." Hannah said and started to lean over the console. Caprice put her hand up to stop her.

"Unless you're a contortionist, there's no way anything is going to happen in this car. Especially not as tall as you are."

"Fine." Hannah got out of the car, walked to the passenger side, opened Caprice's door and helped her out. As soon as she shut the door, she pressed Caprice against it with her body. "Let me show you what I can do in ten minutes," Hannah breathed before she took Caprice's face in her hands and planted a steamy kiss on eager lips. She dropped her hands to Caprice's hips and insinuated her thigh between Caprice's. While they continued to kiss passionately, Hannah slowly rocked the smaller woman against her, the friction driving Caprice to feverish distraction.

Caprice's breathing accelerated and she could feel a pleasant flame start in her center. She was torn between allowing the fire to burn white hot or saving the experience for later when she wasn't so restricted in her participation. Before she could make the decision, Hannah stopped all the action.

"I need to get inside or the band will go on without me," Hannah said, panting only a little less than Caprice.

"Right." Caprice exhaled a shaky breath. She hugged Hannah and gently pushed her away.

"Just ten minutes, huh?" Hannah chuckled and took Caprice's hand. She pulled Caprice to the back door of the bar.

Caprice groaned and chewed on her lip in frustration. The thought of waiting another five hours to finish what Hannah started was going to be torture.

There was a different energy at this club, Caprice had noticed. It was a straight bar and a rowdier crowd than she was used to. If the patrons were any more rambunctious, Caprice suspected there would be chicken wire in front of the band to protect them from flying bottles or worse, airborne bodies.

The band played to the house and appeared to absorb the boisterous atmosphere. Hannah stayed close to Caprice during the breaks and was completely attentive without being blatant about their relationship. Caprice could still see the arousal in Hannah's eyes when they looked at each other but she kept her actions tempered while in the presence of the crowd. When Hannah was on stage, however, she became like the audience - animated, unrestrained...reckless.

It was the sexiest thing Caprice had ever seen and it made her unfamiliarly wanton.

On the break before the last set, while Hannah was in the bathroom, a woman cautiously approached Caprice. "Hi. Are you with Hannah?"

Caprice surveyed the room suspiciously before she spoke. She didn't want anyone to be on a fishing expedition. Another look at the woman and she decided a conversation would be okay; the woman resembled much more of a stereotypical lesbian than she ever did. Caprice smiled at the woman. "Yes, I am."

"Are you two dating?" The woman took a step closer.

Caprice observed that the woman seemed quite nervous, which made her unsure about revealing anything important. "I'm sorry? And you are?"

"Her last victim. Be Careful. She'll hurt you." The woman then focused on something behind Caprice and visibly swallowed, her fear palpable.

Caprice turned around to follow the woman's gaze and saw Hannah making a beeline toward their table.

"What are you doing here, Annie?" Hannah appeared angry.

"Just trying to give your new conquest a little friendly advice," Annie told her as she kept her distance.

"She doesn't need your advice. You're bitter and troubled and you're being here is inappropriate. It's a violation of the restraining order so I suggest you leave on your own or I'll have you thrown out," Hannah warned.

Annie looked terrified and before she left she addressed Caprice. "Just remember what I said."

Caprice watched Annie leave and returned her attention to Hannah. "What was that about?"

Hannah intensely stared after Annie until she was out of her sight, then looked at Caprice. "We dated, it didn't work out. Like I said, she's bitter."

"There was a restraining order involved?"

"Yeah. She got a little crazy. She's seeing a shrink. I hope it all works out for her but clearly, she's not over it yet so... She's nuttier than squirrel shit, believe me. I'm sorry you had to deal with that."

"It's okay, Hannah. She's gone. I'm fine and I'm sorry she showed up and upset you."

"No, no. I can shake it off. It's old news. God! I'm so glad you're not like that. She's like a blender you don't have a lid for, you know?"

Caprice could see that Annie's visit had left Hannah shaken regardless of how much she denied it. Caprice was bothered by Annie's haunted expression and hoped the encounter didn't stay with her. She also hoped that Hannah could, indeed, shake it off because when they left there, their night would just begin. Caprice did not want Hannah distracted.

The drive to the motel after the bar closed was quiet. Caprice could tell that Hannah was still disturbed by Annie's visit. When they pulled into a parking space and Hannah shut off the car, they sat there momentarily, not speaking.

"Are you okay?" Caprice said, finally. Her tone was gentle and she rubbed the back of her hand up and down Hannah's arm.

Hannah turned to her and smiled, seductively. "I am definitely okay and I am so ready for you."

The lascivious expression on Hannah's face caused Caprice's heart rate to soar and moisture to form in her lower regions. Caprice nodded, and when she spoke, her voice was barely audible. "Me, too."

Hannah sighed in relief. "Good. I thought maybe Annie had given you second thoughts."

"No. I kind of feel bad for her." Caprice grinned at Hannah and said, "But I can see how she could become obsessed." Caprice tried to not let her excitement show too much but her body thrummed with anticipation: she was about to fulfill one of her most persistent fantasies with her dream woman.

Hannah returned Caprice's smile and as though she read Caprice's mind, she said. "Come on, let's get inside before we both implode from the suspense."

If Caprice had any hopes of freshening up before things got too hot and heavy, they were dashed the second the front door was closed. Hannah reached around, placed her hand behind Caprice's neck and pulled her to her. Hannah's lips were on her before she could speak.

It seemed as though Hannah had suddenly turned part animal in her aggressive pursuit of devouring her prey. Before Caprice could react, Hannah had abruptly removed every stitch of Caprice's clothing and had maneuvered them onto the bed. Hannah's nibbles turned into bites and her fingers went roughly into Caprice's center without the benefit of gentle foreplay. It wasn't that Caprice wasn't well lubricated, it was just more fingers entered her than she was used to or ready for.

Hannah was still fully clothed as she hungrily ravished Caprice. She stifled any words from Caprice by continued kisses, keeping Caprice's tongue well occupied. She rode the smaller woman's thigh as she pushed into her in a frenzied rhythm.

Caprice was finally able to relax and get used to the thrusting. She closed around Hannah's fingers more comfortably as the minutes ticked by. She finally stopped feeling manhandled and started to get into the attention Hannah gave her body.

Hannah moved down to Caprice's lower neck, where Caprice knew Hannah was marking her. When Hannah closed her lips around Caprice's sensitive nipple, she bit down causing a sensation of pain and pleasure. It startled Caprice and when she gasped out for Hannah to ease up a little, Hannah moved to the other nipple and bit harder. Hannah's descent to the apex between Caprice's legs was hurried and when Hannah fastened her mouth to the heat she found there, she sucked hard and used her tongue to flick fast.

Caprice wasn't used to this kind of vigor in bed. She wasn't sure she liked what was happening but her body began to respond in spite of her. Soon the feeling that swirled around her insides radiated to one concentrated area and suddenly burst outward in an intensity she thought would make her pass out from the pleasure of it alone. She was amazed that Hannah's ministrations had just provoked the longest, hardest orgasm she had ever experienced.

She was instantly exhausted from the impact of it. She was ready for a break but Hannah was not. The singer had stamina that Caprice wasn't used to. Hannah maintained her steady rhythm and impetus and just when she was about to ask Hannah to stop, another climax took her over the edge of a glorious waterfall.

Now sated and sore, she reached down and firmly placed her hand on Hannah's head. "I'm good. Please, Hannah, I need a break."

Reluctantly, it seemed, Hannah removed her fingers and climbed back up Caprice's body. She looked into Caprice's eyes. "I take it that was good for you?"

"Jesus, Hannah. That was amazing. A little rough for me but amazing."

"I'm sorry, baby. Did I hurt you? I just couldn't wait." Hannah's expression backed up her apology.

"No, you didn't hurt me. Like I said, it was a little rougher than I like it but...damn, it certainly worked." There was still awe in Caprice's voice. Her body still vibrated from the powerful orgasm. She ran her finger around the collar of Hannah's tank top. "Are you eventually going to get underdressed?"

Hannah smiled and kissed her. "Told you I couldn't wait."

"I'd like to return the favor."

Hannah sat up, still straddling Caprice and lifted her shirt over her head. She then removed her sports bra.

Caprice admired Hannah's upper half. Hannah's breasts were shapely and her rose colored nipples were taut. Caprice reached up and ran the pads of her thumbs over the pebbled peaks. "My God, you're gorgeous," she whispered.

Hannah climbed off her and stood on the side of the bed. She took off her jeans and panties, crawled back on top of Caprice again and nuzzled her neck.

"You marked me, didn't you?" Caprice asked.

"Mmm hmm," Hannah said. "But not where anyone can see unless you wear something too revealing." She lifted her head and looked in Caprice's eyes. "I like to mark. Is that going to be a problem?"

"No. No, not if it's not visible. The last thing I need to explain to some of those old fart military officers is why I have a high school hickey on my neck."

"I'd love to see the look on their faces if they found out a woman

gave it to you," Hannah said and grinned. She kissed Caprice softly until it grew into something more passionate again. Hannah reached down, ready to enter Caprice again.

"Hey," Caprice said, softly as she placed her hand on Hannah's arm. "Let me please you. I'm a tad sensitive at the moment."

Caprice was startled to see a flash of something...dark...cross Hannah's face but it went away as quickly as it appeared and Hannah's hand slowly returned to caress Caprice's cheek.

"I have a voracious appetite. Think you can satisfy me?" Hannah asked with an arch of her eyebrow. There was a challenge in her voice.

"I don't know...I'll certainly try. Tell me what you like."

"I like fucking you," Hannah said.

"And I would like to see if I like fucking you," Caprice said, with a smirk.

"I like to be on top. Always."

"Then I guess I have my work cut out for me. Show me what you want."

After the lovers had fallen asleep, Caprice slowly awoke to Hannah making love to her. This time Hannah's actions were tender and loving. Caprice did not climax from the attention but she did fall back to sleep feeling warm and tingly.

Except for the time Hannah made a breakfast run, the two women spent the day in bed. They showered together, got dressed and they met the rest of the band at four o'clock at the bar to do a sound check, tune up, work on assorted musical issues and have a few beers.

Caprice liked getting to know the band members; they all seemed to be nice, laid back guys with the exception of Dobie, the drummer. His interaction with everyone but Hannah was congenial and Caprice wondered if the hostility between the two of them was just about Dobie's homophobia. Clearly, her association with Hannah was also cause for Dobie to be unfriendly to her, too, so maybe it was. Somehow, though, it seemed more personal.

Her curiosity about Dobie was all but forgotten when the band broke for three hours and Hannah was at her side again. Hannah suggested returning to the motel but Caprice talked her into going out to dinner.

Caprice knew that she and Hannah would make love again after the show when they went back to the room. She was already raw from the sex play they so vigorously shared the night before and that day. Her body needed a bit of a rest and she wasn't even sure she would be able to receive Hannah's attention later on but, hopefully, a ten-hour respite would be enough.

Hannah's disappointment clearly stayed with her until halfway through their meal. Caprice did her best to keep up her end of the conversation but Hannah snapped out of it only when Dylan, the bass player, joined them at the table. He ordered a drink and they stayed and talked about music until it was time to get back to the bar for their gig.

Caprice noticed that Hannah was now doubly attentive. She was not so much solicitous as she was vigilant. When the band was on breaks, Hannah would go directly to Caprice and, although she was discreet about it, there was always some part of Hannah touching some part of Caprice.

Caprice was torn between being complimented by the attention and suddenly feeling like property. She didn't like the idea of the latter so she opted to feel flattered.

After all, this was her dream woman; she had every right to feel flattered.

She had not been home that long when her phone rang. The called ID told her it was Kelly.

"So tell me, studlet, how was sex with that gorgeous hunk of woman?" Kelly asked, her voice full of expectation.

"I'm exhausted. I need a hot bath and a nap," Caprice said and yawned.

"Wow. That good, huh? What'd you two do? Spend the weekend in bed?"

"Just about. If she hadn't had a show to do, I believe we would have."

"Come on, don't be a tease. How was it?"

"Oh my God, Kelly, it was magical." Caprice couldn't stop the excitement that flowed through her voice. "You think she's hot just standing there, you should see her...well...in, uh, other areas..." She knew Kelly could tell she was blushing. Kelly knew her too well.

"I bet," Kelly said and chuckled. "And?"

Caprice sighed, happily. "Once I got over the fact that I was actually in bed with her, it was exciting...and, um, different."

"Different? How?"

Caprice's embarrassment was now tangible. "Well, she kind of likes it rough and likes to role play and I've never, you know, been that adventurous before."

"Rough and adventurous, eh? Mmm, tell me more."

"Jeez, Kel, you know I don't like to talk about my sex life...out loud."

Kelly laughed. "I know but you've always been able to tell me details, especially if they're confusing. And you sound a little confused."

"Not confused as much as awkward, at first."

"And you're confused about feeling awkward? Help me out here, Caprice."

Caprice gingerly sat down on her couch and elevated her feet on the padded arm. "The first night was eye opening because she surprised me with her, um, enthusiasm. She's has amazing tenacity and she's insatiable when it comes to pleasing me."

"Okay...so you're a little raw?"

"As a radish."

"Oooo, ouch. But, hey, what a way to get it. Be careful what you wish for, huh?"

"Well, no, because, you know, I'm *with* her and you know how long I've fantasized about that."

"But her zeal in bed bothers you?"

"No, it just surprised me. The first night was quite, um, passionate. We got right into it and she was the aggressor. Even after I fell asleep, she was still going. I woke up and she was on me and in me. That was actually gentle and slow and sweet. The next day and night, she was back to being the aggressor and she kept telling me to fight her, to resist. She likes total control."

"So she likes to role play. Nice," Kelly said with a dreamy quality to her voice. "That's new for you, isn't it? That top/bottom thing?"

"Yeah, because it's always been a mutual thing with any partner I've ever had; we're one then we're the other. Not with Hannah, though. She's got to be in charge."

"Honestly, that doesn't surprise me. I mean, she's tall and built like a brick shithouse and she just exudes that strength so she seems the type who would want the dominant role."

"She's definitely strong," Caprice agreed.

"How was it? I mean, the sex wasn't too rough, was it? Did it make you uncomfortable?"

"It actually was a little of both at first but once she explained how she likes it, I just, you know, got on board with it and it was a wild ride."

"Sounds intriguing."

"Like I said, it was different...but...I had one of the most amazing orgasms I ever had." Caprice sounded simultaneously turned on, bothered and surprised.

Kelly laughed at Caprice's inflection. "Wow, Caprice! Sounds like she rocked your socks off. That's cool. It's about time somebody did. I'm visualizing you in a little slap and tickle with her. It's making me horny."

"That doesn't take much," Caprice said and laughed.

"Beeyotch. So how does it stand? Was it just one weekend in heaven or are you going to see her again?"

"As a matter of fact, I am going to see her again. She's playing in Philly for the next two weeks and she invited me stay with her there, at her apartment for both weekends."

Kelly whistled appreciatively. "Nice. Think this might have a chance of becoming a relationship? Or is it just fun for a while?"

"To my knowledge, there is no UHaul in my immediate future but it sure is a lot of fun."

"Is that what you want it to be?"

"I'm not sure. Right now I like what it is."

"Then I'm happy for you, Caprice. You deserve a good time, not to mention a really good fuck. And, damn, she's so flippin' hot!"

"Yeah, she is, isn't she? How'd I get so lucky?" Caprice's tone reflected a delightful pride.

"She's damned lucky, too, my friend. Don't forget that."

"Thanks, Kel. Now I need to take that hot bath, a nap and recover."

"What? No dirty details?"

"Goodbye, Kelly," Caprice said, smiling. She closed her phone and relaxed.

Jarita dropped a load of files on Caprice's desk. "Mornin', Sunshine. These need to be entered into the database. Major Tedore would like them done before you leave tonight."

Caprice looked at the pile of folders. "Is he serious?"

"Have you ever known him to joke about anything?" Jarita asked. "That man is more rigid than his starched uniform."

Caprice sighed. "I'll do what I can but Colonel Enoch has pretty much planned my day for me with *his* paperwork and you know a light bird out ranks a gold oak leaf."

"I'll pass it on. So...how was your weekend?"

"It was perfect," Caprice said, with a quixotic expression on her face.

"Perfectly exhausting, it looks like. Did you sleep at all?" Jarita asked.

"Some," Caprice said, with mock indignation.

"Girl, you better be giving up some details at happy hour."

"Now, Jarita, you know I don't kiss and tell. But speaking of people who do, how was your date with -" she mouthed the word, "Shelly?"

"It was a lot of fun. We definitely have much more chemistry than you two did. We're going out again Wednesday night, to a movie."

"Nice! Well, you're a catch, Jarita. And I know your date is a good person. I hope it turns into something special."

"Thank you, Caprice. And right back at you."

