

**WHEN FATE DECIDES EXCERPT:**

Jack watched her as she made the coffee and followed her through to the sitting room. He took off his jacket and tie, and tossed both onto a chair, before undoing the top two buttons of his shirt. As he sat on the sofa he leant back with a sigh. She placed his jacket and tie on the back of one of the dining chairs, and then sat opposite him on the matching easy chair.

He gave her a reproving look. "I don't attack unless provoked." He laughed at the funny face she made.

"You did the first time you came here." That was said tartly, but he could see she wasn't really annoyed.

"Was it an attack? I thought it was a kiss between two adults who liked each other. And don't glare at me. I want you so much I'm missing sleep." Suspicion was clear in her lovely eyes at that piece of information. "You don't believe me do you?"

"Hardly. And I thought we were going to be friends and not get onto the subject of your fanciful notions again."

"Fanciful!" Jack gulped at his coffee, and swore under his breath when it burnt his tongue. "There's nothing fanciful about it, sweetheart." He held up a hand when she looked about to protest. "Right, no calling you sweetheart. Sorry, that's just how I think of you." He patted the cushion at his side. "Come over here and sit beside me, otherwise I might think I scare you." "Not on your life." Her silky hair swished about her neck as she tossed her head.

"Coward. I never knew you were one of those, Tessa. I always thought you the bravest woman I know. You had to be to put up with your husband." When he saw she was outraged he'd had the nerve to question her bravery he took the advantage. "Come on." He winked to encourage her.

She hesitated a moment, then put her cup on the table before them. Her nervousness returned as she settled beside him on the sofa. Jack had to curl his fingers into a fist for fear of grabbing her. He didn't fancy losing the ground he'd gained tonight. As he also put his cup down, and sat back, her intoxicating perfume surrounded him. "See, I'm harmless." He held his hands out in front of his body and she snorted.

"About as harmless as a tiger snake." Their thighs accidentally touched and she lengthened the space between them furtively.

"A teddy bear, that's me." With the sensations roaring around inside him at her nearness, at the smell of her perfume, and her exclusive scent, he felt more like a rampaging lion.

"Don't you ever give up?" Despite a touch of asperity in her tone, he caught the small tremor in her voice, and could only hazard a guess at its source. Now was the time to tread carefully,

or undo all the progress made tonight, but it became increasingly difficult to keep his distance. “Never. Not when I’m on a path seemingly set in concrete. Can I kiss you, Tessa?” If he tried the soft approach she would never agree, so why not go by the direct route, and see where it led?

“I’m surprised you asked.” Her fingers were busy, straightening her skirt with long even strokes that brought his eyes to the graceful motion. She was doing her best to hide her nervousness. How long was it going to take to eradicate all her tensions and fears?

“Why would you be surprised? I took liberties before. I’m not about to make the same mistake again.” Jack put a hand gently on one of her fussing hands and stilled it. “So, would you do me the honour of kissing me, please?”

“Don’t.” Her soft eyes filled with confusion.

“Don’t what? Don’t ask for something I’ve been dying to do since Sunday?”

“You make me feel so...” She shifted, and Jack eased himself towards her, pinning her to the armrest of the sofa.

“So what?”

“So...I don’t know, but it sure is bewildering.”

Her gaze darted about the room, so he put his finger beneath her chin. “Look at me, Tessa. This is desire you see in my eyes. I won’t do anything you don’t want me to do. Look, no hands.” He held both hands out in front of them and she smiled winsomely. “Would you like to be kissed? Would you like to be held? Would you take pity on this poor lonely man and let him taste your delectable lips?”

The confusion vanished as she laughed, giving one of his knees a gentle push. The touch sent a shock racing up his leg. It did all sorts of things to the part of him growing very hard by being so near her.

“You’re not lonely,” she chided.

“Not true, sweetheart.” She didn’t seem to notice the banned endearment.

In fact she was staring at his mouth. Maybe this meant she was as eager to taste it as he was to taste hers. How he hoped so. “I’m thirty years old, but I feel worn out and lonely most of the time. I’ve spent too much time on my own. Since my divorce there’s only been one relationship where I lived with the woman. It lasted a few months—neither of us finding what we were after in a partner. I need a wife, but not just any wife. As I said, I need one I can love unreservedly, and one who will love me just as much.”

“You’re looking in the wrong place, I’m afraid.” The confusion had returned and she was flustered again.

Damn, now he’d put his big foot in his mouth for sure. She was going to shut him out. She made to rise, and he grabbed her hand, pulling her onto his lap. With an exasperated sound she slapped at his arms, but he secured her to his chest. “Tessa!” Gently he hugged her.