They were both careful to make their conversation not to reveal the genders of their weekend dates. Although neither woman was in the military and did not fall under government restriction of sexual orientation discrimination, both women knew that to blatantly flaunt their sex lives in their work environment would be job suicide for both of them. Their employer could and, no doubt, would find some "legitimate" excuse to fire them if it became known that they were lesbians. The military and the commonwealth of Pennsylvania were not exactly accepting of what it considered an 'alternate' lifestyle.

When Colonel Enoch's nosy and gossipy assistant left the office on an errand, Caprice looked at Jarita. "So you really like her?"

"Oh, yeah. I knew I would. But, man, you never told me that her last name was like a lousy deal of tiles in Scrabble."

"It's pronounced like Jin-jill-less-key."

"But it's spelled like 'Vanna, can I please buy a vowel'." Jarita shook her head. "If we ever get married, she's taking my last name."

"Not so sure she's as marriage-ready as you are but I could be wrong."

"If she's not, I'll change her mind."

Well, if anyone has the charm to do it, it's you."

"Thanks. So are you sure I don't have any kissy, kissy, bang, bang tale to look forward to later on?"

Caprice laughed and blushed. "First, I won't be at happy hour later because I need to catch up on my sleep and second, all I'll say is that there was a lot of both going on, it was everything you would expect it to be and more and we're getting together again next weekend."

Jarita's face lit up. "She must really like you. Isn't she supposed to be in Philly? Isn't that her home base? If she's inviting you to spend time with her there, she must not have someone steady there. Wow, Caprice," Jarita was excited and tried to keep her voice as quiet as possible, "you might actually have the chance to have a relationship with your idol, instead of just being a fan fuck. How hot is that?"

"Jarita, she's not an idol...she's...she's been more like a fantasy come true."

"Again - how hot is that?"

Caprice nodded her head in agreement. "It's pretty hot." At that point, she still believed it was.

The week flew by and before Caprice knew it, it was Friday already. She had packed and kept her clothes in the car so that she could leave directly from work. She arranged to leave an hour early in case the traffic was heavy, as she wanted to be in Philadelphia, by show time, at the very latest.

She drove the Pennsylvania Turnpike, followed her GPS directions and made it to Hannah's apartment by 6:30. That left them three hours before they had to get to the bar for the first set. Caprice was starving and hoped Hannah had something prepared for dinner or an idea in mind of where to go for dinner.

Caprice was excited about seeing Hannah again and she felt the arousal in her loins. As she got out of the car and approached Hannah's door, her heart rate increased and so did her breathing. "Calm down, Caprice," she whispered to herself, "you'll get to that later." She took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" Hannah's voice asked from inside.

"Caprice."

The door opened and a hand gestured her inside. Caprice stepped inside and the door shut.

"Hey, babe," Hannah greeted, in a low, sexy tone. A naked Hannah pressed Caprice against the door and kissed her suddenly and passionately. "I missed you so much," Hannah breathed when she broke the kiss.

Caprice was a little startled by Hannah's immediate ardor and nudity. "I missed you, too."

Hannah kissed her again, an intense action meant to set both their libidos aflame. "I've been counting the minutes until you got here. I can't wait to get you back into bed." Hannah then took Caprice's hand and started to lead her to the bedroom.

Things were happening a little too fast for Caprice. "Uh, wait, I was..."

Hannah stopped and pulled Caprice into a tight embrace. "What? You're still attracted to me, aren't you?"

"Oh, God, Hannah, yes, very."

Hannah kissed her again and continued to pull Caprice to the bedroom. "Good. I'd hate for it to be another case of having fucked me for bragging rights."

The sentence at once surprised her and annoyed her. "I'm not like that. God, Hannah, if that's all it was, I wouldn't have agreed to come to Philly."

Hannah began to unbutton Caprice's shirt. Her tone of voice was placating. "Now, don't get defensive. You wouldn't believe how many times that has happened to me. I wasn't accusing you of anything, I was just making a statement."

Caprice was confused. She felt hurt by Hannah's assertion and a little overwhelmed at Hannah's hasty actions. "I, um, Hannah, wait...don't you want to, maybe get something to eat first?"

Hannah smirked and arched an eyebrow. "Oh, I know exactly what I want to dine on." She kissed, nibbled and licked Caprice's limited exposed skin. "Too many barriers. These things have to come off."

"But...I haven't..." Caprice could not fight her arousal. Her next words came out breathless. "Han...oh, Jesus..."

The surrender in Caprice's voice made Hannah more aggressive. She ripped the rest of Caprice's shirt off, yanked Caprice's sports bra over her head roughly and devoured a nipple. "God, you are so sexy."

Caprice tried to maintain rational thought. She was upset at the ripping of her shirt and the wrenching off of her bra and bewildered of feeling turned on. She had to admit that she was also a little frightened of Hannah's aggression. Her desire seemed to take on a life of its own and she's gasped at the attention her breasts received. "That was my favorite blouse..." was all she could think of to say.

"I'll buy you a new one." Hannah grabbed Caprice by the upper arms and threw her onto the bed. Before Caprice even settled from the bounce, Hannah climbed on her. "Pants off. Now!"

Caprice started to unzip her jeans but was clearly too slow for Hannah, who batted Caprice's hands away and completed the task herself. "God. Okay, okay." She placed a hand on Hannah's chest. "Are we role-playing again?"

Hannah's eyes were now a dark blue. She almost appeared to be irritated at Caprice stopping her momentum. "Role playing? Sure."

"Do you want me to pretend to fight you again?" Caprice asked.

Hannah did not answer her; she proceeded to hold Caprice down, enter her and pump away. With the exception of moans, sexual vulgarity and orgasmic cries of Caprice's name, Hannah did not speak until they were done. It did not seem to matter to Hannah that Caprice didn't really want to or wasn't ready, Hannah persevered until she was well sated and it was time to get ready for the evening.

Although she was ultimately satisfied, Caprice questioned herself for feeling a little upset. Sure, it was unexpected - at that precise moment, anyway - and Hannah's style was a bit more...determined...than Caprice had bargained for but, once again, she had experienced one of the most durable and gratifying climaxes ever so whatever Hannah did, it worked. If she could only shake feeling somewhat rattled.

Relax, she admonished herself. You just need to get used to Hannah's technique. You're too uptight, just like Kelly said.

Hannah interrupted Caprice's thoughts when she peeked her head out of the bathroom. "Come on, babe, we need to get a move on. We need to be out of here in an hour."

Caprice forced a smile and slid out of bed. She joined Hannah in her large, stand-up shower where Hannah initiated sex again, only this time Hannah was much more considerate and gentle. Caprice felt more relieved and less conflicted after that tender lovemaking session and, again, mentally chastised herself for her conservative views toward sex. *You're with Hannah Brishen, she reminded herself. There are plenty of women who would change places with you in a heartbeat. This is what you wanted. Be grateful, you damned fool.*

The night rest of the night went well. The band, especially Hannah, was well received in their home turf. Women made up a majority of the audience and after each break, Hannah was surrounded by the most determined potential suitors the second she stepped off stage. To Caprice's delight, Hannah was polite but firm in her refusal of invitations to join the women at their tables, in the bathroom or in the parking lot. Hannah gestured to where Caprice sat and always made her way to that table as soon as she could maneuver through the throng. Caprice had noticed that Hannah even seemed to rebuff women that she was clearly acquainted with (if their obvious, familiar body language was any indication) and was exclusively focused on Caprice. That made Caprice's ego inflate to be so envied and the seductive expression Hannah wore every time she looked at her caused her heart and lust to swell, also.

After the gig, Hannah mentioned several times that she was exhausted. Because of their rigorous escapades before the show and knowing the energy Hannah put out on stage, Caprice was not surprised. In fact, she was grateful when they got back to Hannah's apartment and they crawled into bed, both almost immediately falling asleep.

Caprice had been sound asleep when she groggily rose to consciousness in the middle of the night to the motion and action of Hannah between her legs. Hannah contentedly feasted on Caprice's center while Caprice slowly gained awareness of what was occurring.

"Hannah -? What's...what are you doing?" Caprice's voice was sluggish and raspy with sleep.

Hannah's response was to moan in pleasure and then push her fingers inside Caprice. Caprice jumped at the sudden action but quickly relaxed and began to move in rhythm with Hannah's hand. Caprice looked down at Hannah's bobbing head and the stimulation started to ignite her lower half. When Hannah's blue eyes swept upward and locked onto Caprice's, displaying a hunger of seemingly unattainable proportions, Caprice's head thudded back on the pillow and she involuntarily gave in to waves of pleasure that overtook her.

"Go back to sleep, baby," Hannah cooed, as she settled herself at Caprice's side. Hannah pulled her possessively close against her and before Caprice had come down from her orgasmic high, Hannah was sound asleep.

When Caprice woke up the next morning, Hannah was not in bed and the welcoming smell of fresh coffee hung in the air. Caprice remained in bed a few moments and tried to clearly recall the events of the middle of the night. She was disturbed and knew she had to say something to Hannah.

Caprice pulled on the t-shirt and panties she had worn to bed the night before. They had been in a heap across the bedroom. She entered the kitchen to see Hannah ready to pour herself a mug of coffee.

"Ah, you're up," Hannah said. "Coffee?"

"Sure," Caprice said and rubbed the remaining sleep from her eyes. She took a cup from Hannah and held it while Hannah poured.

"Cream? Sugar? Oh, that's right, just cream. You don't like sugar...at least not in your coffee," Hannah said, in a tone that reflected lustful intent.

"Right." She fixed her coffee and before she lost her nerve, she said, "Speaking of that...can we talk about last night?"

Hannah pulled the chair out for Caprice, Hannah sat opposite her at the table. "Mmmm...that was nice, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was very pleasurable but...Hannah...I was asleep." Caprice monitored her own tone to make sure she didn't sound indignant, despite the fact that she was still a little piqued.

Hannah reached over and took Caprice's hand. "I'm sorry, baby. I woke up hot and horny for you and you just looked so delicious lying next to me, I couldn't help myself. You sure didn't seem like you didn't want to." Hannah smiled lasciviously. "You were certainly wet enough for me..."

"Hannah...it's not that I don't want to have sex with you, it's just that, you know, I'd like to have a say in it before it starts." Hannah immediately looked hurt and tried to withdraw her hand but Caprice wouldn't let her. "You are so gorgeous and sexy and yes, you certainly make it easy for me to want you but..."

"But what? What's the problem?"

Caprice rubbed the pad of her thumb gently over the back of Hannah's hand. "The problem is you don't wait for my consent."

Hannah removed Caprice's hand and then stood up, upset. "You're my girlfriend. Isn't consent automatic?"

"To a point but -wait, I'm your girlfriend?" Caprice smiled, brightly. "Really?"

"Of course." Hannah sat back down, recaptured Caprice's hand and kissed it softly. "Did you think I would get this involved with you if you weren't?"

"I...wouldn't think so but we don't really know each other that well, other than in bed, that is."

Hannah kissed the inside of Caprice's wrist and smiled. "Bed is a good start. I mean, no sense wasting time if you're not compatible in the sack, you know?"

"If we weren't compatible in bed, you wouldn't give me a chance?" Caprice asked, curiously.

"No, I'm not saying that...okay, yeah, I guess I am. Well, nothing to worry about in this case, because we seem to click..." Hannah leaned across the table and kissed her. "...Everywhere."

Caprice watched Hannah get up from the table and leave the kitchen. She was now more flummoxed than before. How could she convince Hannah of what she was trying to tell her when Caprice wasn't even sure.

This time, in the shower, Caprice was ready for Hannah's advances. They gently washed each other after tender lovemaking and Hannah towed them both off when their shower was done. Their plan for the afternoon was to shop for a new shirt to replace the one Hannah had ruined the night before when she tore it off Caprice's body. The two women spent an enjoyable afternoon together, found the perfect blouse, went to dinner and returned to Hannah's, where they took a peaceful nap, wrapped up in each other's arms before they had to leave for the show that evening.

This was the kind of relationship Caprice wanted with Hannah; one that wasn't all about Hannah's needs, with a mutual respect for boundaries.

That solicitous side of Hannah lasted until the show ended that night.

Caprice dialed Kelly's number after she got home from Philadelphia. She tossed her clothes in the hamper, changed into her sleepwear, poured herself a glass of wine and relaxed on her couch. She was prepared to leave her friend a voice message when Kelly picked up.

"Hey, Kel."

"Hey, you're home. Just a second." Caprice could hear muffled conversation between Kelly and another woman. "Sorry about that."

"Company?" Caprice asked.

"Didi and Maggie dropped by to watch a movie. They said to say Hi."

"Tell them I said Hi back."

"They just left. So...another weekend with the goddess of hot. How did things go?"

"She's...she really is gorgeous..." Caprice said, hesitantly.

"And? Don't tell me there's trouble in paradise already."

"No, not trouble but..."

"But...?"

"I really like her, Kel, but I she's a little, um, different."

"More different than the rough sex?"

Caprice sighed. "That's kind of it. It's all about the sex with her."

"And that's a problem because...?"

Caprice could hear the smile in Kelly's voice. "It's not a problem, per se -"

"You said the sex was really good," Kelly reminded her.

"It is. It's great, actually, but she thinks she's automatically entitled to it because I'm her girlfriend."

"She's calling you her girlfriend?" Kelly asked, excitedly.

"Yeah," Caprice said, and chuckled at the thrill in Kelly's voice.

"Omigod, Caprice! You're Hannah Brishen's girlfriend! Do you realize how impossibly cool that is?"

"Yes, I know. You're missing my point, though..."

"The point, my dear, is that you are now the girlfriend of the hottest woman this side of the Mason-Dixon! Who cares if all she wants is sex? There are worse things, you know!"

Caprice could almost feel Kelly's frustration with her and Kelly's reprimanding tone made Caprice back off. "Yeah. Yeah, you're right."

"You've got yourself a high octane knockout in your bed, sweetie. Go with it or get out of the way because if you don't want what she's offering, I'll take it."

A surge of jealousy streaked through Caprice even though she knew Kelly would never hone in on her 'territory.' Kelly was right. Caprice needed to stop whining about her own sexual naiveté and embrace the fact that she was with a woman *everybody* seemed to covet. After all, it was just some rough sex and when Caprice relaxed, she got great benefit from Hannah's aggression. "No, no, now, behave. I've just never been with anyone who's had so much...endurance."

"It's true, Caprice, that's all it is. You're used to the mild mannered conquests. That gets old and boring for me and I think it would for you, too. Enjoy the wild ride while it lasts."

"I am."

"You don't sound convinced."

"It's new, Kel. I still think I might be in the disbelieving phase."

"Oh, hey, since you two are a couple, you should bring her to Sarah's big cookout next Sunday afternoon. How great would that be? I know we'd all like to get to know her offstage. And then everyone will see you together, you know? That'll shut Sarah up about always having one up on everyone. And she's a huge, *huge* Hannah Brishen fan."

Caprice was dubious. "I don't know. That's kind of using her and I don't want to do that. She has a thing about someone being with her because of who she is, not because they really want to be with her for her."

"If you two are a couple, that's not using her. She should meet your friends. If she invited you someplace to meet her friends, wouldn't you want to go?"

"I've already met her friends: all the guys in the band. She moves around too much to have a lot of friends and her job is a transient one."

"Did you resent having to spend time around the band when they weren't performing?"

"No, of course not."

"Then asking her to a cookout where your friends will be will not be using her."

"You're right. I'll ask her."

"Good. For a minute I thought you were going to keep her all to yourself. You've been coming up on a month with her and none of us have really met her yet."

"It hasn't been a month...has it?"

"As of next weekend, it has. Time flies when you're having fun, eh?"

The new couple spoke with each other frequently by phone during the week. Conversations were idyllic and sexy and Caprice was revitalized by it. She replayed Kelly's words in her head and decided that her oldest friend was correct; Caprice needed to welcome this new adventure and enjoy the rewards from it. Reservations aside, Caprice was quickly falling for the erotically tantalizing Hannah Brishen. By the time Friday afternoon rolled around, Caprice couldn't wait to get back to Philly to be with her woman again.

This time when Caprice knocked on Hannah's door, Hannah was ready to go out to dinner. Caprice was in the apartment long enough to place her overnight bag in the bedroom and receive a fiery hot kiss from her lover. It was Caprice who suggested they skip dinner but Hannah told her she had reservations someplace special to celebrate their one-month anniversary.

Caprice was thrilled that Hannah had remembered and when they reached the restaurant, she was led to a table that had a rose and baby's breath in a vase, two tapered candles and a bottle of champagne, chilled in a bucket of ice.

When they were seated, Caprice's hands went to both sides of her face. She was stunned and appreciative of Hannah's thoughtful gesture. "Oh, Hannah...this is beautiful. Thank you so much."

Caprice was sure Hannah blushed. She put her head down and then glanced back up at Caprice. "You like?"

"I love." She took both Hannah's hands in hers. "This is so romantic."

Hannah's smile could have lit up the room. "I know it's only been a month but, Caprice, you're so beautiful and you're everything I've ever looked for in a woman. I'd like us to be exclusive."

Caprice's eyes went wide. First, she thought they already were and second, she wasn't sure exactly what Hannah was asking. "We are exclusive, sweetheart. I mean, I have been. I haven't seen anyone since I've been with you. Have you been dating anyone else?"

"No, no, I've been faithful to you. I just wanted to tell you that. I was pretty sure you weren't seeing anyone else but if you were, I was hoping it that would stop as of tonight."

"No worries, my love. I am yours."

Fortunately, they were in a lesbian-owned establishment whose patrons were also gay, so when Hannah leaned in and kissed Caprice long and hard, neither had to worry about possible homophobic repercussions. Hannah broke away and kept her face close to Caprice's. "I'd like you to stay mine. For as long as you can." Hannah kissed Caprice on the cheek and sat back in her chair. She appeared to be very proud of herself.

"Wow, Hannah," Caprice said, quietly, suddenly understanding. "Monogamy is a new thing for you, isn't it? That's why this is so important."

"Yeah," Hannah said and nodded. "Yeah, it is. I've never met anyone I've wanted to be with exclusively before you."

When she saw Hannah's eyes glisten, her own teared up. She took Hannah's face in her hands and kissed her soundly. "I am so honored and so lucky."

Hannah reached in her blazer pocket and pulled out a small wrapped box. "Here. I got this for you."

Caprice accepted the present and looked at Hannah, surprised. "I'm so sorry...I didn't get you anything," she said, regretfully.

"You didn't have to, baby. You're my gift."

Caprice removed the gift-wrap to see a velvet-covered box. She suspected it contained a ring of some sort and she swallowed her panic. *It's way too soon for a token that serious.* She was relieved when she opened it to find a delicate gold necklace with a G-clef symbol dangling from it. "Hannah, it's beautiful. Thank you."

"Let me put it on you." Hannah took the necklace from Caprice and fastened it around her neck. She leaned around, kissed Caprice again and sat back down. "It's so you'll think of me every time you look at it."

Caprice fingered the symbol and smiled. "I already think of you every second of the day as it is."

"That's all?" Hannah kidded. She signaled the waiter over.

"Shall I open the champagne, Ms. Brishen?" He was nervous. When Hannah nodded, his hands were shaking so bad that he nearly dropped the bottle.

"Dude, you're opening champagne, not diffusing a bomb," Hannah said and chuckled.

"Sorry. It's only my second night and I've never done this before," he confessed.

Hannah smiled and took the bottle from him. "Watch a pro." She removed the foil and the wire cage from the cork. She placed the towel over the top of the bottle, got a good grip on the cork and twisted the fat part of the bottle until she heard the little pop sound that indicated the carbon

dioxide escaped. She handed the towel and the cork to the waiter and poured two glasses of champagne. She set the bottle back in the bucket. She looked up to see two impressed faces staring at her. Hannah shrugged. "What? I looked it up online."

Caprice laughed and the server groaned.

"Do you know what you'd like to order or should I come back?"

"What are your specials tonight?" Hannah asked and winked at Caprice.

The server took two lists out of his breast pocket and handed them to both women. He then recited the mouth-watering entrees and left the women to ponder the menus.

Hannah and Caprice's weekend was extraordinarily loving and magical. Hannah behaved magnanimously toward Caprice the entire time spent in Philadelphia.

This time when Caprice called Kelly, she would definitely have no complaints.

Caprice had broached the subject of Sarah's cookout on Saturday morning before they both got out of bed. Hannah agreed to go and said she was pleased for the opportunity to meet Caprice's friends in a leisurely setting. She arranged to follow Caprice back to her home and then she could drive back to Philly on Monday.

The gathering at Sarah's seemed to be a success for the new couple. Caprice and Hannah arrived after the party had started but it took no time at all for both women to become as relaxed as everyone else appeared to be. Caprice watched Hannah be her charming and sexy self and was pleased that she was so accommodating about the gushing of her inebriated friends.

She also really liked how lovingly demonstrative Hannah was toward her. Caprice felt that showed those attendees who doubted the relationship was real that Hannah was not just a casual date but that they were, indeed, involved. She felt grateful, however, when her friends stopped fawning over her girlfriend and began to treat Hannah like she had always been a part of the circle.

Hours later, just after Sarah had lit the backyard fire pit, Caprice decided that she'd had enough to drink and didn't want to over do it. She did not want to be hungover at work the next morning and definitely wanted some play time with Hannah before sleep.

She leaned over and said to Hannah, "How about we call it a night and go back to my place?"

Hannah grinned at her and captured her lips in a gentle kiss. She held up her empty bottle. "One more and I promise we'll go. I'm just really enjoying this fire and your friends."

"I have beer at home," Caprice offered.

Hannah pursed her lips in a pout. "Just one more here?"

Caprice smiled. "Sure." As Hannah stood up, Caprice took her hand. "I'm glad you like my friends. They certainly like you."

"I know that's important to you," Hannah said. She tossed her empty bottle in the recycle bin and headed for Sarah's shed to get another beer from the bottles left in the iced tub. She entered the shed and rummaged around the ice-cold water for one more beer. As she grabbed a bottle, she heard a conversation between two women around the corner.

"So what do you think of Caprice's new girlfriend?"

Hannah recognized that voice as Caprice's friend, Kelly.

"Oh, please. Girlfriend, my ass. Isn't it obvious? Caprice is only with her and brought her here to make me feel bad. She knows I've had a thing for Hannah for years. She's always been competitive when it comes to me. She just brought her here as payback for Vanessa leaving her for me all those years ago." The second voice was that of Sarah, the hostess.

Hannah heard Kelly laugh. She left the shed, unnoticed, without the beer. She walked away from the conversation before she heard Kelly say, "You're insane, you know that, Sarah? I can tell you honestly that Caprice and Hannah are the real thing and that you - and getting even with you - is the last thing on her mind. And, don't flatter yourself; Caprice and Vanessa were ready to call it quits long before you came along. Caprice isn't the one with the competition problem, Sarah. You are."

Caprice knew something was terribly wrong but she couldn't pry out of Hannah what it was. First, Hannah returned from the shed without a beer and told her they were leaving immediately and didn't say a word all the way to the car. Second, Hannah let her drive, which never happened, then ignored Caprice and just looked out the window, silently seething until they got to Caprice's row house apartment.

As soon as the door was shut and locked, Hannah slapped Caprice suddenly and fiercely across the face with an open hand. The force of the blow knocked Caprice back against the door. Before Caprice could react, Hannah grabbed Caprice, held her head steadily in her hands and forced Caprice to look at her. "I thought we agreed that you weren't fucking me for bragging rights!" Hannah finally screamed at her.

Caprice was furious and frightened. There were tears in her eyes from the sting and shock of the slap. She struggled to get out of Hannah's grip but she couldn't. Hannah was too strong and her anger only seemed to make her strength more potent. Caprice grabbed Hannah's wrists and finally wrenched Hannah's hands off her face. "What is wrong with you? Why did you hit me like that?"

"I don't like being used," Hannah spit out. Her jaw was set and the hostility in her eyes was spine-chilling.

"What are you talking about?" Caprice was desperate to understand what had just happened. Hannah slammed her sideways, against the wall, which knocked the wind out of Caprice. When she caught her breath she yelled, "Stop it, you're scaring me!"

Hannah leaned toward her, threateningly. "You should be scared. Scared of losing me. You ever do that to me again and I'm gone." Hannah backed off and started to move away.

Caprice's outrage at that remark overrode her common sense and she grabbed Hannah by the arm. "I don't know what I've done but if you ever hit me again, you're right. You are gone!"

Hannah turned around and took a fistful of Caprice's hair. She proceeded to drag Caprice down the hall. "Oh, *really?* You'd leave *me?*" There was an incredulous tone to Hannah's voice. It made her sound even more sinister.

"Let me go! Jesus, Hannah, you're hurting me!" Caprice fought to get free of her, to no avail.

Without another word and what seemed like little effort, Hannah deflected the swats and flailing arms and threw Caprice on the bed. No matter how hard Caprice tried to get free, Hannah was clearly stronger and evidently empowered by Caprice's actions. Hannah straddled Caprice, settled her knees on Caprice's arms and then sat back, rendering Caprice's legs immobile.

"What are you doing? Stop! Hannah, no! Please stop!" It was as though she was now detached from her body and the voice she heard plead was that of a helpless stranger. Caprice was not helpless and once again attempted to break free to get out of what she suspected was about to happen. The woman that sat astride her was now also a stranger...a dangerous one.

Hannah cuffed Caprice a couple more times until Caprice stopped twisting and squirming. Caprice was now almost paralyzed by fear. That and frustration caused her to begin to cry, especially when Hannah tore off all of Caprice's clothes.

"Please, Hannah...please don't do this..." Caprice's cries were now anguished whispers. They fell on deaf ears.

Hannah put one hand on Caprice's throat and viciously entered her with the four fingers of the other. Caprice cried out with the sharp pain that accompanied that first thrust. Caprice was not prepared for the invasion and the continued forceful pumping was agonizing as Hannah positioned herself so that she could ride Caprice's thigh at the same time. Hannah removed her hand from Caprice's neck and used her forearm to cross over Caprice's upper arms to keep Caprice from moving.

The grunting noises that matched Hannah's rhythm repulsed Caprice. *This can't be happening*, Caprice thought, panicked. Four fingers inside her were too much and she suffered each torturous push as the agony drove her to nearly blackout. There was nothing sexy or passionate

about what was happening so no one was more disgustingly surprised than she was when she began to feel the rumblings of an orgasm in her loins. She fought the urge but Hannah alerted on her breathing changes and she knew exactly where to touch Caprice to make her respond.

When Caprice reluctantly climaxed, she did so as quietly as possible. The last thing she wanted to do was encourage Hannah to continue or make her think this was something Caprice enjoyed. She was horrified at her body's betrayal, which now added to her shame.

Finally, Hannah harnessed whatever pleasure she got from the assault, exploded in her own orgasm and collapsed heavily on top of Caprice. Hannah perspired profusely and gasped for air.

The room was suddenly still. The only sound was Hannah's heavy breathing and Caprice's sobbing. Hannah was still on top of Caprice and slowly rose out of her trance. Caprice's crying began to affect Hannah and her reaction was one of unexpected comfort. Hannah kissed Caprice's head and face gently and spoke to her in a soothing tone. Hannah relaxed her death grip on Caprice and held her, reassuringly.

"Shhhh, shhhh, it's okay, baby. It'll be okay. I'm sorry I hit you. I'm so sorry. I overreacted. I just get a little crazy sometimes if I think someone I love is using me. I should have known better. I'll never hit you again, I promise." Hannah smoothed Caprice's damp hair and continued to kiss her on the side of her head.

Caprice couldn't believe what she was hearing. No apology for sexually assaulting her, not even an acknowledgement of it. "Y-you hurt m-me," Caprice managed to get out between sobs.

"I know, I know, baby, and I'm sorry." Hannah positioned herself so that she could cradle Caprice and console her better. "It was wrong for me to hit you."

"You raped me," Caprice said, quietly. Even as the words slipped from her mouth, they sounded surreal.

Hannah raised her head and regarded Caprice with what sounded like genuine shock. "I what? What are you talking about? I can't rape you; I'm a woman. We had make-up sex, baby. Yeah, it was a little rough but I thought that's how you liked it now." Hannah's voice continued to hold a soothing quality that Caprice found sickening.

As Hannah began to rock her, Caprice shook her head in protest, "No, that's not what it was." She realized that her words might provoke another outburst from Hannah so she clutched Hannah's arms close to her chest, hoping Hannah did not react angrily. "You beat me up, then you forced me to have sex with you."

Hannah interpreted Hannah's holding her arm as 'loving'. "Shhh, no, no, baby, I didn't. I reacted badly to the thought of being arm candy at your friend's house. I hit you a couple times and I admit that was wrong. But I didn't beat you up and I certainly didn't force you to do anything. You were more than ready for me, remember? You came. Didn't seem forced to me."

The reminder that Caprice had climaxed provoked another racking sob to escape. Caprice shook her head. "I was fighting you! I was telling you to stop!"

"That's how we usually play, babe."

Caprice continued to cry as she was now totally humiliated and confused. She could not pretend that her body didn't react to some of Hannah's actions. What did that mean? Did Hannah really rape her or did Hannah misinterpret her response as their normal sex play?

"Baby, you can't do this...you can't get me all hot and bothered and suddenly remember that you're mad at me and change your mind in the middle and turn around and call it rape. First of all, I can't rape you; I don't have the equipment and second, if it was a little too rough, I was only taking my cues from your struggling."

"I need to take a shower," Caprice said, in a barely audible voice.

Hannah released her and started to get up with her. "I'll take one with you."

"No!" Caprice whirled and put up her hand in a halting motion. She willed herself to calm down. "Please, no, Hannah. I'm...very sore and I'd like to take a shower alone."

"I promise I won't do anything but wash your back," Hannah assured her. She held out her hand to Caprice.

Caprice did not want a repeat of what just happened and was terrified of invoking Hannah's wrath again. She nodded and took Hannah's hand.

Mercifully, Hannah kept her promise and when they left the shower, Caprice went back to bed while Hannah went to the kitchen to make herself a snack.

When Hannah crawled back into bed, she curled her body around Caprice's and fell sound asleep. Caprice wept most of the night.

The next morning, Hannah behaved like nothing at all had happened. She was bright and cheerful and brewed a pot of coffee. She brought Caprice a cup and sat on the edge of the bed while Caprice sipped at the hot beverage.

Caprice had called in sick and told Hannah she didn't feel well to which Hannah stated that she couldn't risk contracting anything that would affect her singing voice. Hannah left Caprice with a tender kiss and an "I'll call you," and left for Philadelphia.

Caprice finally picked up her ringing cell phone before she knew the call would go to voicemail. The caller ID once again told her it was Kelly.

"Hi." Caprice said.

"Good Lord, Caprice, where the hell have you been? You haven't returned any of my calls and Jarita says you've called in sick for 3 days. Did you get sick off something at the cookout?" Her tone then became teasing. "Or did Hannah wear you out?"

"That's not funny, Kelly," Caprice said, defensively.

"Hey, hey... what's that about? I was joking. Jeez. Did she really wear you out?" Kelly didn't wait for an answer. "She was such a hit at the cookout. And she's so nice! We all thought she'd be kind of a snob, you know, because we thought her ego from all that attention she gets would be ginormous but, damn, woman, she really is *all that*."

Caprice's head started to pound. "Kelly...I, um...something happened after we got back here on Sunday..."

"What? Did you two have a fight? You guys seemed fine -"

"She got upset because she thought I was using her, that I brought her to the party just to show her off." Just the thought of having to recall and talk about this raised Caprice's anxiety level.

"Well, you did."

Kelly's response did not help, which got Caprice more agitated. "No! I didn't! *You* were the one who said that's the reason I should bring her -"

"Wait - why are you getting so upset and defensive?"

Caprice's voice broke when she said, "Because she was so angry, she hit me and -"

"She hit you? Oh, Caprice, that's not good. That's not good at all." Now Kelly sounded appropriately concerned.

"It gets worse."

"Worse? How?"

"Kelly, she raped me. She was so mad, she raped me."

There was dead silence on Kelly's end of the phone. Then there was a disbelieving laugh. "Rape? Caprice... Hannah's a woman, she can't rape you."

"She can and she did!" Caprice tried not to cry even though tears slipped down her cheeks.

"Caprice...come on...women don't, can't rape other women. I wasn't there, I don't know what happened but it sounds to me just like angry, make-up sex. And that can be pretty hot." Kelly sounded patronizing and that confused Caprice.

"There was nothing hot about what she did to me, Kelly."

"Are you sure you're not overreacting? You said she likes it rough, maybe she just got a little carried away. Did it, you know, hurt?"

"Yes, it hurt! And I bled."

"Okay, well next time, tell her not to do you so hard. You're just a little embarrassed, that's all. It's okay, Caprice. The first time I was tied up, I was mortified by how much I loved it, I -"

"God, Kelly, it's not the same thing!"

"Right. I understand. So what has she said about your, uh, rough encounter?"

"The same as you, that I misunderstood."

"Then I would say that's probably exactly what happened."

Now there was silence on Caprice's end. Finally she cleared her voice and spoke. "I don't believe you, Kelly. I tell you something traumatic happened to me and you gloss it over just like Hannah did."

"Caprice, I don't doubt that it was traumatic because you're not used to rough play. You just need to change your attitude about it. You liked it initially and now she's taking it another step further to see how dark she should go. Fine, it didn't work, you didn't like it, now she knows and she probably won't go there again. Fucking A, Caprice, you're dating the hottest woman on the planet. Everybody wants to be in your shoes, don't look this particular gift horse in the mouth."

Caprice was stunned that Kelly actually sounded angry with her. "Kelly, I have to go." Before Kelly could respond, Caprice hung up.

Is it me? Did I misinterpret it? Did I send Hannah the wrong signals?

She was more confused now than ever.

The next day, Caprice went to work. She wore a turtleneck sweater to hide the fading finger marks on her throat. She couldn't do much about the bruise on her cheekbone but she was sure she could explain that away.

Jarita's concern was sincere but Caprice did not want to run the risk of sounding like a fool again, like Kelly had made her feel. When the inevitable question about what happened was asked, Caprice said she had been distracted and misjudged turning a corner and ran right into it, face first. Since Caprice did have a clumsy side, especially when she wasn't paying attention, Jarita bought it.

For the two days she worked that week, Caprice fended off the kidding about her alleged gracelessness with, "You should see the other guy."

That night, she decided to answer Hannah's call to her cell phone. It was strange hearing Hannah's seductive voice again. It conjured up mixed feelings of doubt and desire. Caprice doubted herself for calling what happened the week before 'rape' and desired the relationship she and Hannah had before the 'really rough sex' incident. Caprice felt detached and disoriented.

"Hey, sweetheart, I've called, sent texts and emails and I haven't heard from you. Everything okay?" Hannah's sincerity sounded upfront.

"I...I'm not sure...Hannah, I -"

"Are you still upset about last weekend? Baby, I told you, I'm sorry I hit you. I won't do it again. Let me make it up to you, please? I'm not working tomorrow night. How about I drive over and you pick the place and we'll have a nice romantic dinner and I'll remind you how tender I can be. Please? Baby, do you know how much I love you?"

"You love me?" This just added to Caprice's confusion.

"Very much. Give me a chance to make it up to you." At Caprice's hesitation, Hannah said, "Listen, we can just go to dinner and talk, okay? If I can't convince you that I love you and I'll never hurt you again, then I will leave afterward and drive back to Philadelphia."

"Hannah, I...um, okay. I'd like to go out to dinner and talk about things." *I need to understand. I need to determine if it's is me or you.*

Hannah sounded thrilled. "Great! You tell me what time and I will be there."

"How about six? That gives me a chance to get home from work, relax a little, shower and get ready." Caprice wanted to be more enthusiastic but she just couldn't muster it. She was involuntarily apprehensive about seeing Hannah again.

Hannah arrived at Caprice's door at exactly six o'clock, dressed uncharacteristically conservative as opposed to her usual rock-star appearance. Her black hair was elegantly pulled back away from her face and tied neatly in a ponytail, her usually outlandish make up was toned down to modest and she wore a stylish but subtle navy blue pantsuit. When Caprice opened the door, it was like looking at a subdued businesswoman look-alike of her girlfriend.

Hannah's dazzling, white smile prompted a shy grin from Caprice. From behind her back, Hannah produced a bouquet of fifteen white roses and held them out to Caprice.

"They're beautiful, Hannah, thank you." Caprice accepted the bouquet and gestured Hannah inside so that she could put the roses in a vase. She knew the significance of fifteen roses meant the giver was truly sorry and was asking forgiveness. The color indicated that Hannah's intentions were worthy.

Hannah reached over to touch the fading green and yellow bruise on Caprice's cheek, then retracted her hand. "God, Caprice, I am so sorry."

"We'll talk over dinner," Caprice told her.

Hannah waited patiently in the living room while Caprice finished with the flowers, grabbed her jacket and declared she was ready to go.

It obviously surprised Hannah that Caprice insisted on taking two cars but she didn't balk at Caprice's logic. If they ended the evening apart, it would be easier for Hannah to get on the turnpike from the restaurant than to have to drive all the way back to Caprice's place, then backtrack to Interstate 76.

Hannah followed Caprice to an upscale restaurant in downtown Harrisburg that was a converted firehouse. They were seated on the second floor at a table that was somewhat secluded in the corner. Hannah ordered a bottle of Shiraz and the two women waited to speak until the first glasses were poured and the food was ordered.

"Tell me what I need to do to make this right," Hannah said, earnestly.

Caprice took a deep breath and slowly let it out. She looked directly into Hannah's eyes. "Don't ever do that to me again."

Hannah looked down in a moment of compliance, then reengaged Caprice. "I can't apologize enough for hitting you."

"It's not just about that and you know it."

"Baby, I had no idea. I now understand you aren't ready to be as, um, daring as I thought you were. I thought you were comfortable with what we were doing and I realize now that you're not there yet."

Caprice started to shake her head before Hannah had finished speaking. "How could you think - after you hit me and dragged me down the hall by my hair - that it was suddenly okay to be sexual?"

"I told you, remember? I was taking my cues from you. You started doing that resisting thing that you do when we, you know, play around and I just thought...well, clearly there was a miscommunication."

"Clearly." Caprice folded her arms across her chest. It took everything she had to hold it together.

"Caprice, please give me another chance. I won't take your discomfort for granted. I'll be however you want me to be. You want gentle, I'll be gentle. When, *if*, you want more, you just let me know. Please don't send me back to Philly tonight...at least, not alone."

Their food orders arrived and were placed before them. When the server left them alone again, Caprice picked up her fork and looked over at Hannah. "I'm willing to try again because my feelings for you are very deep." *And I'm not ready to believe what I thought happened, really happened.*

Hannah reacted with a "Yes!" that caused the entire second floor occupants to look at them. Seconds later, everyone had returned their attention to their own tables.

Caprice held up her index finger to indicate she wasn't finished. "But...if it happens again, there will not be a third time. Are we clear on that because I want to make sure there is no miscommunication here."

"One hundred percent clear," Hannah said, excitedly. "Thank you, baby." She reached across the table and squeezed Caprice's hand. "I won't disappoint you again."

Caprice couldn't help but smile at Hannah's contagious exuberance. She prayed she had made the right decision.

After dinner, the women went for a leisurely stroll and then decided to go to a movie. Caprice loved that Hannah had taken her out on a real date and Hannah's behavior was impeccable. She even asked Caprice if she could hold her hand once they were in the dark theater, as opposed to just grabbing it without permission.

When they got back to Caprice's apartment, Hannah waited to be invited to Caprice's bedroom and let Caprice dictate what, if anything, happened between them. At first, Caprice was a little shaky and asked if Hannah minded just holding her. Hannah told her that she would do whatever she wanted. An hour or so of drawing light circles on her back and shoulders with the tips of her fingers, Hannah's warm, adoring but sexless touch drove Caprice to near madness until Caprice rolled over into Hannah.

Hannah looked at Caprice quizzically.

"Let me make love to you, Hannah," she whispered.

"Of course, baby," Hannah said. When Caprice didn't move but continued to stare at her, Hannah asked, "What?"

"Let me be on top." Caprice was quiet in her request.

Hannah was hesitant but smirked and turned to rest on her back. She pulled Caprice on top of her. "I would be honored," Hannah told her, with an expression that made Caprice's heart melt.

True to her word, Hannah allowed Caprice free reign of her body and never once tried to take over or speed up the pace. Caprice was a generous lover and performed uninhibited acts of love, each one gradually ratcheting up Hannah's temperature. Caprice did her best to satisfy Hannah but Hannah never reached orgasm.

That frustrated Caprice but it was soon forgotten when Hannah received permission to make love to Caprice. Hannah was careful to not repeat anything in the same manner of any acts that had occurred the week before. Hannah was thoughtful and thorough in her ministrations and finally climaxed through self-stimulation only moments after Caprice had reached orgasm.

They awoke the next morning wrapped in each other's arms. Hannah insisted that Caprice stay in bed while she made her breakfast. Twenty minutes later Caprice was presented with a tray that held toast, coffee and scrambled eggs with cheese. Hannah removed the tray when Caprice was done, washed, dried and put away all the dishes and then drew them a bubble bath.

Sitting in the tub, Caprice leaned her back against Hannah's front while Hannah bathed her. It was much more a sensual gesture than a sexual one. When they were both relaxed and clean, they went back to bed and satisfied each other one more time before Hannah had to leave. She had to be back in Philadelphia that night for an acoustic gig at a café. It was just going to be her and Joey, with his 12-string Washburn.

She asked Caprice to come back with her but because Caprice had missed so many days of work, she volunteered to go into the office on Sunday to catch up.

Hannah left her with an intense kiss and the promise that it would all be okay.

The second Caprice heard Hannah drive away, she missed her. She hugged herself, suddenly feeling the absence of Hannah's strong arms around her. She reminisced about the weekend. *This* was the woman she wanted to be with, *this* was the romance she wanted. She still could not explain away the previous weekend but, hopefully, it was all behind her.

"Ah...so you're speaking to me again?" Kelly asked. There was a trace a humor in her tone.

"I'm sorry I hung up on you. You pissed me off, though."

"Why because I told you how it really is?"

"Don't be smug. It's unbecoming."

"So what happened? Did you and Hannah work things out?"

"We are working on working things out and so far, so good. She understands now that when she's too aggressive, it doesn't work for me."

"Well, not yet, anyway," Kelly said and laughed. "I know she's playing at Matrika's again this weekend. I assume she will stay with you."

"You assume correctly."

"Ask her if we can all be her guest and sit at the band table?"

"Tell you what...I'll get there when the band does and I will reserve a table up front."

"Nice. Will she still come sit with us during breaks?"

"She will come sit with me. If I am at that table then that's where she'll be."

Not an evening went by that Caprice and Hannah didn't either talk on the phone or chat online. The romance heated up again and Caprice was thrilled to have the relationship back on track. The 'incident' two weekends ago was a bad memory that she was quickly putting behind her.

Friday afternoon, after work, Caprice drove to Matrika's to find the band had already set up and were doing sound checks. Hannah was onstage when Caprice entered the bar and the singer's face lit up when she saw her. Caprice reciprocated in kind. Hannah jumped off stage, wrapped Caprice in an embrace, dipped her and kissed her in a grand gesture. The boys hooted and whistled and even Dobie cracked a smile.

While Hannah and the band finished their sound check, Caprice picked out a table in front and marked it as 'reserved.' She then sat with Bill, the sound man, as he adjusted the levels to just the right decibels. When the resonance was exactly where they needed it to be, the band broke for supper.

Hannah grabbed Caprice around the waist from behind and pulled her close. "Want to go back to your place for the next couple of hours?" Hannah whispered into Caprice's ear.

Caprice leaned back into Hannah's embrace and smiled. "I am starving so...how about we stop and get Chinese, bring it home and then whatever time we have left..."

"Works for me."

Caprice had called Kelly and told her where the reserved table was and asked her to call the others and advise them. She and Hannah were just barely going to make it back to the club before the band was scheduled to start.

They ran in to Matrika's through the back band entrance and Hannah's band mates were not happy.

"Christ, Hannah, nothing like cutting it down to the last second," Dobie said, amid the muttering of the others.

"Hey, I'm here now."

Joey looked at his watch. "We should have been onstage five minutes ago."

"So we'll play five minutes over on a set," Hannah said.

"I swear you're like a horny weasel, Brishen," Dobie said and shook his head. He and the others left the room.

Hannah took Caprice's face in her hands and kissed her deeply. "I love you, baby. I'll be singing to you tonight."

"Love you, too," Caprice told her and meant it. What she and the singer had shared back at the apartment had been heavenly. She knew she would join her friends at the table with a permanent blush on her face. It seemed as though all she and Hannah did involved sex and her friends knew it. Hannah smacked Caprice playfully on the bottom when Caprice started to leave the room. Caprice heard the introductory chords of the first song and shouted to Hannah, "Give 'em hell!"

Hannah nodded with a grin. She winked at Caprice and jogged by her and out front to take her place on stage.

The crowd cheered and Hannah broke into song. Caprice walked out and over to her table of friends. She took a seat between Kelly and Jarita.

Kelly leaned over to Caprice. "Now that's a look of someone who was freshly fucked." Caprice blushed even more. "I take it you two have worked things out?"

"Oh, yeah," Caprice said. She looked up at Hannah and nearly melted under the heat of her gaze. She had never met anyone as sexually charged and ready as Hannah.

"Good Lord," Kelly said. "You two keep that up the entire night and I'm going to order a bucket of ice to sit on."

She wanted to tell Kelly that they worked it out but that didn't mean that she had forgotten Hannah's angry actions. She had forgiven her but Hannah was on a warning. Kelly would not have understood those boundaries, she would have made Caprice feel inadequate and

unsophisticated. She would have reminded Caprice of Hannah's profound desirability and that Caprice should accept the singer, flaws and all, because there would always be someone waiting in line behind her to take her place.

During the breaks, Hannah would return to the band room with the guys, then come back out to the table to sit with Caprice and her friends. Hannah's affectionate behavior with Caprice did not deter other women from approaching Hannah to openly flirt or proposition her. Caprice watched with admiration and amusement as Hannah diplomatically fended off all advances.

After the second set had begun, the third song was a ballad. As couples took to the dance floor, Hannah stepped off the stage, walked over to the table and extended her hand to Caprice. While they danced slowly, Hannah held her with one arm and sang directly to her. When the song was finished, Hannah leaned in and gently kissed Caprice and escorted her back to the table before she returned to the stage to growl out the next raucous rock song.

"Oh my God, Caprice, that was the most romantic thing I've ever seen," Jarita told her, fanning herself. She shouted over the music to be heard. Caprice had to agree. It was definitely romantic and unexpected.

Later, in the early hours of the morning, Caprice and Hannah engaged in positive pillow talk regarding the direction their relationship seemed to be headed. Hannah's declarations of love and devotion had been bolstered by her earlier conduct with the randy women in the bar. Hannah had certainly, sincerely done her best lately to make Caprice feel special.

Hannah was insatiable Friday night to Saturday morning, to the point where the couple slept most of the day and only got up in time to shower, feed themselves and get to the bar.

Caprice was so used to the set songs that she knew every musical number before the band started to play. Her favorite was still "Mission of Mercy" but since the slow dance the night before, the one that told the whole bar that she and Hannah were together, she had become quite fond of Hannah's cover of Trisha Yearwood's "Down On My Knees."

The only friend of Caprice's to show up on Saturday night was Jarita and that was due to Jarita's new girlfriend, Shelly, being on duty. Once again, Hannah invited Caprice up to dance during "Down On My Knees," and Hannah's eyes never left Caprice's the duration of the song.

"If anyone had any inclination toward Hannah before that song, they surely won't have it after," Jarita told Caprice after she sat back down. "That woman only has eyes for you."

Caprice grinned coyly at Jarita. "Whoda thunkit, huh?" Caprice joked.

Jarita reached over and rubbed Caprice's shoulder. "It's about time. I know how long you've wanted this. Everyone should have their fantasies come true."

"Well...not everyone whose fantasies involve Hannah," Caprice said.

"Point made," Jarita said.

Hannah sat with them during her breaks and the intensity between the two women almost made Jarita feel as though she was intruding.

The last set, during Hannah's third song, Caprice felt a tap on her shoulder. She looked up and saw Vanessa, her first serious girlfriend, standing behind her. Caprice stood up and gave Vanessa a hug, a gesture that was not missed by Hannah.

Vanessa was clearly drunk and held onto Caprice longer than was comfortable. She tried a few times to kiss Caprice on the lips but Caprice was able to prevent it. Vanessa continued to hang on to Caprice and Caprice finally persuaded Vanessa to sit down before she fell down. Vanessa could not seem to keep her hands off Caprice.

"Talked to Sarah," Vanessa said, as she leaned in close to be heard. "She said you're in love."

"I'm sure leaning that way," Caprice said and smiled.

"She's beautiful," Vanessa said,

"Yes, she is," Caprice agreed.

"Did you ever love me, Caprice?" Vanessa asked. She was so close to Caprice's ear that she leaned in further and kissed her on the neck. "Does she do for you what I used to?"

Caprice gently pushed Vanessa away and held her hands so they could no longer paw at her. "Stop, okay?" Caprice wasn't mad, in fact, she felt sorry for her ex. "You've had too much to drink so now is not the time or place to get into this discussion." She looked behind Vanessa and focused on a smirking Sarah, who raised her glass in indication of a toast. Caprice then looked at Vanessa. "Did Sarah send you over here?"

"She said you never loved me. She said you bragged at her cookout that you were in love for the very first time in your life." There were tears in Vanessa's eyes.

Caprice shot Sarah a glare that should have struck her dead. She then studied Vanessa. "I never said that, Vanessa. You should know by now that Sarah is a liar and an opportunist. Isn't that why you broke up with her?"

It took a moment for Vanessa to acknowledge Caprice's words. She did, finally, with a small nod. "I'm sorry, Caprice. I really am happy for you, even if I'm not happy for me." Vanessa then broke Caprice's grip on her hands and flung her arms around Caprice, hugging her.

Caprice gave up and hugged her back. Something made her look up at the stage and she saw Hannah, who sported a livid expression. *Oh, shit.* "Vanessa, you should go, okay?" Caprice said into Vanessa's ear. "Go back over to Sarah and tell her to keep her nose out of my business."

"You did love me once, didn't you, Caprice?" Vanessa now looked drunk and sad.

"You know I did." She glanced back up at Hannah again, who was now ignoring her. It was difficult to hold this type of conversation when one had to shout over the music to be heard. "Vanessa, please go. Give me a call sometime this week if you need to talk."

Silently, Vanessa stood up. She grabbed the back of the chair to steady herself, then she toddled off, back toward where Sarah stood.

"What the hell was that about?" Jarita asked.

"Sarah up to her dirty tricks again," Caprice told her.

"Your girlfriend doesn't look very happy," Jarita pointed out.

"I'll explain what happened. She'll understand." *I hope.*

When the last set ended, Caprice jumped up and caught Hannah before she could escape to the band room. "Listen, I can explain about what you saw at the table..."

Hannah reached behind Caprice's head and pulled her into a soft kiss. "Let's talk about it at home, okay? We have to have a short meeting about keeping or dropping one of the songs so I'll meet you there."

"Okay. Sure." Caprice sighed, relieved, as Hannah left to go back to the band room.

Jarita stood next to Caprice. "She all right?"

"Yeah," Caprice said, surprised. "She seems to be fine."

"Great. You go home and get ready for your girlfriend and I'll wait here for mine to finish up. Call me tomorrow and let me know how you plan to kill Sarah." Jarita smiled at her.

Caprice laughed. "Something tells me I'll have to get in line."

There was a knock on Caprice's door not too long after she had arrived home. She opened the door to a fuming Hannah. Hannah closed and locked the door behind her and when Caprice attempted to greet her with a kiss, Hannah pushed Caprice away.

"What the fuck was that display back at the bar?" Hannah's voice was tightly controlled. Her rage seeped out every pore.

"Hannah - she was drunk," Caprice began, cautiously.

"Who is she?" Hannah's eyes were like slits.

"She was my first girlfriend. We broke up years ago. We're barely even friends now."

"That's not what it looked like to me." Hannah's demeanor was menacing and as she took steps toward Caprice, Caprice backed away from her.

"I can't help what your interpretation was, Hannah, Vanessa was drunk and... I don't know what to tell you."

Hannah shook her head. "You two looked pretty lovey-dovey to me. How do I know what you really do during the week?" Her voice started to rise. "How do I know that you're faithful to me? How do I know that Vanessa doesn't share your bed when I'm not here?"

Caprice's entire body started to shake, as though it perceived violence. "Why don't you trust me?"

"Trust you? After what I saw tonight?"

"You can call any of my friends, they'll tell you -"

"Call your friends? Really? Like they would tell me anything other than what you told them to tell me?" Hannah leaned her face right into Caprice's and shouted, "Do I look like that stupid to you?"

The little hairs on the back of Caprice's neck stood up. The savage look in Hannah's eyes was unmistakable. Caprice shook her head negatively as Hannah backed her up against the wall. "Hannah, please -" Caprice whispered, desperately.

It was too late. Hannah could no longer be reached. "After I crawled back to you, begging like a weakling, giving you everything you wanted, catered to you like your slave and this is how you show me your gratitude? By flirting with another woman right in front of me?" Hannah's body was pressed hard against Caprice's.

"It wasn't what you think," was all Caprice was able to say.

"It was exactly what I think and you know it." Hannah grabbed a fistful of Caprice's hair and began to pull her toward the bedroom.

Caprice managed to knock Hannah's hand away and ran up the hall. In three steps, Hannah caught her and threw her down on the living room rug. As Hannah picked Caprice up by her arm, she repeatedly slapped Caprice to get her to stop fighting.

If it was one thing Caprice loved about living in a row house, it was that the walls were soundproofed so that she didn't hear the neighbors and they didn't hear her, especially when she cranked up her music. Now the fortified walls were her worst enemy because no one would hear her struggle, cry or scream.

"Hannah, you said you would never do this again," Caprice cried. She continued to battle Hannah but, once again, the singer displayed strength that seemed beyond human.

Hannah dragged her over to the couch but she couldn't quite get Caprice up off the floor. "Come on, Caprice," Hannah said, wrestling with flailing arms and kicking legs, "I'm trying to make this comfortable for you."

"I'm not role-playing, Hannah! Jesus, you're out of control again! I don't want to have sex with you!" Caprice yelled at her. "Stop!"

Hannah, oblivious to Caprice's pleas, said, "Fine. You want it on the floor, no problem." She grappled with Caprice and finally pinned her down, rendering Caprice immobile. When Hannah attempted to kiss her, Caprice turned her face away but was soon forced as Hannah didn't stop until she seized Caprice's lips. When Caprice bit down, Hannah used her thigh to pry Caprice's legs apart and slammed her knee up against Caprice's center. The shock and sudden pain left Caprice momentarily powerless to resist Hannah's advances. Hannah wiped the blood from her lip. "God, I love it when you're feisty."

Caprice lay on the floor, rocking, and stared at the ceiling. Tears still streamed down the sides of her face hours after Hannah had left. Her body throbbed but her mind was numb.

How could someone who claimed to love her do that to her? How could someone be so loving and tender one minute and so hateful and violent the next?

The only rational thought she could form was that she felt dirty and ashamed and that a long, hot shower would make her feel cleaner. She rolled over onto her right side and slowly stood up. She went to her front door, locked it, and slid the bolt across. Every muscle in her body screamed its protest at her movement as she walked to the bathroom. When she saw her reflection in her full-length mirror, she almost fainted. She had bruises, scratches and rug burns scattered on her torso. Hannah seemed to have taken great care not to mark up her face this time and left reminders on areas of her skin not too many people would ever see.

Once in the shower, after she got used to the sensation of the water stinging her battered skin, she couldn't stop the images that continued to flash through her mind. How could Hannah get so

turned on by Caprice's fear? Hannah did things to her that, when done out of affection, aroused her but when done in anger, hurt her and made those acts vulgar.

At least her body didn't betray her this time, regardless of Hannah's proclamations of her being so wet and so ready. The recollection of a voice that once excited her now repulsed her. The thought of Hannah ever touching her again made her stomach roll.

When Caprice delicately washed between her legs, she started to cry again. When Hannah's fingers had cramped, she finished the job with an empty wine bottle that had been left on the coffee table from the night before. Hannah had repeatedly rammed the bottle into her so hard, Caprice thought it might shatter. And Hannah didn't seem to care, all she could say was, "You love this, don't you, baby? Yeah. So good."

Caprice stayed in the shower until she ran out of hot water. She stepped onto the bathmat and gingerly dried herself off. She went to her bedroom and put on her robe. She sat on her bed and hugged her legs up to her chest and looked at her bedside clock. It was 4:45 AM.

Now what? What do I do? I can't call Kelly; it's too early and she won't believe me, anyway. I could call Jarita but what's to say she won't be as disbelieving as Kelly? I can't let Hannah near me again, no matter how much she sweet talks me, no matter how much she tries to make me think she misunderstood my signals. God, I can't believe it happened again. How stupid am I? Is this how women get into abusive relationships? Before they realize what's happening, they're already in it? I don't know what to do. I can't forget she did it again; I can't just let her get away with it. But...will anyone believe me?

She positioned herself on her bed with her back against the headboard and started up her laptop. She searched for the phone number of a local rape crisis center. She then opened a new window and searched for 'lesbian rape' but all she could find were either stories on heterosexual males who had raped lesbians or addresses to porn sites.

Discouraged, Caprice closed one window on her screen, picked up her cell and called the number for the rape crisis center.

"County Rape Crisis Line, may I help you?" The female voice sounded young and nervous.

"I...I'm not sure," Caprice said. "I was, um, sexually assaulted tonight and I need someone to talk to about it."

"Oh, boy, I knew this was going to happen. Cathy stepped out to use the restroom and I'm her trainee. I'll do what I can until Cathy comes back and you can talk to her, okay?"

"You know, maybe this wasn't such a good idea." Caprice was ready to switch the phone off.

"Wait!" the voice said. "Please don't hang up."

"I'm sorry but I've changed my mind about talking to somebody."

"I swear, Cathy will be right back..."

"No, please. Forget I called." Caprice hung up. It wasn't that she had to wait; it was more that she didn't know what to say. *Hi, I'm a lesbian and I was raped by my girlfriend?* Her own lesbian friend didn't believe it was possible, how could she convince someone who was probably straight that it happened? Especially in this area.

Caprice was still awake hours later. She had just dozed off when her cell phone rang. She froze and forced herself to look at the caller ID. 'Hannah' was displayed. She started to tremble and ignored the call. A minute later the phone vibrated to advise her that she had a message. Caprice stared at the phone until curiosity got the better of her.

"Hey, babe. Sorry I couldn't spend the night but I had to be back early because we're going to be rehearsing new songs this afternoon for next week's show. We'll be playing Hagerstown again starting Thursday night, so it won't be as long until I see you again. I know you're probably still asleep. Call me when you get this. I love you."

She clicked the phone off as tears ran uncontrollably down her face again. *How can she pretend like nothing happened? How can she think she didn't hurt me, that I actually enjoyed it? And what if I don't meet her in Hagerstown? Will she come after me? Will she be so angry that she attacks me again?* That thought frightened Caprice to the point where she knew she had to do something.

She couldn't seem to pull herself together for the rest of the day. Hannah called one more time that evening but didn't leave a message. The next morning, Caprice called in sick to work, got dressed and headed down to the police station.

She walked into the county sheriff's department after being told that where she lived was out of the city's jurisdiction. Caprice timidly approached the desk that had a sign on that said 'Check In Here.' Caprice studied the middle-aged man in the beige uniform shirt with two chevrons on each sleeve. He appeared to be busy but when she got closer to the desk, she realized he was doing the crossword puzzle from the Sunday paper. "Excuse me..."

"Can I help you?" The sheriff's deputy looked up at her as a few people milled around, drinking coffee and seemingly bored.

"Do you have a female investigator I could talk to?" Caprice asked.

"Not on duty today," the desk jockey told her. He went back to his puzzle.

"When will she be back?" Caprice asked.

He looked up again. "She's on vacation. She'll be back in about 3 days. Anything anyone else can help you with?"

"I...I need to report a...a sexual assault." Caprice silently cursed her shaky voice.

The deputy looked at her, questioningly. "Are you the victim?"

"Yes. Yes, I am." Caprice looked down at the floor.

The deputy picked up the phone and pressed three numbers. "Yeah, we've got a gal down here, wants to report a 3121. Yep. Okay." He hung up the phone. "One of the investigators will be down in a moment. Why don't you go ahead and sign in here."

"Do I have to sign in?" Caprice asked.

"If you want someone to help you, yeah." He went back to his puzzle.

So much for compassion, Caprice thought as she signed her name, the current time and then sat down on a wooden bench at the side of the desk. Thirty minutes later, she saw a man in civilian clothes descend the stairs. He was about forty-years old, slender with a growing paunch. He wasn't unattractive but the scowl he wore was. His tie was askew and the top button on his green shirt was undone. He sipped on a mug of what Caprice assumed was coffee.

He looked around, then focused on Caprice since she was the only female in the room. "You the rape?" He said to Caprice, not caring that other people were around to hear him.

Caprice looked up to see people staring at her. She felt mortified. "Yes."

"When did the alleged incident take place?"

"Saturday night."

"It's Monday," he said, annoyed. "Why the delay?"

Caprice began to regret ever coming in. "Could we please talk about this in a more private setting?"

The investigator looked around. "Yeah. Sure. Come on upstairs."

Caprice followed him up to the second floor where he led her into an empty interrogation room with a pad and a pen he had grabbed off his desk. "What's your name?"

"Caprice Gallagher."

"I'm Sergeant Shumacher," he said, without looking up. "Your address?"

Caprice provided him with her address and phone number.

Shumacher wrote it down. "Have you bathed or showered since the alleged incident?"

Caprice was bugged by Shumacher's use and intonation of the word 'alleged.' "Yes, I took a shower yesterday morning."

He looked up at her, clearly displeased. "You realize that pretty much kills the chance to get DNA. It doesn't help if you've washed away your attacker's sperm."

"There wasn't any sperm," Caprice told him, quietly.

"So he used a condom," Shumacher wrote down. He looked up at Caprice. "You don't act really upset."

Caprice began to get indignant. "I'm sorry my not being hysterical makes me appear less believable." It was then the tears came to her eyes again.

Shumacher put his hand up, dismissively. "An attitude doesn't help, either." He looked down at his note pad. "Where did the alleged incident take place?"

"My apartment."

"Was it a stranger or do you know this guy?"

"Yes, I know the person. We've been dating..." *This was a mistake.*

He looked at her, patronizingly. "Are you sure it was rape and not just rough sex?"

"Would you ask me that question if I were your daughter and I had told you someone I had been dating raped me?"

The investigator thought about it, then nodded. "No, I guess I wouldn't." He shook his pen. "Damned company issued crap. I'll be right back."

Caprice watched him exit and fought with herself as to whether she should stay or leave. Before she could make a decision, Shumacher returned.

"Okay, you said you know him, what's his name?"

"Um...her name is Hannah. Hannah Brishen." Caprice waited for a reaction and was not disappointed.

"What? Wait - *her* name?" Shumacher slammed his pen down. "You want to make a rape claim against another woman?"

"A woman raped me. She forced me to have sex with her without my consent. That is rape!" Caprice tried to stay calm but Shumacher didn't make it easy.

"What the hell was she supposed to have penetrated you with?"

"Her hand and then a wine bottle!"

"This is some perverse shit, lady. Go back to this dyke you're dating and work it out or whatever but don't come back here wasting our time with that kind of deviant bullshit. What's this world coming to? Fucking gays..." He stood up, opened the door and gestured her out.

"You're not going to take a report?" Caprice was prepared for resistance but not for a complete denial of protection and justice.

"You're lucky I don't lock your depraved ass up! Now get out of here before I change my mind."

Without another word, Caprice glared at him, finally stood up and left. She wept, frustrate, the entire drive home, where she stayed, cocooned in her apartment for the rest of the week.

The next week found Caprice despondent and on the verge of running away. She wasn't sure where she would go or what she would do but she knew she no longer wanted to be where she was.

She had her landline disconnected and her cell phone number changed with no notice of connection to her new number. She deleted her regular email account and registered under another, less identifying name. She had called her job, given them two weeks notice and requested her accrued vacation time be used for the next fourteen days. She searched online for places to live that were gay-friendly, unlike where she was now. When she narrowed it down to three locations, she then began to look for employment opportunities.

Caprice did not look upon this sudden venture as much as a new beginning as she did as an escape. She had never really lived anywhere other than that area but she felt she had nothing that held her there. She felt abandoned by her friends, her extended family had washed their collective hands of her years ago when she came out to them and her job was secure as long as she continued to keep her personal life private. Day after day, she witnessed impropriety between students and instructors, enlisted personnel and officers and married co-workers who openly neglected their vows. A slap on the wrist was all the discipline those infractions seemed to garner, if even, but any hint of her homosexuality and she would have been let go under some trumped up allegation, regardless of her exemplary work record. Then, the agency that was sworn to protect her from crime turned out to be conditional; the offenses committed against her were evidently only valid if she were heterosexual.

She needed to find a place to go that was less likely to punish her because of her orientation. She needed to find refuge from the oppression, repression and depression that area forced on her. She

needed to find some place where Hannah wouldn't find her or where she'd be reminded of her and what she'd done.

Yes. She needed to run away.

Caprice had not been out of her apartment for nearly two weeks.

It had been quiet after she changed her phone number and email. Hannah's attempts at communication had become incessant. Hannah's last few voice mails had been angry and then concerned. Caprice sent Hannah a text not to contact her anymore and that she knew why. Then all of Caprice's connection information changed. The only phone calls Caprice then had were from Jarita, the only friend she provided with her new number.

While in her self-imposed sanctum, Caprice had gone through a majority of her groceries and had asked Jarita to please pick her up necessities. When Jarita showed up at the door, she insisted that Caprice let her in.

"I've tried to be patient, Caprice, I've tried to give you your space and wait for you to tell me what the hell is going on with you but you just keep getting more and more reclusive. This afternoon, I overheard Enoch talking to HR about your replacement and I find out - from *work*, not from *you* - that you quit! What the fuck, Caprice?"

Jarita closed the door behind her after she handed Caprice two of the five grocery bags. Caprice reached around Jarita and secured the lock. "How much do I owe you?"

"Give me an explanation and we'll call it even," Jarita told her as she followed Caprice to the kitchen.

"Help me put these away and we'll talk," Caprice told her.

The lighthearted atmosphere Jarita always encountered in Caprice's apartment was gone. In its place was a dour ambience with something almost sinister lurking behind it.

Caprice poured them both a glass of wine and they sat on the couch.

"So...out with it," Jarita said.

"I need to leave here. I, uh, I can't live here anymore." Caprice's voice cracked when she spoke.

"Why? What's going on? Are you going to Philly to live with Hannah?"

"No." Caprice shuddered at Hannah's name.

"None of this makes sense." Jarita took a sip of wine and studied Caprice. "Did something happen?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because you quit your job, you're ignoring your friends and you want to leave...and you look like shit."

Caprice took a long drink of wine. "I'm going to tell you something. I don't expect you to believe me which, of course, is your prerogative, but it's true."

"Why wouldn't I believe you?" She then saw tears come to Caprice's eyes. Jarita put her wine glass down on the coffee table and slid closer to Caprice. "Oh, sweetie, tell me what's going on."

"Remember when Vanessa came over to the table at Matrika's?"

"Yeah. She was wasted."

"Hannah thought it was something else. She accused me of being unfaithful."

"What? Of course that's crap! You would never cheat on Hannah. Is that what all this is about? You reacted when I said her name. Have you two split up?"

"It's worse than that."

"Worse how?"

Caprice hesitated. "When she got back here, she was so angry. She said she couldn't trust me and that I flaunted my infidelity in front of her."

"I hope you told her to go shit in her hat and pull it over her eyes! I don't care how gorgeous someone is, you don't just accept that kind of behavior in them and until you give her a legitimate reason, she should trust you." Jarita watched as Caprice openly cried now, visibly upset.

"Jarita...she...she has a nasty temper. She started hitting me and -"

"What? Oh, no, she didn't..." Jarita's voice rose with every word.

Caprice nodded. "She beat me up, threw me on the floor and raped me." The last two words were whispered.

Jarita just stared at her, absorbing Caprice's words. "Are you serious?"

"It's okay if you don't believe me, Jarita." Caprice wiped her eyes on her sleeve.

"Oh my God, of course I believe you! Why wouldn't I believe you?" She pulled Caprice into a reassuring hug.

"Why would you? The police didn't."

"You reported it?"

"I tried."

Jarita was speechless. Then it hit her and she looked skyward and back at Caprice. She took Caprice's hand. "You told them it was your female lover that did it and that's why they didn't believe you, isn't it?"

Caprice nodded before she answered. "Yes. They got mad and threw me out."

"You're in the left loop of the bible belt. I'm surprised they didn't try to arrest you."

"He threatened to."

Disgusted, Jarita shook her head. "Fucking ignorant cops. Just 'cause she doesn't have a dick, they think she isn't capable?"

"Exactly." Caprice looked at Jarita, curiously. "Why do you believe me? Kelly didn't. She told me women can't rape women, that she was sure it was just rough sex."

"Of course Kelly would say that, she never met a kinky situation she didn't like," Jarita commented.

"This wasn't kinky. It was violent." Caprice set her wine glass down and lifted her shirt. There were still remnants of bruises and fading marks where the scratches and rug burns had been.

Jarita took in a sharp breath and put her hand over her mouth. "Caprice...my God. That's very violent." Her eyes narrowed. "Oh, no. You didn't run into anything a month ago, did you? Hannah did that to you, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Caprice! Why didn't you say something?"

"I did. I told Kelly. She was appalled that Hannah hit me but when she found out the rest, she told me that I didn't understand about tops and dominants and rough sex and to, basically, lay back and enjoy the ride."

"She's as bad as the cops. So this isn't the first time Hannah assaulted you."

"No."

"Jesus, Caprice...I don't understand. Why did you go back with her after the first time?"

"I was confused. With what Kelly said and Hannah made me feel like we got our signals crossed." She looked up at Jarita, embarrassed. "Hannah does like it pretty rough sometimes so I thought it might actually be me. But she was apologetic about hitting me so I told her she crossed a boundary with me and told her not to do it again. She promised me she wouldn't. And after that, everything seemed fine...until that night."

"Has she tried to get in touch with you?"

"Yes. Every day, several times a day. That's why I changed my phone number and email."

"And that's why you want to move away."

"Yes. The sooner, the better."

"Has she come back here?"

"Not that I'm aware of. She hasn't knocked on my door."

"So why do you think you need to leave?"

"Just because she hasn't, doesn't mean she won't."

"Maybe she got the message."

"And maybe she hasn't."

Jarita stayed with Caprice another hour and spent most of that time trying to convince her not to move. She offered Caprice her couch until they could find a two-bedroom apartment but Caprice told her if she stayed in the area, Hannah could find her. If the police wouldn't protect her, she couldn't expect Jarita to do their job for them.

By the time Jarita left, Caprice had started to feel better. At least Jarita didn't think she was paranoid or overreacting. At least one person believed her. If she could only find a place to live and a job before her savings ran out and get out of town before she ran into Hannah again, she was sure she would be all right.

She poured herself another half-glass of wine and decided she did not want to go back to packing just yet. She settled on the couch, picked up the remote and clicked on the TV. Something caught her eye and when she looked to where Jarita had been seated, she saw Jarita's cell phone. Caprice put it on the coffee table. *I'd call you to tell you to come back and get it but...*

Caprice snickered as she pictured herself calling Jarita and having Jarita's phone ring in her other hand. *Duh. She won't get to far before she remembers, if she hasn't already.*

Just as she finished her thought, there was a knock on her door. "Ha! I knew it." She jumped up off the couch and walked to the door. She swung it open and stopped dead as she faced Hannah.

"Hello, Caprice." Her tone was calm; the look in her eyes was anything but.

Caprice immediately tried to shut the door but Hannah forced her way in and pushed Caprice backward. As Hannah shut the door, Caprice regained her balance and put her hands in front of her. "Hannah, you need to leave or I'll call the police." Her voice shook with ominous forewarning.

"No you won't," Hannah told her and leaned against the door. "All I want to do is talk."

"I don't want to talk to you. I told you there would not be a third time. Now leave or I *will* call the police. I mean it." Caprice was suddenly ice cold, trembling and more frightened than she could ever remember being.

Hannah did not seem to be at all fazed by Caprice's fear of her. "Just what exactly do you think the police will do? I didn't break in; you opened the door. I'm not doing anything to you, I'm just standing here."

Caprice knew the police most likely wouldn't respond if Shumacher had entered her name and address into the system. She held up Jarita's cell phone. "Jarita just left and forgot this. She should be back any second for it."

"So that's why you opened the door without asking who was there first. I think we surprised each other. I prefer it this way, though." Hannah took a few steps toward the sofa. "Wine, huh? Something going on between you and Jarita?"

"No," Caprice answered, quickly. "And I don't have to defend myself to you."

Hannah glared sharply at her. "Watch your tone with me, Caprice. I just want to talk. Don't make things worse than they have to be."

Caprice crossed her arms. "If I let you talk, will you leave when you're done?"

"Promise," Hannah put her right hand in the air as she sat down on the couch.

"I don't want any more trouble, Hannah." *Jesus, how can someone so beautiful be so evil?*

"What *do* you want?" Hannah asked. Her eyes never left Caprice.

Caprice took a deep breath. "I want you to leave me alone and let me get on with my life."

"And I have no say in that?"

"Hannah...you hurt me. Twice. And you hurt me horribly. I can't be in a relationship like that. Whether it's your fault or mine, it doesn't matter. I will cherish our good times but I need to learn from the, um, not-so-good ones."

Hannah nodded, took her eyes off Caprice and noticed the boxes and disarray of the apartment for the first time. "Where are you going?"

"I'm moving."

"Where?" Hannah began to sound upset.

"I...I don't know yet."

Hannah stood up and Caprice took a step back. "Do you hate me that much, that you'd give up everything you have here and flee to a place you don't even know?"

Caprice swallowed hard. "I don't hate you; I'm afraid of you."

"No because if you were afraid of me, we could talk about it. You don't want to talk, you want to run away so you don't have to face what you've done."

"What *I've* done?"

"You're not fooling me, Caprice." Hannah's voice turned cocky and menacing. "You used me. You selfishly took what you wanted from me so you could brag about it and now you're done with me."

"You need to leave now, Hannah," Caprice demanded, recognizing the predatory look in Hannah's eyes. "I'm calling the police."

As Caprice pressed 9 on Jarita's cell, Hannah leapt at her and knocked the phone out of Caprice's hand. She grabbed Caprice and trapped her against the living room wall. She pressed herself into Caprice, rendering her immobile.

"Jarita's coming back for her phone, she'll call the police," Caprice cried.

"Without a phone?" Hannah's lips were barely an inch from Caprice's.

"If I don't answer the door, she'll find a way."

"Let her." Hannah forced a hard kiss on Caprice until Caprice could maneuver her face away.

"Please, Hannah, please, please don't do this! You promised you'd leave -"

"I said I'd leave when I was done. I'm not done." She looked down at Caprice. "Come on, babe. You know you love this. Why would you want to walk away?"

Caprice was paralyzed with fear, knowing what was going to happen next. Then she had an idea. "Hannah, let's go into the bedroom. Let's not do it like this. Please, let's go to bed and, I swear, I'll do whatever you want. Just don't hurt me again, I'm begging you." To prove she was sincere, she initiated a stirring kiss between them.

At first, Hannah appeared to be stunned by Caprice's compliance. She responded enthusiastically and moaned into the kiss. Then she broke away. "No. Uh uh." She shook her head. "You must think I'm an idiot. If we do this your way, do we get back together?"

Caprice nodded vigorously. "Yes."

The slap came without warning. It was followed by another and another, each knocking Caprice's head against the interior brick wall. "Liar," Hannah spat. She hammered Caprice with her fists until Caprice dropped to the floor in a fetal position to protect herself.

Hannah kicked Caprice's legs apart, dropped to her knees and removed a butterfly knife from her back pocket. She expertly whipped the balisong into position. "Now let's have some fun."

Jarita had been gone approximately an hour when she realized didn't have her cell phone. She had been at the mall and was waiting for a text from Shelly about meeting later. The only place her phone could have been was back at Caprice's. Fifteen minutes later, she was at Caprice's apartment, pounding on the door.

She knew Caprice was inside. The car was still in the same place it was when she left and the way Caprice had been feeling, Jarita knew she wouldn't have left the apartment and made herself vulnerable.

Finally, Jarita ran next door and knocked on that door. Mr. and Mrs. Koblenksi were kindly, elderly neighbors Caprice trusted enough to give an extra key in case of locking herself out or an emergency. Thankfully, Mr. Koblenksi was home and followed Jarita back to Caprice's where they both entered the apartment.

"Good Lord," the old man exclaimed when he saw Caprice on the floor, naked, bruised and bloody.

"No, no, no, no, Caprice," Jarita said as she ran to her friend. "Call 911!" Jarita yelled. She picked up her cell phone off the floor and threw it to Koblenksi who immediately dialed.

"Caprice, hey, sweetie," Jarita said, soothingly. Caprice's eyes were swollen shut.

"She came back," Caprice said in a whisper.

"I know." Jarita's tears fell as she gently rocked Caprice.

"Ambulance is on its way," Koblenksi said. He averted his eyes from Caprice's nude state.
"Shouldn't you cover her?"

"No," Jarita said, bitterly, "I want every molecule of evidence preserved. She's not getting away with it this time."

Jarita rode with Caprice in the ambulance the twenty minutes it took to get to the hospital ER. Jarita also stayed with Caprice, at Caprice's request, when a nurse did a rape kit, as ordered by a Sergeant Quillan who had not arrived at the hospital yet.

They had given Caprice a mild sedative to combat her hysteria when the paramedics arrived and tried to fight them when they attempted to medically assess her.

Jarita watched closely as the nurse did a medical exam and documented the general health of Caprice. She asked Jarita what she knew of the assault as she took photographs of Caprice and marked a chart with a detailed evaluation of the trauma to Caprice's body. The nurse collected scrapings from under Caprice's nails and then clipped the nails, placing them in an evidence baggie.

The nurse then swabbed for sperm or seminal samples and combed Caprice's pubic hair for any foreign hairs, fibers or substances. She also combed Caprice's head hair for the same. Before they left the apartment, the EMT had advised Jarita to carefully place Caprice's torn and bloody clothes in a paper bag and bring them to the hospital. They were added to the rape evidence. Last, the nurse drew Caprice's blood for typing and DNA. Once that was done, she left Jarita alone with Caprice, who was still sedated.

Jarita studied her dear friend and started to cry again. Caprice's beautiful face was swollen and bruised, as was most of her body. There were surface slash marks on her back and buttocks and horrific trauma to her vaginal area. She just couldn't believe someone could do this to Caprice. What kind of monster was Hannah? How could a woman do this to another woman?

Jarita's anger built and when the nurse and another staff member returned and told Jarita they were going to clean Caprice up, the nurse also told her that there was a cop named Quillan outside who had come to pick up the rape kit and get a statement from Caprice.

The first thing Sergeant Delaney Quillan saw was a blur of a person exit the ER room she needed to go into and rush at her. The woman stopped in front of her and looked around.

"Where'd the cop go? They said there was a cop out here picking up the rape kit?"

Quillan took out her badge and showed it to the clearly stressed African-American woman. "I'm Deputy Sergeant Quillan from the Sheriff's office. Are you the victim?"

Jarita focused on Quillan. "You assholes better listen to her and do something this time!"

Quillan took a step back from the forefinger that threatened to impale her. "Hold on a second, what are you talking about?"

"My friend! She went to you guys two weeks ago and reported a rape and you blew her off! You didn't believe her and then you threatened to arrest *her*! If you had done your fucking job, she wouldn't be in here!"

"Okay, you need to calm down and tell me what you're talking about."

Jarita took a deep breath and measured every word, as though she were speaking to a child. "My friend, Caprice Gallagher. She is the victim. She was brutally raped. Again. And you could have prevented it."

Quillan was still confused. "This is the first time I'm hearing about any of this. Ms. Gallagher reported a rape previously? To us?"

Both women looked at each other, bemused.

"Should I go in and talk to Ms. Gallagher?" Quillan asked, finally.

"They're cleaning her up and she's kind of out of it."

"Let's sit down and you can catch me up," Quillan offered. She gestured to a row of empty seats.

They sat and Jarita faced the deputy. "All I know is that she said this isn't the first or even second time, this bitch has done this to her."

Quillan took out her pocket notebook and a pen. She clicked it and began to write. "So it was a woman who raped Ms. Gallagher?"

"Yes," Jarita said, defiantly, "and don't tell me it isn't possible."

"I hadn't planned to."

"So...you believe it can happen?"

"I know it can happen." Quillan looked up from her notes to see a shocked expression on Jarita's face. "What's going on?"

"Caprice tried to report it two weeks ago but one of the dicks - and I mean *dicks* - from your squad called her a pervert and threw her out of the station."

"Oh, no." Quillan shook her head in disgust. "Did she tell you his name?"

Jarita shrugged. "I don't know, something German."

"This is Pennsylvania; that describes three-quarters of the population."

"I think she said something like...Shoemaker?"

Quillan bit her lip and sighed. "Oh, yeah. I know the guy."

"Well, if he had done his job, she wouldn't be in the hospital!"

"I understand and I apologize," Quillan said and wrote something in her notes. "I will deal with him when I get back to work. I was on vacation and no one advised me that anyone reported anything while I was away. I promise you, I will follow through on this. The woman who did this to your friend - what's her name?"

"Hannah Brishen."

Quillan wrote it down, then looked up. "Wait...Hannah Brishen, the singer?"

Jarita crossed her arms. "Yeah, what difference does that make?"

"It doesn't make any, I just recognize the name from seeing posters in town. What are the circumstances of the assault? Do you know?"

Jarita settled back in her chair and told Deputy Quillan how Caprice and Hannah met, started dating and how Jarita thought everything was fine until two weeks ago when Caprice didn't come to work and wouldn't talk to anybody. Jarita told her she didn't really have a clue until today.

Quillan looked up when she saw two nurses exit Caprice's room. "I should go in there and see if she wants to talk while the details are still fresh in her mind."

"Let me go in with you because I don't think she'll be too thrilled about talking to the police."

Both women stood up. "I hope she'll trust me. It might be the only way to make this stop."

Delaney Quillan was not prepared for the physical brutality clearly inflicted upon the victim. And those were only the exposed areas of skin she saw. She approached the side of the bed while Jarita spoke to Caprice.

"Hey," Jarita said, quietly. She sat in the chair by the bed and gently took Caprice's hand. "You awake?"

"Sleepy," Caprice mumbled. "Think they gave me something."

"They did. It's to help with the pain. Caprice, there's someone here from the sheriff's and -"

"No. Don't want them here," Caprice said, upset.

"It's okay," Jarita told her, soothingly. "This deputy is a woman and she believes you. She'd like to talk with you while details are still clear."

"Sleepy. So tired. Maybe tomorrow."

Jarita looked back at Quillan. "She's been through a lot. Is tomorrow okay?"

"Whenever she's ready," Quillan said. "I need to get the evidence back and logged in, anyway. I assume she will spend the night for observation?"

"They didn't say anything to me about sending her home," Jarita said.

"I'll come back in the morning, then. The nurse told me that you came in with her on the ambulance. Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

"No, thank you. I'm going to stay here with her. I want her to wake up to a friendly face when the drugs wear off."

"I'm sure she will appreciate that. You're a good friend, Ms. Johnson."

Jarita looked back at Caprice. "Apparently not as good as I could have been or she would have told me sooner."

"Don't blame yourself for her silence. It's difficult enough to acknowledge a male-to-female rape; a female-to-female rape brings with it an entirely different agenda."

"Why?"

Quillan nodded toward Caprice. "Even though she's out of it, she can still hear our conversation. We'll talk more tomorrow when she can participate."

Jarita stood up and extended her hand to Deputy Sergeant Quillan. "Thank you."

Quillan accepted the handshake and smiled. "It's my job." She reached into her jacket and pulled out a business card, which she handed to Jarita. "I'm on call. My work cell is on there. If you need me for anything - like if Ms. Brishen tries to visit her - call me immediately."

Jarita looked surprised. "She wouldn't come here, would she?"

"My guess is no but nothing would surprise me."

"Are you going to arrest her?"

"When I locate her, I will question her."

"Just question her? Look what she did!"

"I know. I need to get a look at the evidence; if I can *prove* she's responsible, I will make sure she is held to answer." Quillan moved toward the door. "I know these chairs aren't very comfortable but you should try to get some rest. She's going to need all the emotional support she can get and trust me, that will take its toll on you, too."

The next morning, Delaney Quillan returned to the hospital only to find that Caprice had been released thirty minutes earlier. After she obtained copies of all current medical reports, she drove to the address the hospital provided her with where Caprice had gone to recover. She knocked on Jarita Johnson's door just as Jarita was leaving to get something substantial to put in Caprice's stomach.

Jarita told Quillan that there wasn't much she had at home that Caprice could consume as her split lip and swollen face rebelled against every bite. Jarita had brewed her some hot tea and cooked up instant grits but Caprice craved a fruit smoothie and that, among other food that could be sipped through a straw, is what Jarita was going to bring back.

She instructed Quillan to go on in; that Caprice was expecting her. Quillan shut the door and entered the living room, where Caprice was set up on the futon sofa.

Quillan observed that the skin around Caprice's eyes was purplish-black but that she could actually see through one of the bloodshot slits. The victim watched Quillan's movements until the deputy sat down in the chair vacated by Jarita.

"Ms. Gallagher, do you remember me? I'm Sergeant Quillan from the sheriff's department. We sort of met last night."

"Oh. Right. Jarita said something about you coming back today." Her speech did not seem to be as slurred this morning.

"I ran into Ms. Johnson on the porch. She said that except for needing more painkillers, you didn't put in too bad of a night."

"Considering," Caprice said. She studied the attractive, older, auburn-haired woman with eyes a similar color to her own.

"Do you feel like talking? It's fine if you don't, I just don't want to wait too long -"

"Will it do any good talking to you? Jarita said you were cool about everything but the law around here isn't. And neither are your co-workers."

Quillan drew a deep breath and ran her hand through her long hair. "When it comes to issues that affect members of the gay community, I cannot apologize enough for my colleagues' armor of insensitivity. Men like Shumacher don't try to educate themselves on matters they don't want to understand. As far as he's concerned, a gay or lesbian's moral code is written in invisible ink."

"He was horrible to me. If he had taken me seriously, I might not be here."

"You will get no argument from me. What he did was atrocious and I have a complaint written up against him. If you want to read it over and sign it, I think that would be helpful in preventing him from treating another victim the way he treated you. I'll leave that with you to look over and make any necessary changes. I also photocopied your signature, date and time in from the Log In register. Those things have a strange way of disappearing in situations like this."

"Why are you doing this?"

"It's my job...and I'm not your enemy. I need you to know that I take what happened to you very seriously and I will investigate your incident to the best of my ability."

"But...why? Why do you so readily believe me when nobody else but Jarita seems to?"

"Because evidence of sexual trauma supports your claim."

Caprice bowed her head. When she spoke, her voice cracked. "I still can't believe she did this to me, not just once but three times."

"I'm sure she repeated the personality traits that all abusers do - great charm, violence, remorse, wooing you back with grand, romantic gestures until a violent rage is triggered again."

"Yes."

"Do you feel up to going over your history with Ms. Brishen with me? I have to make a report. I will need your complete candor, Ms. Gallagher. The more I know, the better I can help the DA put together a defense."

"Do you think it will get that far?"

"That will depend on you and how the evidence ties her in with the rape and assault. Tell me what happened and we'll discuss your options."

Caprice liked the deputy; she felt comfortable with her honesty and demeanor. She didn't feel judged or like talking to her was a waste of time.

By the time Jarita got back from her trip to the market, Caprice was almost finished with her account of the whirlwind romance with Hannah and everything that led up to that moment. Jarita handed Caprice the smoothie and a straw and went back out to the kitchen to put away the few groceries she had purchased. Later on in the week, when Caprice could eat solid food again, Jarita would raid Caprice's cupboards, pantry and refrigerator and transfer the items back to her house.

The living room and the kitchen were openly connected so Jarita could hear the conversation between her friend and the deputy. She listened quietly to Caprice put the finishing touches on her story and made a pot of coffee.

Quillan spent a few minutes writing her notes and then reached into her briefcase. She pulled out a folder and opened it up. "I did some checking last night on Hannah Brishen. Her birth name is Hortense Anna Brishen."

"Hortense?" Caprice and Jarita chorused.

"No wonder she has anger issues," Jarita mumbled.

"She legally changed it to Hannah when she was twenty. And she has a record in Washington State." Quillan looked up from her paperwork. Despite the damage that had been done to Caprice, she still seemed surprised.

"What for?"

"Assault and battery. From the report, I think it was sexual battery but my guess is they didn't want to push for that due to the circumstances of it being two women."

Jarita handed a cup of coffee to Quillan. "So she's done this before."

"Did she go to jail?" Caprice asked.

"Just overnight," Quillan said, and sipped her coffee. "She admitted guilt, paid bail and was put on probation. She stayed clean and when her probation was done, she left the state. The next report I have on her is two years later. She was arrested in Montana for battery on a domestic partner and then for resisting arrest. Again, no real jail time but there was probation, community service and mandatory counseling, which was clearly a waste. Then there was a report filed in Chicago regarding a known prostitute who was beaten, raped and murdered. Brishen was listed as a possible suspect. For some reason, Cook County dropped the case. Probably didn't want to waste the taxpayer's dime on a dead hooker."

Caprice blanched. "She murdered someone?"

Quillan marveled at how someone with so much color on her face could so easily pale. "I don't know. It certainly indicates it here. Do you think she's capable of it?"

Caprice suddenly sounded like a lost little girl. "God, I...I don't know. I know her temper is violent and when she loses it, she's out of control...but murder?" Caprice shuddered.

"We may never know." Quillan turned the paper over and read the back. "Anyway, she's stayed clean until last year when she assaulted her domestic partner in Philly. The partner somehow stopped the state from prosecuting the case and the charges were dropped. A restraining order was filed against Hannah, though."

It looked as though something clicked with Caprice. "A restraining order...was her name, um...Annie?"

"Yes. Anne Zeeman. Do you know her?"

"No, not really, except she showed up at the last gig Hannah did in Philly. She came up to me and asked me if Hannah and I were together and when I said yes, she told me to be careful, that Hannah would hurt me." Caprice covered her mouth as the recollection hit her full force.

"What happened?" Quillan asked.

"Hannah came back from the bathroom and told Annie to leave and she did. I asked Hannah what that was about and she told me that Annie was an ex who was bitter and troubled and crazy and that there was a restraining order involved but I just assumed it was against Annie and not Hannah."

"Now you know the truth and now it comes down to what to do. So, Caprice, what do you want to do? I can arrest her and charge her with assault and battery - again - and I can try to charge her with rape but I pretty much guarantee that charge will be dropped. Her attorney will argue there is no way to prove penetration and I'm sure the defense will be that it was a sexual romp that got out of control...however...with her bite marks and saliva and the noted trauma to your genital area, we might be able to get her on sexual battery. That's a lot easier on everyone to say, regardless of whether or not they're comfortable with the concept. I know it's not a full-fledged rape charge but it's a start. Rape and sexual assault laws may not be antiquated but the attitude on them still is."

"What happens if I say yes?"

"I'll find her, I'll arrest her, she'll get arraigned and the judge will decide to set bail or remand...kind of like how you see it on Law and Order. A lot will depend on what the attorneys work out between them but I'm not going to lie to you; if the press gets wind of a story like this, your life won't be your own until it's over and maybe not even then. Every aspect of your intimate life with the accused and, most likely, with every other woman you've ever been involved with will be brought to light. If this makes it to trial, you will be under just as much scrutiny as she will be, perhaps more." Quillan finished her coffee as Caprice and Jarita stared at her, blankly.

"I didn't think they could do that anymore," Jarita said, finally.

Quillan looked at Caprice. "You two were in a relationship and that relationship will be under a microscope. Hannah is going to say that you two enjoyed rough sex and that is your sexual history with her the entire time you two were a couple."

"Can't her past arrests be brought in, her past behavior? Couldn't we get ex-girlfriends to testify?" Caprice asked.

"Past history will be up to the judge but that can be a double-edged sword. If hers is admissible, yours might be, too."

"But my sexual history is tame and -"

"Depending on who you get for a judge or whether or not it's a bench or jury trial, the fact that you sleep with women might be all that's needed to show your past behavior as deviant in their eyes. Have you ever experimented sexually with a partner other than Hannah? Ever had cybersex or phone sex? Ever bought sex toys for sex play? Do you watch or read porn or enjoy anything with sexually explicit content? They all sound like harmless, private things you may have done with a previous partner but you'd be amazed how an attorney can twist that around and make you look like the perverse aggressor and Hannah look like the victim."

"So you're trying to talk me out of pressing charges?"

"Absolutely not. I'm trying to tell you what you'll be up against."

"Is that why all of the previous times, sexual violence hasn't been included in the charges?" Jarita asked.

Quillan nodded. "At least not the charges on record."

"This isn't very encouraging." Caprice finished her smoothie. "How come you believe me?"

"I thought we already established that," Quillan told her.

"No, you told me the legal reason why you believe me. Nobody else believes that it's rape, other than you and Jarita. Everyone else thinks it's just rough sex gotten rougher. Why is that people who know me don't believe me, other cops don't believe me but *you* do?"

Quillan closed the file folder on her lap. "I think the reason people don't want to believe it is because it's about two women and not about a man and a woman. Most people think rape has to involve a man because they think there has to be forced penetration by a penis."

"But even my lesbian friends didn't believe me," Caprice reiterated, sounding betrayed.

"If it hadn't happened to you, would you have believed it if one of your friends had told you?" Quillan asked, reasonably.

"I would like to think I would at least give her the benefit of the doubt."

"It would be nice to think that you would."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Think about it," Quillan said. "Don't you equate rape as a male crime? Most women, especially lesbians, do. They don't want to acknowledge that women are not only capable of rape but that female-to-female rape has trespassed into the lesbian community. Lesbians don't want to admit that there are distinguishable heterosexual problems within their same-sex relationships. Why give the straight community any more reasons to point fingers?"

"They point fingers anyway," Jarita said.

"But not on something like this," Quillan said. "This is viewed as airing lesbian dirty laundry to the straight world."

"That's not fair. That means while we're fighting repression outwardly, we're promoting repression inwardly," Caprice said.

"Yes," Quillan agreed. "They don't want anything being conducive to the negative stereotypes. Deep down, they don't want to believe that women can or would hurt each other like that. You're both women and it's considered a betrayal that one of you would bring 'male violence' or abusive 'male' behavior into the women's community. They don't want to create a backlash."

"So you're saying, as a culture, we are in denial about it, that we pretend it's all right even though it's not and that it's not as bad as straight male-to-female rape?" Jarita asked.

Quillan nodded. "How many times have you heard serious problems between your friends who are couples downplayed as being a 'cat fight'? Female violence is quickly trivialized because half want to believe women are incapable of inflicting that kind of brutality and the other half are loathe to admit that the roots of violence aren't just in misogyny and a patriarchy. It's kind of like the community's own 'don't ask, don't tell'."

"And reporting it will just bring it out to the public..." Jarita said. She now understood what Quillan was saying.

"Which will cause more disapproval to rain down on the community," Quillan finished for her.

"Talk about being between a rock and a hard place..." Caprice moaned.

"Here's the thing - before I take anything to the DA's office, I need you to be absolutely sure you want me to file a report. I believe I have enough for the DA to go after her and, at the very least, convict her of assault, maybe even sexual assault and that can be done with or without your cooperation."

"What does that mean?"

"One thing that isn't like on TV is that if I file the report, and the DA's office decides to press charges against Hannah, there's no changing your mind or dropping charges. It's out of your hands. You become a witness for the commonwealth in its case against Hannah Brishen. Yes, you are still her victim but as far as the trial is concerned, you are a witness. You get on the stand, answer questions and hope you're believed over her whether it's a bench or jury trial."

"What if I don't want to testify?"

"You'll be subpoenaed anyway and, depending on your attitude on the stand, you could be declared a hostile witness. I'd advise against that. Your police report, your medical report, your rape kit, the sworn statements from Jarita and Mr. Koblenksi will all be in evidence. I know testifying can be unnerving but if you ask me to submit this report, you need to be prepared to go the distance."

Caprice absorbed this information, then looked at Jarita. "What do you think?"

"I think it's a decision you have to make," Jarita said. "I'll be there with you, whatever you decide."

"I know and I love you for that but if you were in my situation, what would you do?"

"I wouldn't want her to get away with it."

"What about what she said," Caprice pointed to Quillan, "about the community pressure I might get."

"You were going to leave the area anyway," Jarita argued, mildly. "What do you care about these people, anyway? They didn't go through what you did. And, hopefully, by going after her, you'll stop her from doing it to someone else."

"But...didn't others try?" Caprice looked at Quillan.

"Yes. And I can't give you any guarantee that you will be the one to make the difference. If we go forward, we will probably deal with continuances that will go as long as the judge will allow. The defense wants you to have the lousiest recollection of the assaults and the longer the delay, the less clarity you will have of the details. Defense lawyers will try to get evidence thrown out, statements suppressed and they are never known for sympathetic cross-examination of the victims."

"She has a record, though. Won't that count against her at all?" Jarita asked.

"Again, what's admissible depends on how it plays out between motions of the prosecutor, the defense and the judge's decisions on them. I've testified at trials that have had everything needed for a conviction going in and it all falls apart and I've testified at trials where it's been the

scantest of circumstantial evidence and it's ended in conviction." Quillan shrugged and gave Caprice a noncommittal smile. "We do our job and hope justice prevails."

"I've got a question," Jarita spoke up.

"Yes?"

"What's your story?" Jarita asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you don't fit around here. You don't have the usual mentality. And the way you talk about the community, like you know it intimately. Are you gay?"

Quillan put her notebook away and crossed her legs. "No. I identify as straight. I am familiar with the community because my sister is a lesbian and we're very close."

"Was your sister...I mean, did she go through this, too? Is that how you know so much about this?" Caprice asked.

"No, not my sister but her best friend."

"Was this around here?" Jarita wondered.

"No. I was a detective in Houston at the time. And even though it happened in a bigger, metropolitan area, the attitude about it was much the same as it is here."

"What happened?" Caprice asked. "How did that case turn out?"

"It didn't. Nobody wanted to cooperate and the victim was vilified by her friends. Luckily, for her, the woman who attacked her left her alone after the first time. But it opened my eyes to the issue."

"How did you end up here?" Jarita wanted to know.

"My husband, well...ex-husband now, has family here and wanted to come back. He managed a lateral transfer and I was out of work for six months until I got picked up by the sheriff's department. This is my fourth year here and I still can't make up my mind if I like it or not."

"I'm glad you're here," Caprice said, almost shyly. "And I think I want you to file the report."

Deputy Sergeant Delaney Quillan walked into the band break room in a nightclub in Pittsburgh. She was accompanied by two local, uniformed policemen and was greeted with sudden silence

from the three males draped over a broken down sofa. Two were drinking beer and one was plucking his unplugged bass guitar.

"We're looking for Hannah Brishen," Quillan announced.

Just as one of the band members pointed toward the door, Hannah walked in. When she saw the law enforcement trio, she stopped dead in her tracks. Quillan observed the demeanor of the tall woman with the extraordinary blue eyes. She had to admit to herself that Hannah was much more beautiful in person than her image on the band publicity posters. It was such a shame she had such an ugly personality.

Panic registered momentarily in Hannah's eyes and she stiffened but then she appeared to command her entire body to relax. "What's going on?" She asked, coolly.

"Are you Hannah Brishen?" Quillan asked her.

"Yes."

Quillan identified herself and then nodded to the officers who flanked Hannah while Quillan handcuffed her. "Hannah Brishen, you are under arrest for the rape, aggravated assault and battery of Caprice Gallagher." She proceeded to recite the Miranda Warning. "Do you understand each of these rights as I explained them to you?"

"Yes," Hannah said and sighed. "I understand my rights but I don't understand the charges."

"Having these rights in mind, do you wish to talk to me now?" Quillan asked.

Dylan, the bass player put his guitar down. "Don't say a word, Hannah."

"This has got to be a mistake," Hannah said to Quillan. "Caprice is my girlfriend."

"Hannah! Shut up," Dylan admonished.

"Having these rights in mind, do you wish to talk to me now?" Quillan repeated, a bit more sternly.

"No," Hannah finally said.

"The officers are going to put you in the back of their patrol car and transport you back to the station. Before they do that, I'm going to pat you down. Do you currently have anything on your person that I need to know about before I conduct the frisk search? Weapons? Controlled or illegal substances?"

"No," Hannah answered. She was now subdued.

Quillan pulled out a pair of black nitrile police gloves and put them on her hands. She instructed Hannah on the proper position to be in while she ran her fingers expertly over Hannah's clothing to feel for anything that might present a danger to the officers during transportation. Quillan hoped Hannah was carrying the butterfly knife she used on Caprice but it was nowhere on her person. When she was finished, Quillan removed the gloves. She addressed the officers.

"Thanks, guys. I will be back to collect her when I'm finished here."

Hannah was escorted out of the building and Quillan returned her attention to the three band members.

"What are we supposed to do about the show tonight?" Dylan asked.

"Not my problem. But if you want my advice, you might want to start looking for another singer." Quillan looked at the scruffy, skinny man wearing a do-rag. He looked disgusted.

"What's your name?"

"Dobie."

Quillan took out her notebook. "First name or last name?"

"Last. First name's Richard but everyone's always called me Dobie."

"Okay, Dobie, how about I start with you...I get the feeling you might have a story to tell me."

Dobie looked at Dylan and Flip. Dylan shook his head, negatively, as though he was sending a warning. Dobie looked back at Quillan. "I've got more than one to tell you."

"Dobie, no!" Dylan yelled.

"Shut the fuck up, you little pissant. I'm done keeping my mouth shut."

"Why don't you come outside with me and I'll get your statement," Quillan said.

"Yeah, no problem. I could use a smoke, too." He looked back at Dylan. "You can protect that psycho bitch all you want but you know what she did to Annie. I'm glad it's over." Dobie followed Quillan outside and immediately lit up a cigarette.

"Doesn't sound like you're a big fan of your lead singer."

"You know, she is so fucking talented and she brings in the crowds. I know the band itself is good but I'm not delusional enough to think it's us they come to see. They come to see her. And we work all the time because of her so it's not that I'm not a fan. Have you ever heard her sing? She's got a gift."

"But..."

"But she's nuts. She's calculating and cruel and...thuggish. She's like a thug in pretty packaging. I think, deep down, she hates women."

"I need specifics," Quillan told him.

Dobie took a long drag on his cigarette. "I'll tell you what I know. First, though, I don't doubt she hurt Caprice because I don't think she can stop herself but how bad did she hurt her?"

"Caprice was brutalized and we really won't know the extent of her injuries until later."

"I'm glad she's pressing charges," Dobie said. "Okay so where do you want to start?"

Hannah had slept most of the drive from Pittsburgh back to Dauphin County. Quillan was pleased that there was no conversation between them; she wanted everything to be on the up and up so there were no technicalities on which Hannah could be set free.

Quillan drove Hannah to the holding facility where she was booked and detained until she could be arraigned. When Quillan was done with her paperwork, she hung around until the procedure with Hannah was completed. Quillan wanted to be able to tell Caprice that, yes, Hannah was behind bars and it went smoothly.

Just as Hannah was being led to her solitary cell for the rest of the night, she passed Quillan and said, "How is she?"

Quillan stopped. "She'll live."

The correctional officers urged Hannah along and she looked back at Quillan. "I do love her, you know."

"Funny way of showing it," Quillan mumbled. She watched as Hannah was secured into a detention cell by the admissions desk. Quillan breathed a sigh of relief and left the facility. When she got home, she called Caprice.

"Hello?"

"Hi Caprice, it's Sergeant Quillan. I hope it's not too late."

"No, it's fine. Jarita's gone to bed but I'm wide awake. What's going on?"

"I arrested Hannah tonight. She's spending the night at County Correctional. She'll be arraigned in the morning."

Caprice was quiet at first. "Wow. Did she deny it? Put up a fight?"

"No fight. She opted to say nothing."

"What happens now?"

"Depends on her arraignment. I'm sure she'll plead not guilty, the attorneys will be confirmed, the judge will either remand or set bail."

"Do you think she'll get bail?"

"Hard to say. If she does and can make bail, I'll make sure you get an emergency restraining order against her. Don't worry, Caprice. I won't let her get to you again."

"Sergeant Quillan, I don't know how to thank you for everything you've done."

"Thank me after she's been sentenced, okay? I don't want to jinx anything."

"She pled out," Kurt Kleinschultz, the harried assistant district attorney, told Quillan as they walked toward his downtown office.

"What? When? Who was her lawyer?" Quillan had a hard time keeping up with him.

"Genette Jensen from Philly. She called me first thing this morning with the deal, I took it to my boss who said make it happen. So I did."

"What was the deal?"

"One count of Aggravated Indecent Assault, second degree felony. Goes on file. She registers as a sex offender and she gets one year and must undergo treatment the entire time she's incarcerated, three years probation and pays a thousand dollar fine."

"A year? That's it? She'll be out in six to nine months if she behaves herself!"

"If they keep her that long." He entered his office and closed the door behind Quillan.

"Did you read my report? The reports from the hospital? Did you see the photographs of what she did to her victim?" Quillan was outraged.

"Yes. She's willing to apologize to Ms. Gallagher in person, if that's amenable to Ms. Gallagher."

"I think what would have been amenable to Ms. Gallagher is to have had some kind of say in the punishment of Ms. Brishen." Quillan rested her fists on her hips.

"Kleinschultz put the folders down on his desk. "Look, Deputy -"

"Sergeant," she reminded him.

"Oh? Congratulations on the promotion. Look, the judge was Abendroth. He heads the peoples' synod in the local Evangelical regional council. I was sweating bullets that he was going to dismiss the whole thing due to his position on homosexuality."

"You would have thought that would have made him twice as severe."

"You'd have thought. And had it been two men, he might have and probably found a way to put both attacker and victim in jail. But he had a full docket and wanted this to go away. If my boss can do anything to accommodate Abendroth, he will. So...you have what you have, I'm afraid."

Quillan sighed and rubbed her temples. "A fucking year."

"It's better than nothing...which was a conceivable alternative. And it's better than him also going after your victim."

"I hate politics and I hate religion when officials use it to control their politics." She looked up at him. "Is this deal set in stone?"

"As far as I know."

"Fine. I'll drop by and give Ms. Gallagher the news."

Caprice's bruises had begun to heal nicely. She could open both eyes equally and the blood had cleared out of one and was almost gone in the other. The swelling in her face had subsided and her other injuries had also started to mend.

She hadn't expected to hear from Sergeant Quillan quite so early but she made sure there was enough coffee for when she arrived. Jarita was at work and Quillan had called beforehand so that she was expected but even with that, the knock on the door made Caprice jump. Caprice stared at the door until she heard Quillan's voice announce herself.

"Coffee?" Caprice asked, as Quillan entered. She made sure the door was locked behind her.

"Coffee would be great, thanks." She followed Caprice to the kitchen.

"What's going on?" Caprice poured and handed Quillan a cup.

Quillan gestured for Caprice to sit, then pulled out a chair and sat opposite her. "It's over."

"What do you mean?"

"Hannah pled out." Quillan explained the sentence and what it meant. She reached over and patted Caprice's forearm. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry? What for? She admitted guilt and she's being punished. She's also getting help."

"Don't put too much on the help thing. Normally, sex offender treatment in jail isn't the best. What the counselors try to put right, the other inmates and genetics tear apart. It's hard to *fix* sex offenders, Caprice. And female sex offenders are a new breed and one I'm not sure the prison treatment programs have caught up with yet."

"So there's a chance she'll come out worse than when she went it?"

"There's always that chance when someone enters into a prison environment." She still saw victory in Caprice's black eyes. "You're happy with the plea?"

"I don't know what I'm supposed to feel. She could have fought it and denied it and made all of our lives a living hell. The judge could have dismissed it, right?"

"Yes, that was one of the possibilities."

"Or she could have spent more time behind bars and become bitter and vengeful."

"You don't know that she won't be that way after a year...or however long she spends there."

"True but doesn't her pleading guilty admit that she's done something wrong?"

"Not always. Sometimes pleading guilty to a lesser charge is just a way of getting less time. If she had said to her attorney that she wanted to fight this, who knows when this would have gone to trial? Hannah didn't have the money to pay ten percent of the two hundred fifty thousand dollar bail, so she would've had to stay in jail until the trial came up. With the court system back log, that means she could have spent as much, if not more, time in jail just waiting for her trial. She's also taking the chance that her past record could be admitted and that she gets found guilty on the original felony charges, which bring a much stiffer sentence. Sometimes pleading guilty is a lesser of two evils."

"Is this why you're not happy with what she got?"

"It's not that I'm not happy; it's a lot better than the charges being dismissed. I just expected the ADA to work a little harder to get her more time. I keep forgetting that this case is just one number among many for the Commonwealth. It was personal for me. All sexual assault cases hit me to the quick but I guess I was hoping they might make more of an example out of this one."

"To make people more aware?"

"Yes."

Caprice nodded and studied Quillan's disappointed expression. "Maybe if this were a place where so many people weren't necessarily closeted, my case might have made that kind of statement. Maybe in a place where no one bats an eyelash at gays and lesbians, where same-sex couples are so common, no one cares. Maybe it would be easier to be a test case and a martyr there. But here, in this area? No one would want to be put on the map for this. No one would be supportive and even my gay friends wouldn't want to tell people they were from *that place* where *that lesbian* accused *that other lesbian* of rape. So, yeah, I'm okay with what she got because she got *something*. The fact that you wouldn't let it be ignored and she got had to answer for her actions - I'm okay with that because it's more than others have got."

"You do realize though that when she gets out, she'll join another band and just pick up where she left off, don't you? No one is going to think of asking their female vocalist whether or not she's a sex offender with a criminal record."

"I figured as much. All I can say to that is that I hope she behaves. I won't be in the area so I won't have to worry about her coming around me."

"So you're still going to move?"

"Soon as I can start lining up some job interviews and my face goes back to looking human." Caprice smiled and that caused a small split of the dry skin on her upper lip. She reached over, grabbed a tissue and began to apply pressure to the area. "I keep forgetting to apply lip balm to keep that area moist."

"How's everything else coming along?"

"Good. The doc said another week before the stitches come out. I can't wait. They're itching and driving me crazy." She warmed her coffee by adding more from the pot and held it toward Quillan. The deputy nodded and Caprice refilled her cup. "So where will they send her?"

"I didn't ask. I assume it will either be Muncy or Cambridge Springs; that's where female prisoners usually go. I'm thinking probably Cambridge Springs, though. Muncy houses hard core and death row females." Quillan hesitated then said, "Hannah asked if she could apologize to you, in person. I have to get back to the ADA today if you want that to happen before they ship her off to her new home."

Caprice contemplated this while she took a long sip of her coffee. "I've heard her apologies before. They don't mean anything face to face. If she wants to put it in writing and give it to you to give to me, that's fine. I don't want to see her. It would be too much, I think. The nightmares of that beautiful, evil face over me are just starting to not come as often. I don't need a refresher."

"I understand but I needed to ask you."

"Thank you but no."

Quillan finished her coffee and looked at her watch. She stood up. "Thank you for the morning pick-me-up," she said and rinsed her cup out in the sink. "I need to get to my office. I still have a final report to file on this case and I have some butt-kicking to do to a certain sergeant named Shumacher."

"I'd love to be a fly on the wall for that." Caprice stood up.

"He'll be sent back to sensitivity and diversity training, which didn't do anything for him the first time. The report will, however, go into his jacket. Guys like him rarely change, they just disguise their ignorance the best they can." Quillan walked to the front door. "Keep in touch, Caprice. I want to know how you are and definitely if Hannah tries to contact you in any way."

"I'll let you know."

"You've got my card, right?"

"Yes. Listen, thank you again, for everything."

"You're welcome."

"Um...would you like to come over for dinner some time before I go?"

Quillan smiled at her. "Uh, well, you do remember that I'm straight, yes?"

"Yes."

"So it wouldn't be a date."

"No, no date. Jesus, no. I'm barely out of this relationship, even if you were interested. I'm not sure I will be dating again any time soon. I think I need to make new friends and this would just be a friend saying thank you."

"I think making friends is always a good idea but...you are moving..."

"There's always email and other social networking."

"True." Quillan thought about it and nodded. "I'd like that."

"Great."

"I'll be in touch," Quillan said.

Caprice closed the door and locked it. She felt she needed to start surrounding herself with people who understood.

Two Years Later...

The women had gathered at their favorite coffeehouse on the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk to listen to the new motivational speaker everyone had been raving about. They had seen her on the national talk show circuit, heard her on the radio and now they wanted to see her live.

When she walked up on stage to the sound of applause it was decided that she was much more attractive (and tinier) in person than in photos or on television. Her physical appeal certainly helped bring in the crowd. Her compelling story convinced them to stay.

When the clapping and whistles died down, she spoke into the microphone. "Good evening, ladies. Thank you all for attending. My name is Caprice Gallagher and I am a survivor of lesbian rape."

The reaction was different than the first time she had said that statement when she'd started speaking publicly nearly a year earlier. Delaney Quillan had talked her into putting together a seminar program for a few police agencies. That turned into speaking at women's shelters and then giving presentations at certain gay pride celebrations. Local gay and lesbian newspapers wanted to interview her and then she had an article published about her in an international lesbian magazine.

Her job then became to tour the country and enlighten the gay and lesbian community and educate police departments, ER personnel and rape-crisis centers about same-sex rape. She was so in demand, it was difficult for her to keep up with the requests.

She approached her subject matter with kid gloves to get her audience intrigued and then hit them hard with her own personal story and photos of her injuries that had been taken at the hospital. She then related her frustrating encounter with reporting the crime and how her lesbian friends reacted.

Caprice spent less time talking about the actual incident and more time imploring the members of her audiences to understand that it did exist, it did occur more frequently than suspected and that the victim needed to be believed and supported, not ignored or denounced.

After this appearance, Caprice had planned to take a few days off before her next series of lectures and just spend some time in the Delaware coastal town, enjoying the ocean tranquility. Day after day, bringing up the details and photos of what had been done to her took its toll and she needed a break, no matter how much good she was doing for her community.

She retired to her hotel room, one with a balcony that overlooked the Atlantic. She took a hot, relaxing shower and wrapped the luxurious room robe around her. She made sure it was belted tightly and securely around her body when she stepped out onto the deck to listen to the waves and look up at the stars.

"I heard the shower stop so I poured you a wine and brought it out here."

"Thanks, honey," Caprice said. She bent down and bestowed a kiss on her partner's head before she sat down. "It's beautiful out here."

"It sure is."

"Did you schedule a wake up call?" Caprice asked. "I don't want to miss the sunrise."

"All set up." She reached over and took Caprice's hand.

They held hands and quietly enjoyed the evening. Finally, Caprice said, "I know I've said this before but I need to say it again. I am so grateful that you decided to contact me again. Who knew that your faith and belief would help me work through that horrible period in my life? I'm so glad we ended up together. Now that's fate."

"I agree."

Caprice sipped on her wine. "The breeze has started to get a little chilly."

"Let's go inside. We can warm each other up."

"Sounds good. I just want to cuddle though, tonight. You okay with that?"

"I am very okay with that."

Both women stood up as Caprice opened the sliding glass door to room. Before they stepped inside, Caprice leaned in and kissed her partner, tenderly. "I am so glad you only *identified* as straight, Delaney," Caprice said, with a wink and a shoulder bump.

The End